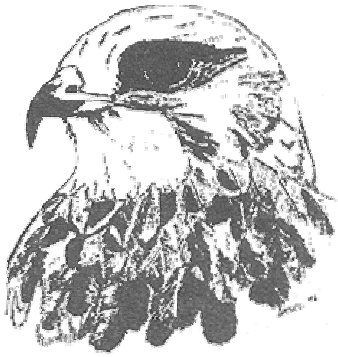
February 2010

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

*** Monday, February 1st, 7pm:** Char Murray will host the board meeting.

*** Monday, February 8th, 7:30pm:** Amy Cilimburg of Montana Audubon will speak about how climate change is impacting birds at the February program meeting.

*** Friday, February 12th:** Submission deadline for the March edition of the *Birding Observer*.

*** Friday, February 12th-15th:** 2010 Great Backyard Bird Count. See details on page 4.

*** Saturday, February 27th:** Full-day field trip to the Mission Valley. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the Ninepipes Lodge at 9:00 AM.

*** Saturday, March 13th:** Cross-country ski trip at Lolo Pass to listen for owls. See the following article for details.

*** March 18th – 21st:** Rivers and Wildlife Celebration will be held in Kearney, Nebraska.

*** June 4th – 6th:** Montana Audubon's Bird Festival will be held in Missoula. Please save the dates. The planning committee will be asking for volunteers to help out during the Festival.

Birds and Wildlife in a Warming World

The effects of global warming are already visible across Montana's landscape: Beetle-killed trees, glaciers retreating, birds moving north, and wetlands drying. What does the science say is in store for the critters of Montana, and what can we do to help? Join Amy Cilimburg, Director of Bird Conservation for Montana Audubon, to learn how climate change is impacting our birds and wildlife, the most crucial and timely policy solutions, and how the efforts of Auduboners and friends can help safeguard our natural resources. Amy will give a slide show presentation that highlights climate impacts, what we can do to reduce global warming, and moving toward a clean energy economy.

She will also discuss the importance of our riparian and wetlands in a changing climate, and how this is linked to our statewide Important Bird Areas (IBA) program. Healthy resilient habitats will be key for bird populations as we move forward, and the Clark Fork River Grass Valley and other nearby IBAs feature prominently in conservation efforts. We can meet head on the challenges of bird and wildlife conservation in times of changing climate – *and* create a better future for all. Join us!

Amy Cilimburg is the Director of Bird Conservation and Global Warming Outreach Coordinator for Montana Audubon, where she works to educate and inspire action around issues related to climate change, birds, wildlife, and energy both here in Montana and nationally. Amy spearheads the IBA Program in Montana and collaborates with other biologists and conservationists to protect Montana's birds and their habitat. Prior to coming to Audubon, Amy was the Assistant Director of the University of Montana's Avian Science Center. **The Chapter meeting on Monday, February 8th at 7:30 p.m. in room L14 of the UM Gallagher Business Building.**

Peeps From the Prez by Paul Loehnen

Beth and I recently returned from an amazing birding adventure. We completed an extensive tour of Argentina, with the birding company, Wings. The tour was divided into three sections: The High Andes, the Pampas, Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego and finally a week at Iguazu Falls. Our son, Ben, joined us for the first section in the high Andes. I hadn't realized how large the country is. It's the eighth largest country by area in the world and is 2400 miles north to south. We saw so much that this account will only deal with the first section. I'll cover our other experiences in future Peeps.

We flew to Buenos Aires, an overnight flight from Atlanta. Buenos Aires is a massive city of 19 million people. The area that we were in was wonderful with large boulevards, beautiful architecture and lots of green open space and parks.

A premier birding spot within walking distance of our hotel is Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve. In the mid 20th century during reconstruction of the city, remnants of demolished buildings and construction debris were discarded into the Rio del La Plata. This is the widest river in the world, being 137 miles wide were it meets the Atlantic Ocean. Gradually the debris, mixed with sand from the river, began to create the marshy foundation for what is now the reserve, a world class wetland but also sought after by developers because of its premier location for skyscrapers. It covers about 900 acres and is used for many activities including biking and jogging. We saw some wonderful birds including Coscoroba Swans, Brazilian Teal, Rosy-billed Pochard, Ringed Teal, Giant and Gray-necked Wood-rail. We also saw White-winged and Red-gartered Coots, as well as a great look at a Spot-flanked Gallinule.

We flew north, to the city of Salta, with a population of half a million people. We travelled on to a quaint town, San Lorenzo, with a picnic lunch and birding on the way. Birding treats were a pair of Cream-backed woodpeckers, Sooty-fronted Spinetail, Curve-billed Reedhaunter and a Dusky-legged Guan. We braved some rain to go night birding, not turning up any owls but coming across a wet and relatively rare Little Nightjar.
We next drove north towards the small town of San Martin. We saw many expected and some unexpected birds including our first Andean Condors, the first Toco Toucans and a rare (first record on a Wings tour) Chaco Chachalaca. We also saw a Plumbeous rail on the road; almost get run over a number of times. In addition we saw our target bird of that area, a Red-legged Siriema. The latter is about three foot tall, with bright red legs and yet difficult to see.

We spent two days visiting the Calilegua National Park, starting at high elevation and slowly descending. The highlight for me was seeing a White-throated Antpitta, which although calling from close by, resides in dense bush and is very skulky and difficult to see. The whole group saw it before I eventually got a wonderful point blank view. We also saw a Blue-crowned Trogon, Great Antshrike, Variable Antshrike and Black-capped Antwren among others.

Late afternoon took us to the Yala River, but it was a national holiday and to our dismay the river was packed with picnickers. However in a relatively secluded part of the river we saw our target birds, namely the Rufous-throated Dipper and a pair of stunning Torrent ducks. Our wait until evening was rewarded with a Red-faced Guan and incredible flight displays of the male Lyre-tailed Nightjar.

We spent the next day slowly ascending the Andes to about 12,000 feet and the village of Abra Pampa (population 5,000). This journey took us through incredible scenery of multicolored sedimentary rock formations. We saw a Giant Hummingbird on a nest, Red-tailed Comets, Sierra-finches, Chat tyrants and Mountain Caracaras. However two nights at 12,000 feet elevation caused us all to not function too well. We marveled at the local school

girls playing soccer, while we had mild headaches and had trouble walking up stairs.

Our main birding sites were ponds and lakes. We walked through surreal terrain to Lake Pozuelos where we saw thousands of pink flamingos: all three species, Chilean, Andean and Puna. In addition we saw Puna plovers, Puna Rheas, Andean Avocets and Vicunas (delicate small Llama-like animals).

The following morning en route to a larger city, San Salvador Jujuy, from where we would fly back to Buenos Aires, we stopped in a typical Andean village for lunch. We had a wonderful meal of goat stew, delicious Empanadas and a soup called Locro. Beth got the recipe and now makes that delicious soup. That ended a magical week of birding in the "High Andes".

Field Trip by Larry Weeks

Saturday, January 9, 2010: Maclay Flat was the site for the first field trip of the new year. It was 10 degrees F with some scattered snow showers, but the wind was calm which made it tolerable. Fourteen people joined the author for a walk around the main trail. The birds were very hard to find and it wasn't until we returned to the parking lot along the Bitterroot River that we started seeing a few birds. A female belted kingfisher gave us some good looks and there were mallards and common goldeneye in the river. Two red-tailed hawks were perched in a pine on McCauley Butte and a great blue heron flew upstream and landed in a snag. White-breasted and pygmy nuthatches were foraging along the trail to the boat ramp. Since I couldn't find a great horned owl at Maclay Flat, half of the group followed me to the Tower St. Open Space where I showed them 2 great horned owls in the roost tree near the parking lot. We ended up with 14 birds for the trip.

Workshop for Beginning Birders

The Five Valleys Audubon Society will conduct a workshop for beginning birders. It will consist of two classroom sessions and a field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursday, March 11th and Thursday, March 18th. The field trip is scheduled for March 20th. The classroom sessions will be held at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Regional Office at 3201 Spurgin Road, and will start at 7:00 PM and last until 9:30 PM. Half of the classroom presentations will be devoted to the common birds that are found in four basic habitats. This discussion will include the major field marks for identification, behavior and songs. The rest of the presentations will include ethics, bird anatomy, field guides, migration, and optics. There will be a $20.00 charge for the workshop. To sign up, please call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email at bwsgenea@onlinemt.com. The workshop will be limited to 30 participants.

Cross-Country Ski Trip

On Saturday, March 13th, there will be a cross-country ski trip at Lolo Pass. We will meet at the West end of Rosauer's parking lot at 4:00 PM for carpooling, drive to Lolo Pass, ski into Packer Meadow in the twilight, and listen for owls on the return trip. For people that will be driving directly to Pass, you should plan on arriving by 5:00 PM. Dress warm and bring a headlamp, a lunch or snacks, and your cross-country skis. You can rent cross-country ski packages at the Army Navy Economy Store for $8.00 per day. Drivers will have to purchase a $5.00 day pass to park their vehicles at the Pass. These can be purchased at the Lolo Pass Visitor Center. Call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 for additional information.

Great Backyard Bird Count

The 13th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) runs from February 12th through the 15th. The GBBC is held each February with the goal of getting a snapshot of bird numbers and distribution across the continent and in Hawaii. As a participant, you commit to count birds anywhere for at least 15 minutes on one or more of the four count days. Tally the number of individuals of each species you see and enter your totals at http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/.

The GBBC helps scientists to determine trends and identify worrisome declines that may call for conversation attention and require further study. Citizen scientists can make crucial observations and contribute to a dataset the magnitude of which no team of scientists can achieve alone! That's why it's so important for Montana's stellar birding community to participate!

FVAS Recognizes Shirley Holden for Her Longtime Support
by Carolyn Goren

At our January 11, 2010 FVAS meeting, Shirley Holden was recognized and thanked for her devotion and contributions to Five Valleys Audubon. Shirley, a retired R.N., has been a member and supporter of Five Valleys Audubon for at least 20 years. She served on the Board of Five Valleys Audubon in the mid 1980's, and later took over the two jobs of Archivist and Newsletter Circulation. As Archivist, she maintains copies of our Newsletters and a scrapbook of related newspaper articles, and is sometimes called upon to research details from our group's past history. Newsletter Circulation involves picking up the newsletters from the publisher, folding and sealing them, placing address labels, and organizing the newsletters by zip code to meet Post Office regulations, as well as distributing copies to public locations. Shirley attends FVAS meetings, participates in field trips, feeds birds, and worked hard at garage sales and other fund-raising activities for our organization. We appreciate all her efforts.

Our Extraordinary Place by Jim Brown

Five Valleys Audubon has been working in partnership with Five Valleys Land Trust for the past eight or more years to promote conservation and protect wildlands including important bird habitat. The recently acquired conservation easement on Joe Boyer's Ranch is a good example. Bird surveys by our Chapter were instrumental in justifying and procuring grant funding for this easement. To celebrate conservation accomplishment and support for conservation efforts Five Valleys Land Trust is sponsoring a special event:

Five Valleys Land Trust invites you to "Our Extraordinary Place," a free *thank you celebration in honor of Western Montana's stewardship spirit,* on Friday, February 5 from 7-9 pm at The University Theater in Missoula. This event will feature a multi-media program of words, music and images inspired by Western Montana's landscapes and people, and the role they play in enriching our lives and the planet at large. Featuring **Sanjayan**, lead scientist for the Nature Conservancy, and **Eugenia Choi**, internationally renowned violin soloist with acclaimed concert pianist **Christopher Hahn**. **THIS EVENT IS FREE TO THE PUBLIC.** To learn more about these talented performers or information about the event call 549-0755 or go to www.fvlt.org. Please come and enjoy it.

Hi Friends! 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 Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrl.net.
We will alert you each month when the newsletter becomes available on-line.

Sentinel High School Students Are Bluebird Heroes

Sentinel High School teacher Kathy Heffernan, took her biology class up to Waterworks Hill, north of Missoula on November 11th to maintain bluebird nest boxes. What an adventure it was! Here is what her students had to say about their experience and what they learned:

At one time, bluebirds thrived in western Montana, but during the 20th Century, the bluebird population declined dramatically due to lack of nesting space. Bluebirds had to fight for their lives and their homes due to competition from non-native birds. If that wasn't enough, loggers were clearing out dead tress and we were suppressing forest fires. The bluebirds' savior came in the 1970's when Ronan resident Art Aylesworth began building bluebird boxes and placing them throughout western Montana. Now with many grassy areas (which is the kind of habitat they need) and plentiful food supply (insects), they are able to live mostly in harmony. ~ By Mikayla S.

Both Mountain and Western Bluebirds live on Waterworks Hill. The Western Bluebirds are darker blue with a red chest. Mountain Bluebirds are lighter blue and has white on its belly. Bluebirds prefer grassy areas where they can find insects. Mountain bluebirds prefer to nest on grasslands. Western Bluebirds like to nest in open forests and grasslands. The reason we are maintaining bluebird boxes is that they have a hard time finding homes. The House Sparrows kill bluebirds, and then make their nests on top of the bluebird nests. Without our help, bluebirds could become extinct. ~ By Colton B.

We are really interested in helping the bluebirds of Montana. We show our support by making new bird houses, repairing the old houses, and putting up new ones. We use caulk so that rain and snow doesn't get into the houses, and to put up the houses, we use a portable drill. Even with our help, the bluebirds are still susceptible to competition from other bluebirds and House Sparrows and Starlings. Sometimes, the bluebirds don't make it through the struggle. As we unscrew the tops of the houses, we sometimes find the remains of the baby bluebirds. ~ By SaNia S.

The boxes preferred by Mountain Bluebirds have a 5"x 5" floor and 1-9/16" hole. The hole keeps out Starlings. House Sparrows and Starlings are the main competition for Bluebirds and are not native to this area. Placing bluebird boxes on pipes helps us to place them where there are no fenceposts and protect the bluebirds from anything that can climb up like raccoons and cats. Bluebirds are territorial so we can't place the boxes closer than 150 yards apart. ~ By Amber A.

Maintaining bluebirds boxes is a hard job. You have to keep records of nests, eggs, and also be sure that the boxes will keep the birds warm. …If the nestlings die, then you remove the nests to tell the parents to give it another try. ~ By Mikaela H.

As we walked up the hill, snow started to fall. We looked up in the cottonwood trees and saw an Oriole nest uninhabited by the birds. We learned a lot that day. ~ By Daniel M.

If you wish to find out more information on maintaining your own boxes or learn more in general, you may contact Mountain Bluebirds Trails @ PO Box 1183; Emigrant, MT 59027 or at this website: www.mountainbluebirdstrails.com

2009 Missoula Christmas Bird Count by Larry Weeks, compiler

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 19th. The weather was seasonally mild with temperatures in the range of 25–32°F. 69 people participated in the field count, and there were 37 feeder watchers – for a total of 106 participants! The Count tallied 72 species, which is our average. (See the table below.) The 3 barred owls found by Denver's group, west of the airport, was the top bird and close behind were the 2 northern saw-whet owls found by Joe Regan on Kelly Island. Jim Brown's group birded Mastel and Jim Edwards' properties and had the only green-winged teal and northern pintail. Joyce Swingendorf had the only golden eagle which was feeding on a deer carcass in Pattee Canyon. Terry Toppins' group had the only Cooper's hawk and yellow-rumped warbler at Maclay Flat. Rose Leach's group birded Mullan Road and had the only gray partridge. Paul Loehnen's group had the only marsh wren at Council Grove. Kay Lambert had the only white-crowned sparrow and Cassin's finch coming to her feeder on Aspen Drive. Dorothy Anders had the only rosy finch at her feeder near Duncan Drive. Denver's group saw the only American tree sparrow. Brian Williams birded the Stewart Peak Trail and had the only pine grosbeak and red crossbill. Other group leaders included Paul Hendricks who birded the Marshall Canyon to Woods Gulch, Virginia Vincent who birded Orchard Homes and Target Range, Jim Sparks who hiked up the main Rattlesnake Trail, Robin Anderson who birded the University and Greenough Park, Joe Elliott who birded La Valle and Butler Creeks, Norm & Cathy Smyers who birded the Tower St. Open Space and the State Nursery, Elena Ulev who birded the Rattlesnake Greenway and North Hills, Edward Morgan who birded the upper Clark Fork River and the Kim Williams Trail, Dick Hutto & Sue Reel who birded Sleven's Island, and Will McDowell who birded Crazy Canyon. There were 2 count week birds; a dusky grouse near Mt. Sentinel and a prairie falcon North of Duncan Drive. The day ended with another fabulous potluck dinner at the home of Ruth & Russ Royter. 25 people attended the potluck and the bird tabulation. A big thank you to Ruth & Russ for hosting again, and to everyone who participated!

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2009		
great blue heron (27)	mourning dove (24)	marsh wren (1)
Canada goose (632)	Eurasian-collared dove (11)	American dipper (9)
Green-winged teal (26)	great horned owl (16)	Golden-crowned kinglet (11)
Mallard (561)	barred owl (3)	Townsend's solitaire (15)
northern pintail (3)	Long-eared owl (11)	American robin (4)
Gadwall (24)	northern saw-whet owl (2)	Bohemian waxwing (217)
common goldeneye (98)	belted kingfisher (14)	cedar waxwing (137)
common merganser (32)	downy woodpecker (61)	northern shrike (3)
bald eagle (41)	hairy woodpecker (17)	European starling (95)
golden eagle (1)	northern flicker (176)	Yellow-rumped warbler (1)
Sharp-shinned hawk (4)	pileated woodpecker (17)	American tree sparrow (22)
Cooper's hawk (1)	gray jay (5)	song sparrow (77)
Red-tailed hawk (34)	Steller's jay (9)	White-crowned sparrow (4)
Rough-legged hawk (32)	Clark's nutcracker (3)	Dark-eyed junco (210)
American kestrel (3)	Black-billed magpie (448)	Red-winged blackbird (184)
Merlin (2)	American crow (91)	rosy finch (2)
Peregrine falcon (2)	common raven (194)	pine grosbeak (11)
prairie falcon CW	Black-capped chickadee (478)	Cassin's finch (2)
gray partridge (39)	mountain chickadee (50)	house finch (747)
Ring-necked pheasant (28)	Chestnut-backed chickadee (9)	red crossbill (8)
dusky grouse CW	Red-breasted nuthatch (116)	pine siskin (39)
wild turkey (51)	White-breasted nuthatch (32)	American goldfinch (76)
Killdeer (8)	pygmy nuthatch (103)	evening grosbeak (23)
Wilson's snipe (6)	brown creeper (18)	house sparrow (692)
rock pigeon (413)	winter wren (2)	
72 species, 2 count week birds, 6619 total birds		

New Members:

Dianne Barnes
Erin Gilder
Geoffrey Hill
Dennis & Deborah Mayhew
Jacob Sakaske
Chester Cornelivson
Mary Jean Goldberg
The Jeffs
Leona McDonald
John M. Smith MD
Kristina Davis
Betsy Griffing
Caroline Kurtz
Deborah Norheim
Le Roy Gaski
Frances Higinbotham
Susan Land
Janice Pierce

Returning Members:

Janet Allison
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Lois P. Habbe
Christian F. Miller
Kathleen Regg
Lars Anderberg
Laurice M. Fritz
Pam & Ernie Jean
Scott Morgan
Carol & Terry Toppins
Peter Bring
Catherine Goodman
Linda Jensen
Roy S. O'Connor
Nancy & David Tyrell
Mr. Larry Evans
Kate Goodwin
Margaret C. Kingsland
Arlie G. Peterson

Important Note To Our Valued Members:
Please note the expiration date of your membership on the address label of this newsletter. We wouldn't want your membership to expire. We would miss you! A renewal form is on the last page of every newsletter for your convenience. Please renew your membership so that you don't miss any newsletters or any of the upcoming events of the Five Valleys Audubon Society.

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 a one-year membership for an individual or family

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:** _____

Phone: _____

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

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