February, 2009

Birding Observer

Five Valleys Audubon Society **A Chapter of the National Audubon Society**

Calendar

* **Monday, February 2nd, 7pm:** Jim Brown will host the board meeting.

* **Monday, February 9th, 7:30pm:** Michael Schwitters will present Birds of Mongolia.

* **Friday, February 13th:** Deadline for submissions to the March *Birding Observer*.

* **Friday, February 13th through Monday, February 16th:** Great Backyard Bird Count. Visit www.birdcount.org or review your January newsletter for details.

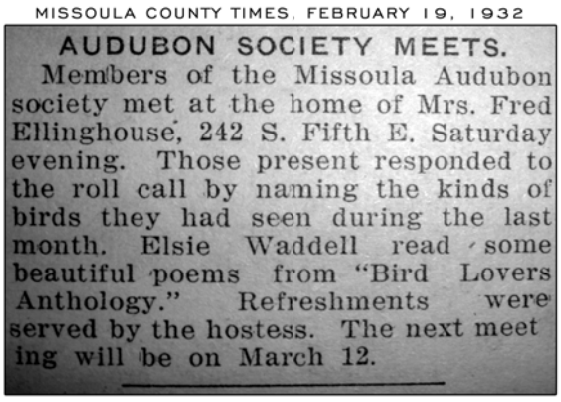
* **Saturday, February 28th:** Half-day field trip to Smurfit-Stone. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 9:30 AM or at the pulp mill at 10:00 AM.

Seeking the Birds of Mongolia

Michael Schwitters will share his two-week birding tour in Mongolia in 2006 with the Five Valleys Audubon Society on Monday, February 9th in the Gallagher Business Building, Room L14 at 7:30 pm. The meeting is free and open to the public.

Mike and a small group traveled by bus and lived in tents and gers (yerts) to explore the many habitats of the Gobi desert of Mongolia. They explored this vast and empty land and its birds. Mike is retired from the Air Force and has a second career as a retirement apartment's manager in Choteau. His retirement has been a quest for the birds of North America. Additionally, he has worked in wildlife biology with various wildlife agencies to resight neck-banded waterfowl. These two interests have taken him to remote and exciting destinations including the arctic of Canada, the Aleutian Islands, California's Central Valley, the Gulf of Maine and Nebraska's Rainwater Basin. He and his wife (Connie) live in Choteau.

Blast From the Past



MISSOULA COUNTY TIMES, FEBRUARY 19, 1932

AUDUBON SOCIETY MEETS.

Members of the Missoula Audubon society met at the home of Mrs. Fred Ellinghouse, 242 S. Fifth E. Saturday evening. Those present responded to the roll call by naming the kinds of birds they had seen during the last month. Elsie Waddell read some beautiful poems from "Bird Lovers Anthology." Refreshments were served by the hostess. The next meeting will be on March 12.

Special Note: Amanda Ormesher's talk on her osprey research announced for January was unavoidably postponed. Her presentation will follow Mike's, and be in addition to the program scheduled for this month. See the January newsletter for details about her research.

Peeps from the Prez by Paul Loehnen

From Alice Springs, we flew to Darwin, the Capital of the Northern Territory. The city is closer to New Guinea than Alice Springs. It is tropical and very hot and humid. A highlight of our first afternoon was two Beach Thick-knees, quite rare and not always seen on these trips. In addition very close to the road we saw nesting Bush Thick-knees and Orange-footed Scrub fowl. Our local guide, another wonderful birder, had scouted and found both Barking and Rufous owls in the Darwin Botanical garden, needless to say a real treat.

We were rewarded with a Rainbow Pitta, a beautiful bird, singing on a perch after appropriate searching once our guide heard and played his tape. He had found an Owlet-nightjar earlier that week. They are difficult to locate as they are nocturnal and have several tree holes that they use. With appropriate anticipation we waited with our binoculars aimed at the appointed hole. They apparently fly out very fast and can easily be missed. Unfortunately, our Owlet-nightjar had been evicted by a Possum who stuck his sleepy head out and then retreated.

The next morning we made a trip to the obligatory sewage ponds and lagoons. We were rewarded with Mangrove Robins and Mangrove Gerygones as well as Whiskered and White-winged Terns. Freshwater Crocodiles eyed us with apparent disinterest. The lagoons yielded many wonderful birds, including several thousand Magpie Geese, Australian Pranicoles, Green Pygmy-geese, Comb-crested Jacanas and Black-necked Storks.
We then drove to Kakadu National Park. Aboriginal people have occupied Kakadu continuously for about 40,000 years. It contains more than 5,000 recorded art sites illustrating aboriginal culture over thousands of years. Because of this and the wide variety and concentration of wildlife this area is a UNESCO World Heritage site. An early morning boat ride on Yellow Water billabong yielded elusive Great-billed Heron, two Striated Herons, a Rufous Night-heron and five species of Kingfisher. And all this amongst a wealth of waterfowl with birds visible in every direction.

From Darwin we flew to Cairns. This city on the sea has a wide esplanade allowing walking, jogging, picnicking and people watching. Fortunately this prime real estate has escaped high-rise development. It's a wonderful birding site especially when the tide goes out. Among others we saw Doubled-eyed Fig Parrots, Varied Honeyeaters, and a variety of waders. We drove inland to an escarpment, the beginning of the Atherton Tableland were we stayed at a wonderful lodge in a rain forest, the Kingfisher Lodge. They had feeders where Blue-faced Honeyeaters dazzled and more timid Red-browed Finches entertained. We walked around the property and were shown a Papuan Frogmouth. After diner we were taken to a pair of nesting Masked Owls. This was a real treat, being a lifer for everyone including both our guides. (About 30 cumulative years of guiding in Australia).

We then headed inland, to an area where Bustards are usually seen. The bird is large and should be obvious but going in we didn't see any. Dispirited on our way out we saw nine, including one large male near the road displaying for the surrounding females. In the afternoon, we visited the Mareeba Wetlands where another local guide found us Black-throated Finches and Brown Treecreepers as well as a nice selection of waterbirds on the lagoon. He also pointed out an Amethystine Python curled up on one of the beams of the ladies toilet.
After our arrival in Atherton, at dusk we went to a little stream known to have Platypus. They are quite shy and only surface briefly but their sighting was truly wonderful and took me back to kindergarten days, when we learned about weird and wonderful other worldly creatures.

The next day at Lake Eacham in a collection of fruiting trees we saw the Victoria's Riflebird, Wompoo Fruit-doves, White-headed Pigeons, Bower's Shrike-thrush and a Grey Goshawk. We also saw the hoped for Bridled Honeyeater and nesting Mountain Thornbills. After trekking up a

leach infested trail we "dipped" on the Golden Bowerbird. We did find the bower but it appeared unoccupied. That afternoon however we did see the Tooth-billed Bowerbird and wonderful views of Pied Monarchs dancing up and down nearby vines.

The following morning we headed for Red Cedar Tree National Park where we were greeted with singing Chowchillas. Quite stalking rewarded us with a good look at these unusual birds scrapping and scratching in the leaf litter. Our other target birds, the Fernwren and the Atherton Scrubwren also put on a good show. We happily returned to our hotel for a wonderful breakfast under the gazebo on the front lawn. We then made our way back to Cairns birding on the way. We visited a colony of nesting Metallic Starlings, one of the more striking birds of the entire trip. Our adventure continues in the next Peeps.

Two Bicentennial Celebrations
by Bill Gabriel

This is the bicentennial of the birth of two men born on February 12, 1809, each famous for vision, clarity of thought, and ability to persuade others to their point of view. Abraham Lincoln was born into a poor family in Kentucky and received little formal education, but he pulled himself up by his own bootstraps through "reading the law" to become a lawyer, a politician, and a founder of a political party. By force of will, political acumen, and oration President Lincoln unified a nation torn by regional jealousies and war.

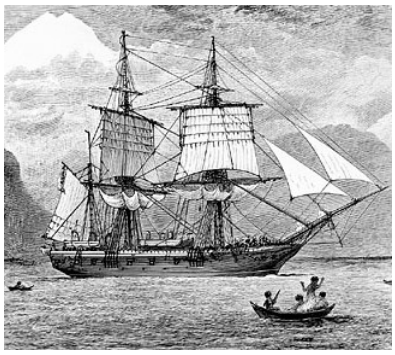
Charles Darwin was born in England to a family of privilege and wealth and was accorded the best possible education. A man who never held a job or public office, by today's standards Darwin was an amateur scientist, yet he provided the unifying theory that underlies all of biological science.

This year is also the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's most famous book *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. At the time, the idea of evolution had been around in one form or another for nearly 100 years. In fact, his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, published his own ideas about evolution in 1796 in *Zoonomia*; or the *Laws of Organic Life*. As new discoveries in geology, paleontology, and biology accumulated scientists of the day realized that, rather than being independently created all at one time, species had evolved from earlier forms. What was lacking was a theory to account for the working of evolution.

Charles Darwin was well aware of those discoveries and arguments when, as a new university graduate and 22 year old, he set sail in 1831 on H.M.S. Beagle. He boarded the vessel as merely a dining companion for the captain—a man only four years his senior. Beagle's task was to map the coastal waters of South America to improve the safety of British trade. Darwin's unofficial task was to serve as the expedition's naturalist and his father paid his expenses. The voyage lasted four years, nine months, and five days, and when his diary was published in 1839 (later re-titled The Voyage of the Beagle) it made him famous.

Darwin spent the next twenty years studying the fossils, plants, and animals collected on the voyage and discussing them with other English naturalists. During that time he was educating himself, much as Abraham Lincoln had done, by reading, exchanging information by letter, attending lectures, and presenting papers at meetings of learned societies. Charles Darwin published on geology, fossils, the origin coral reefs, and a four volume work on barnacle taxonomy for which he won a Royal Medal in 1853. Finally, in 1859, *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* was published and all 1,250 copies were sold the first day. The book went through many printings and five more editions in his lifetime.

Today, whether they realize it or not, birders use field guides whose organization is derived from Darwin's theory of evolution through variation, natural selection, and extinction. But science is not static, so, as we learn more about bird ancestry, species are renamed, genera and families are moved from place to place, and new editions of field guides are printed to reflect the reorganization. Just as *The Origin of Species* went through many editions, so have Peterson's field guides. And more on that later.



2008 Missoula Christmas Bird Count
by Larry Weeks, compiler

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 20th. On December 17th, when the weather forecast for Saturday morning was –16 degrees F, I considered rescheduling the Count. However, after agonizing over the dilemma, I decided to proceed with the original schedule because I would have lost some of the participants with a reschedule. As it turned out, the low temperature was 2 degrees F above, and although it was a cold day, it was tolerable. Fifty-four people participated in the field count and there were 22 feeder watchers. The Count tallied 74 species which is above our average of 72. The most unusual bird turned out to be a canvasback which is a first for the Missoula Count. The canvasback was documented by Jim Brown who was birding Jim Edwards' property on Mallard Way and Erick Greene who was birding a slough near the Council Grove State Park. It's possible that there were 2 different canvasbacks but that couldn't be verified. The other top birds were a white-winged crossbill and a great gray owl. Jim Brown found one lone white-winged crossbill near Primrose and Terry Toppins had the great gray owl at Maclay Flat. Erick Greene also had the Count's only wood duck and bufflehead. Jim Brown's group birded the Mastel and Kinney properties and had the only American wigeon and gadwall. Brian Williams birded the Stuart Peak trail on skis and had the only pine grosbeaks and northern pygmy owl. Cathy Ream's group birded Lavelle and Butler Creeks and found the only common redpolls and brown creeper. Poody McLaughlin and Joe Regan's group, who always brave the river crossing to Kelly Island, had the only Barrow's goldeneye. Norm and Cathy Smyers had the only Cooper's hawk at the State Nursery. I had the only winter wren in the National Wildlife Federation property along Grant Creek. The feeder watchers also contributed. Norm & Maurine Jacobson, who live near Brickyard Hill, had the only evening grosbeaks (100+) and Joe Toth had 2 spotted towhees coming to his feeder on Lincoln Hills. Other group leaders included Denver Holt who birded west of the airport, Paul Hendricks who birded Crazy Canyon, Virginia Vincent who birded Orchard Homes/Target Range, Robin Anderson who birded Greenough Park and the University, Rose Leach who birded along Mullan Road, Elena Ulev who birded the Rattlesnake Greenway, and Elizabeth Johnston who birded Chokecherry Draw. Jim Sparks attempted to find the canyon wren up the main Rattlesnake trail but his caller failed to play after he reached the site. Overall, the bird numbers were down but there were some exceptions:

Bird	2008 Count	Previous Maximum
Common goldeneye	437	228
Common merganser	113	65
Rough-legged hawk	88	51
Wild turkey	61	51
Clark's nutcracker	57	42
Red-breasted nuthatch	341	335

There were 3 count week birds; an American 3-toed woodpecker on Blue Mountain, a chestnut-backed chickadee at Paul Loehnen's feeder and a Harris' sparrow at the Smyers' feeder. The day ended with another fabulous potluck dinner at the home of Ruth & Russ Royter. Thirty-three people attended the potluck and the bird tabulation. A big thank you to Ruth & Russ for hosting again, and I also want to thank everyone who participated in the Count.

GO GREEN, Save Paper and Other Costs

View your ***Birding Observer*** newsletter even sooner, only "on-line".
Just send us an email request with your name to k7vk@arrl.net.
We will alert you each Month when the newsletter becomes available on-line.

Advanced Birding Workshop

Five Valleys Audubon Society has scheduled an advanced birding workshop for February and March 2009 that will include six sessions from 7:00 PM to 9:30 PM on Thursday nights at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Regional Office on Spurgin Road. The dates are Feb. 19, 26, Mar. 5, 12, 19, and 26. Each session will be devoted to one bird group. The subject and presenter of each session are as follows:

Date	**Bird Group**	**Presenter**
Feb 19	birding-by-ear	Larry Weeks
Feb 26	gulls	Dan Casey
Mar 5	raptors	Steve Hoffman
Mar 12	sparrows	Bob Martinka
Mar 19	shorebirds	Jim Brown
Mar 26	flycatchers	Christina Smucker

A person may decide to attend a single session, any combination of sessions or all 6 sessions. The cost will be $15 per session or $60 for all 6 sessions. To sign up, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or bwsgenea@onlinemt.com.

	Christmas Bird Count 2008	
great blue heron (17)	rock pigeon (172)	brown creeper (1)
Canada goose (628)	mourning dove (47)	winter wren (1)
canvasback (1)	Eurasian-collared dove (13)	American dipper (4)
wood duck (1)	great horned owl (8)	golden-crowned kinglet (4)
green-winged teal (19)	northern pygmy owl (1)	Townsend's solitaire (10)
mallard (457)	great gray owl (1)	American robin (151)
gadwall (10)	long-eared owl (8)	Bohemian waxwing (862)
American wigeon (1)	belted kingfisher (14)	cedar waxwing (348)
common goldeneye (437)	downy woodpecker (38)	northern shrike (2)
Barrow's goldeneye (3)	hairy woodpecker (18)	European starling (21)
bufflehead (1)	American 3-toed woodpecker cw	spotted towhee (2)
common merganser (113)	northern flicker (134)	American tree sparrow (4)
bald eagle (34)	pileated woodpecker (11)	song sparrow (75)
northern harrier (6)	gray jay (4)	Harris' sparrow cw
sharp-shinned hawk (7)	Steller's jay (18)	dark-eyed junco (166)
Cooper's hawk (1)	blue jay (5)	red-winged blackbird (161)
red-tailed hawk (36)	Clark's nutcracker (57)	pine grosbeak (5)
rough-legged hawk (88)	black-billed magpie (262)	house finch (509)
American kestrel (2)	American crow (74)	red crossbill (233)
merlin (2)	common raven (94)	white-winged crossbill (1)
gray partridge (16)	black-capped chickadee (274)	common redpoll (2)
ring-necked pheasant (20)	mountain chickadee (19)	pine siskin (113)
ruffed grouse (3)	chestnut-backed chickadee cw	American goldfinch (31)
wild turkey (61)	red-breasted nuthatch (341)	evening grosbeak (100)
killdeer (9)	white-breasted nuthatch (33)	house sparrow (430)
Wilson's snipe (10)	pygmy nuthatch (114)	
74 species, 7173 total birds		

Robert E. Conway
1938-2008

Missoula lost an avid birder on October 16, 2008, when Bob Conway succumbed to a three-year battle with cancer. We remember him as president of Five Valleys Audubon Society in 2004 and 2005, and as an enthusiastic member of bird-a-thon teams and FVAS field trips. He enjoyed a variety of other outdoor activities including hunting, fishing, skiing, field trials with his Labrador retrievers, and flying his airplane. Bob also became an accomplished photographer of birds.

Before he died Bob Conway gave to Five Valleys Audubon Society 32 books about birds (and a roll of raffle tickets) with instructions that we hold a book raffle and devote the proceeds to the Philip L. Wright Memorial Endowment for student research. The retail value of the books, all still in new condition, is about $800. The FVAS Board gratefully accepted Bob's gift, but decided that a series of silent auctions, where people could bid more for the books they most wanted, might be more equitable than a raffle.

At our December meeting there were 12 bids on 6 books. The high bids totaled $85.

During the January meeting we received only 10 bids on 4 of the 7 books offered. They brought in $35.00.

We will continue to offer about half-a-dozen books at each meeting until all are gone.

In recognition of Bob Conway's service to Five Valleys Audubon Society, and his interest in supporting student research, some members who did not bid on books have made contributions in his memory to the Endowment. Others wishing to contribute should make your check to: P. L. Wright Memorial Endowment and send it to Five Valleys Audubon Society.

2009 Field Trip Schedule		
Date	**Destination**	**Leader**
February 28	Smurfit-Stone	Larry Weeks
March 28	Lee Metcalf	Larry Weeks
April 25	Warm Springs Ponds	Gary Swant
May 2	Brown's Lake	Jim Brown
May 10	Smurfit-Stone (Mother's Day)	Larry Weeks
May 30	Bandy Ranch, Ovando	Larry Weeks
June 5, 6, 7	Montana Audubon's Bird Festival	
June 13,14	Bannack/Clark Canyon	Nate Kohler
June 27	Mt. Sentinel	Larry Weeks
July 9,10,11,12	Glacier Park Campout	Larry Weeks
August 15	Smurfit-Stone	Larry Weeks
September 5	Tower St./Sleven's Is.	Larry Weeks
September 26	Flesher Pass (raptor banding)	Rob Domenech
October 10	Smurfit-Stone	Larry Weeks
November 7	Smurfit-Stone	Larry Weeks
December 6	Mission Valley	Jim Brown

Check Out the Montana Outdoor Birding Group
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MOB-Montana/

Montana Outdoor Birding Group is a Yahoo Group that you can join to receive and share up-to-date information on bird sightings throughout Montana. It also provides a forum to share photos, identification problems and various other issues related to birding. Once a member, one can elect to receive batched or individual member emails. Members can post messages and /or photos.

Welcome New Members:

Cori Archibald
Rebecca Douglas
Daniel A. Harper
Lorinda K. Kendall
Julie Morgan
Richard Terry
Victoria Balfour
Hardy Eshbaugh
Darcy Hover
Naomi Kimbell
Jeffrey P. Osteen
La Wana Whaley
Barbara Barker
Tom Gillespie
Karen J. Hendrickson
James E. McKay
Janet Palmer
Judith Weir
Ben Deeble
Rose Graves
John A. James
Billy Ann & Mark Merila
Arlie G. Peterson

Thanks to Our Returning Members:

Gary Aitken
Arnold Finklin
Tom & Alice Layne
Poody McLaughlin
Gigi Rose
James Tingle
Janet Allison
Tony Hoyt
Sharon & Tom Lukomski
Richard Petaja
Jessie Sherburne
Virginia Vincent
Ed Brunsvold
Judith Hutchins
Darrell W. Mason
David Plummer
Minie Smith
Patty Watson
Betty Csorosz
Dennis & Sylvia Kimzey
Miriam Morgan
Marie Root
Norman Smyers
Eleanor Weidman

Join The National Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local Chapter. I will receive the *Audubon* magazine and the *Birding Observer*, as well as participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City:_____ **State:**_____ **Zip:** _____

[ ] $20 for an individual or family

[ ] $15 for students and seniors

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 51001, Boulder, CO 80323-1003. **N53 7XCH**

Join The Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a Chapter member of the Five Valleys Audubon Society. I will receive the Birding Observer and may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues remain entirely with the Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City:_____ **State:**_____ **Zip:** _____

Email (optional): _____

[ ] $15 is enclosed for Chapter membership

[ ] An additional sum of _____ is also included to support Chapter activities.

Please make check payable to the Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to: Five Valleys Audubon Society, PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807.

FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
Bird Hotline	Terry Toppins	1210 Tower, Missoula, MT 59804	721 – 9799	tertop@aol.com
Past President	Jim Brown	1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 8052	woodsy@onewest.net

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Five Valleys Audubon Society

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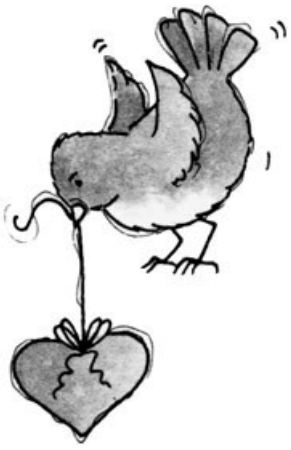

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