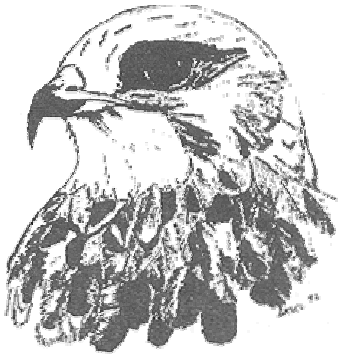
January, 2009

Birding Observer

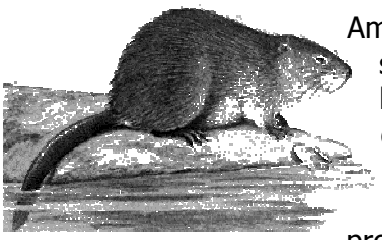


Five Valleys Audubon Society **A Chapter of the National Audubon Society**

Calendar

* **Monday, January 5th, 7pm:** Alex Taft will host the January board meeting.
* **Monday, January 12th, 7:30pm:** Recipients of the 2008 P.L. Wright Awards will present their research.
* **Friday, January 16th:** Deadline for submissions to the February *Birding Observer*.
* **Saturday, January 17th:** Owl trapping field trip led by Denver Holt. The location will most likely be in the Missoula Valley. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 9:00 AM. Participants need to dress accordingly for standing outside for 2 hours.

Presentations by the recipients of the 2008 Philip L. Wright Research Awards



Amanda Ormesher was a sophomore in wildlife biology at the University of Montana when she applied for a grant to support an inventory of productive osprey nests on Northwest Montana lakes under the direction of Professor Erick Greene. Among the birds most affected by the introduction and use of DDT, Osprey populations dropped precipitously in the 1940s and 50s. When the use of DDT was banned in the 1970s Osprey recovered to become common wherever there is suitable habitat. Now researchers are finding unexpectedly high levels of mercury in some Osprey. Come and hear what Amanda learned last summer.

The second awardee was Darin Newton, who was then a junior in the wildlife biology program at UM. He proposed a survey of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge to determine the species of mammals living in each habitat on the refuge. Through live-trapping small mammals, and observing larger species, he could provide the refuge staff with a list of species and locations to use in their interpretive program. Darin will share his findings with us at the FVAS meeting on Monday, January 12, at 7:30 p.m. in room L14 of the Gallagher Business Building on the University of Montana campus.

Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

Over twenty years ago Five Valleys Audubon Society began a program of awarding small amounts of money to help students fund small research projects. Originally called the Field Biology Research Awards, they have provided support for students undertaking research in the fields of ecology, wildlife biology, environmental biology, animal behavior, and conservation biology.

In 1992 the name of the program was changed to the Philip L. Wright Research Awards in recognition of Dr. Wright's contributions to science and the community. Philip L. Wright, a professor of zoology at the University of Montana, inspired thousands of students over four decades while teaching them mammalogy and ornithology. He established the zoological museum that now bears his name and he shared his passion for the natural world with an infectious enthusiasm while keenly encouraging students in their research endeavors.

About 45 university and high school students have received a total of more than $16,000 from these research awards — in the range of $200 to $1,000 per student.

Requests for proposals for research to be funded this year have been distributed to schools. Proposals for the 2009 awards will be due in March.

Peeps from the Prez by Paul Loehnen

You may remember that in my last Peeps we were exploring the Gluepot Reserve in South Australia. One of our target birds was the Malleefowl, an endangered chicken- sized bird that is not only shy but also has excellent camouflage. We searched hard but never saw this remarkable bird. Its genus is Megapodius, representing birds who do not sit on their eggs to incubate them, but build a large mound of leaves and other organic material. It constructs an egg chamber in the middle of this mound. With decomposition heat is given off which incubates the eggs. The height of the mound is adjusted by the male as the ambient temperature changes. Apparently his bill is a very sensitive gauge of the temperature. However, with the prolonged drought there is not enough moisture to cause decomposition and thus no nests are being built and this rare bird is becoming even more endangered.

We then flew to Alice Springs, in the so called "red center" of the continent. The spring after which the town is named has dried up. However, we did see a Western Bowerbird next to its bower adorned with white rocks, bones and other white knickknacks. Apparently, this is the equivalence of a "singles bar". Females check out the display and if they like what they see, they mate. They then go off to make a nest and lay their eggs. The male waits for more visitors and doesn't help the female with her chores. We saw a Common Walleroo and a Dingo. Interestingly, Dingoes are feral dogs of the everyday variety. They are sleek, wary and behave similarly to our coyotes.

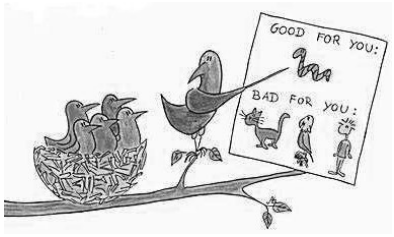
The following day one of the highlights was a pair of Pink Cockatoos at a nest. We were also treated to majestic Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring overhead. Our wonderful guides knew that the uncommon, small Bourke's Parrot drink before roosting at night. We stopped near a rain puddle near dusk and sure enough two Bourke's Parrot magically appeared.

The next day we flew to Uluru (Ayer's Rock) and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas). Although I knew that Uluru is massive, one cannot appreciate its size without seeing it. It has a circumference of 5.8 miles and is 1142 feet high. A remarkable fact is that most of it is buried. It is a sacred site for the aboriginal people.

We saw Pied Butcherbirds, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Grey-headed Honeyeaters as well as a few dozen Zebra Finches coming into drink at the Olgas. We returned to Alice Springs that night.

On our final morning we visited the sewage ponds, the only obvious water anywhere in that arid terrain. It's somewhat unpredictable as to what might be seen. The highlights were two Long-toed Stints, a Latham's Snipe, Wood Sandpipers, many Black-tailed Native-hens, a Straw-necked Ibis, and a lovely group of Variegated Fairy-wrens including at least two beautiful males. We then flew north to Darwin, where our adventure will continue in the next Peep.

Advanced Birding Workshop by Larry Weeks



An advanced birding workshop has been scheduled for February and March 2009 that will include six 2-hour sessions 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 26	gulls	Dan Casey
Mar 5	raptors	Steve Hoffman
Mar 26	flycatchers	Christina Smucker
*	sparrows	Garrett McDonald
*	shorebirds	Jim Brown
*	birding by ear	Larry Weeks

(* dates not finalized)

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.

Audubon at the 2009 Montana Legislature

Montana Audubon has made the following list of bills a priority for the 2009 Montana Legislature:

- Montana River Legacy Act – The "River Legacy Act" will be introduced to require new homes and commercial buildings to be set back at least 250 ft from the ordinary high water mark on up to 12 legacy rivers.
- Wind Farms and Wildlife ~ A wildlife-friendly certification program will be established for new wind projects.
- Protecting Prairie Dogs ~ Legislation will be introduced to allow Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to manage these declining animals.

If you are interested in helping with our legislative work, consider signing up for our action alert program. You can sign up for our alert program by: signing up at your local chapter meeting, sending an email to lobbyist Janet Ellis (jellis@mtaudubon.org), signing up on our website (www.mtaudubon.org), or calling the Montana Audubon office (443-3949). THANKS for your interest and involvement!

Field Trips by Larry Weeks

Sunday, December 7, 2008: As it turned out, the Five Valleys Audubon (FVAS) did not jinx the Grizzly football team by scheduling the December field trip on Sunday to avoid a potential playoff game at home. The Grizzlies ended up victorious on December 6th and FVAS had a successful field trip to the Mission Valley which was led by Jim Brown. The weather was wet and breezy but it was tolerable with temperatures in the mid thirties. Due to the mild fall weather, most of the standing water was ice-free and we did very well on waterfowl. The Polson sewage treatment ponds had an exceptionally large concentration of goldeneyes that included at least 30 Barrow's goldeneyes. There were several trumpeter swans on Nine Pipes Reservoir and a large concentration of bald eagles. Raptors were the primary focus of the field trip and we tallied 89. The breakdown on raptors was red-tailed hawks (30), rough-legged hawks (22), unidentified buteo (1), northern harriers (10), American kestrels (6), bald eagles (17), and great horned owls (3). Three of the red-tailed hawks were Harlan's. The vole population is down this year and that is probably the reason for the lower number of rough-legged hawks. Other interesting birds included northern shrike and American tree sparrow. Twenty-four people were on the field trip and we found 34 bird species.

2008 Field Trip Bird List by Larry Weeks

During the 2008 calendar year, the Chapter had 18 field trips that included Smurfit-Stone (5), Mission Valley (2), Maclay Flat (2), Lee Metcalf, Brown's Lake, Freezout Lake, Bear Canyon, Lolo Pass, Moose Can Gully, Glacier Park, Tower Street, and Flesher Pass. Three of these field trips were multi-day trips; a 2-day trip to Freezout Lake and the Rocky Mountain Front led by Nate Kohler, a 3-day trip to Bear Canyon which is in the Pryor Mountains near Bridger, and a 4-day campout to Glacier Park. If someone had participated in all 18 field trips, they would have seen, or had the opportunity to see, 212 bird species. This total does not include some special birds seen on the field trips at Montana Audubon's Bird Festival in Billings. The most unusual birds seen during the 18 Chapter field trips included the following:

Clark's grebe – Freezout
Black-crowned night-heron – Freezout
Ferruginous hawk – Mission Valley
Great gray owl – Maclay Flat
Mountain plover – Bear Canyon
Upland sandpiper – Freezout
Whimbrel – Smurfit
Alder flycatcher – Freezout
Blue-gray gnatcatcher – Bear Canyon
Tennessee warbler – Glacier
Snow bunting – Smurfit
Sprague's pipit – Freezout
McCown's & chestnut-collared longspurs – Freezout
White-winged crossbill – Glacier
Black rosy-finch – Bear Canyon (Red Lodge)
Green-tailed towhee – Bear Canyon
Grasshopper sparrow - Freezout

Fall 2008 Raptor Migration Study in West-Central Montana at Nora Ridge
by Fred Tilly

This project is part of an ongoing effort to monitor trends in raptor populations of the northern Rocky Mountains by counting the raptors passing along this portion of the ridge flyway comprising the interface of the Rockies and the Great Plains. The eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains runs mostly northwest to southeast through Montana. Rogers Pass is located on the Continental Divide Ridge where Montana Route 200 crosses the Continental Divide. Nora Ridge is parallel and lies 3.5 miles to the southwest. The lookout used is at the north end of the four mile long ridge at an elevation of about 6,000 ft. The banding station is ¾ of a mile to the southeast along the ridge top and about 400 feet higher in elevation. Observers were Fred and Cathy Tilly. Both observers have extensive experience. The area covered by this count includes the slopes of Nora Ridge, out 3 miles to the west and 3.5 miles to the east to include migrants on the flanks of the Continental Divide Ridge.

This season's count ran from September 1 through October 29. During the 59 day (341 hours) period of the 2008 count a total of 2,905 raptors were observed (see table). Highlights of the season were an unusually large number of Broad-winged Hawks (79) and good numbers of the Sharp-shinned Hawk (545) and Cooper's Hawk (206). The Peregrine Falcon put in a very good showing with 17, almost all adults. The species has been on the increase throughout North America. The Goshawk at 38 was 47% below last season's level. The Red-tailed Hawk at 209 was very close to last year's level.

Our most spectacular and most numerous migrant here on the Front Range is the Golden Eagle. This season's total of 1279 was 22% below last season's level. Most were sighted off to the east and moved along the flanks of the Continental Divide Ridge. The decrease in Golden Eagle numbers is not necessarily the result of a decline in the migrating population but is more likely the result of snowy weather and low cloud cover on the ridges during the peak migration for this species. We had 18" of fresh snow on the ground at the base of Nora Ridge on October 10. Peak Golden Eagle days included 159 on October 15 and 124 on October 20.

Raptor View Research Institute of Missoula MT operated the Nora Ridge count as well as the banding station on Nora Ridge. The banding crew included Rob Domenech (President), Tyler Vito, Vince Slabe, Stephen Wilson and occasionally other volunteers. Twenty-eight Golden Eagles and 127 other raptors were banded at the Nora Ridge project this fall. The Golden Eagles were fitted with numbered petagial wing markers. The color is blue. Satellite transmitters were put on three Golden Eagles this fall. These and one transmitter Golden from last fall are being monitored in wintering areas from Wyoming to south Texas as of December 2008.

Nora Ridge, MT, Totals for Fall 2008

date	hours	TV	OS	BE	NH	SS	CH	NG	BW	RT	FH	RL	GE	AK	ML	PG	PR	UA	UB	UE	UF	UU	TOTAL
Sept.	173	5	10	10	57	405	193	10	79	162	14	2	277	129	8	17	1	20	11	0	3	14	1427
Oct.	168	0	1	46	11	140	13	28	0	47	2	122	1002	13	9	0	2	4	8	6	2	21	1478
total	341	5	11	58	68	545	206	38	79	209	16	124	1279	142	17	17	3	24	19	6	5	35	2905

The grand total of 2905 includes one Gyrfalcon, adult gray phase on 10/20.

TV-turkey vulture, OS-osprey, BE-bald eagle, NH-northern harrier, SS-sharp-shinned hawk, CH-Cooper's hawk, NG-N. goshawk, BW-broad-winged hawk, RT-red-tailed hawk, FH-ferruginous hawk, RL-rough-legged hawk, GE-golden eagle, AK-Am. Kestrel, ML-merlin, PG-peregrine falcon, PR-prairie falcon, UA-unidentified Accipiter, UB-unidentified Buteo, UE-unidentified eagle, UF-unidentified falcon, UU-unidentified raptor

Welcome New Members:

Sharyl Ackley
Nancy Cohen
Beverly Evans
Bryon H. Griffin
Sara Krier
Dawn Maki
Elizabeth Rantz
Virginia L. Speck
Liz Bradley
Lane & Linda Coulston
Leo Frye
Mindy Hill
Gloria Langstaff
Angela J. Morrison
Glenda Scott
Patty Watson
Barry Brown
Dawn Duncan
Sue Furey
Jil & Mark Hollinger
Wallace & Karla Long
Doug Pryor
Rebecca Sharp
The Parker McClain Family

Thanks to Our Returning Members:

Anne T. Arrington
Kim Erway Birck
Will Butler
Larry Evans
Jeanne Fevold
Le Roy Gaskin
E. G. Grimley
Linda Jensen
Vicki Montejano
David Nelson
Robert E. Perrin
Kathleen Regg
Dorothy Wilson
Jeanne Wolverton
Shanna N. Bauer
Nathan Blackburn
Alan Dix
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Jami Romney Fitzgerald
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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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Five Valleys Audubon Society

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