January 2015

Birding Observer

Five Valleys Audubon Society, a Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Calendar of Events

- **Saturday, January 3rd:** Terry Toppins will lead a bird walk at Maclay Flats and the adjacent areas looking for wintering residents from 9am to 1pm. Meet at the Maclay Flats Parking Lot. Trails in the area could be icy.
- **Monday, January 5th, 7:00pm:** The next board meeting will be held at Naturalist's Mercantile, 131 East Main Street in downtown Missoula.
- **Monday, January 12th, 7:30 pm:** Join us to hear Yvette Ortega from the Native Plant Society explain knapweed's impact on native plants and birds. The meeting will be held in the Gallagher Business Building, room L123 at UM.
- **Thursday, January 15th**: Submission deadline for the February edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, January 17th**: Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Beginning birders are welcome!

Knapweed

How Knapweed Impacts Native Communities

On Monday, January 12th, Yvette Ortega from Native Plant Society will discuss the rippling effects of the knapweed invasion on native communities and the erosion of bird song diversity. This will be the joint meeting of the Five Valleys Audubon Society and the Native Plant Society. The meeting will take place in the Gallagher Building, Room 123, at 7:30 PM.

Yvette Ortega has been an Ecologist with the US Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station in Missoula for 16 years. She focuses on community interactions and how they are influenced by shifts in environmental context, including those induced by the invasion of novel species. She will tell the story of spotted knapweed's impacts on native plants and how these shifts ripple through the food chain to affect not only the population dynamics of birds but also their songs.

Christmas Bird Count & eBird

Hello Audubon Friends,

FVAS is entering some of our more interesting historic Christmas Bird Count records into eBird.

If you want to enter your own data, please do! Just let us know, and we will delete it if it is already entered. This helps us to geo-reference important bird records for our area.

Thanks for being eBirders!

Your Vice President, Rose Leach
rleach-2@bresnan.net

Peeps From The Board: Birding Glacier Park – Part II
By Rose Leach and Larry Weeks

Pacific Wren

My sister Peggy, traveled to Missoula to attend my daughter's wedding this past July, and to do some birding here. I organized a 4-day trip to Glacier with some folks she had birded with on our great Montana Audubon-South Texas bird trip during April 2011. The Glacier group included Rose, Peggy, our grade-school friend Madeline, Jerry Dirnberger, Cynthia Hudson and husband Bob Zirl, Nate Kohler, and Larry Weeks. On July 29th, we converged on Glacier via different routes. Larry left early, heading straight to Apgar to reserve a campsite for communal meals and for the hearty campers. Jerry was the chauffeur for Rose, Peggy, Madeline, and we birded our way from Missoula to Apgar via the Mission Valley hotspots with Cynthia and Robert in their car. Nate came from Deer Lodge, birding from that direction. We were successful in finding a Pacific Wren for Peggy—her 719th North American bird. After Larry got the campsite, he drove to the Camas Creek trailhead to look for a Great Gray and Northern Hawk-Owls. Unfortunately, he had no luck. The birding was not very productive because the birds had stopped singing. He then hiked from Camas Creek to Dutch Creek, and then on to Howe Lake. On the Howe Lake trail, there were many dead trees that had fallen across the trail. This is mentioned because of what the group would encounter the following day. Larry did find a family of Spruce Grouse, the only ones for the trip. Everyone gathered at Apgar for a salad and spaghetti dinner and swapped birding stories from the day.

After a quick breakfast the following morning, we drove to the Camas Creek Trailhead and hiked 2 miles up the trail. We were unsuccessful in locating any owls. We also had to work hard for the birds that we did see. We then moved to the Howe Lake Trailhead where the Olive-sided Flycatchers were very vocal. It had rained during the night and we soon realized that a bear had come down the trail during the night or early morning, because every downed tree across the trail now had a muddy foot print that wasn't present the previous day. We saw 2 Common Loons at the second lake, and there was American Kestrel activity at the first lake. Walking back, we found Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins. After another great dinner, mostly prepared by Larry, he and Cynthia, Robert, and Nate, drove to Logan Pass. There were several big-horned sheep in the Logan Pass parking lot that were licking up material from the asphalt. Some mountain goats were spotted just below the pass. The return drive from the pass was through a spectacular thunder storm with strong winds and driving rain.

The next day, we briefly looked for Harlequin Ducks along McDonald Creek before stopping at a pull out at Haystack Creek. Our mission here was to locate a Black Swift nest under Haystack Falls. There were 4 of us with Swarovski spotting scopes. We knew where to look and what to look for, but the early morning low light made bird finding difficult. After about 15 minutes and no success, we were ready to move on. Suddenly Cynthia found a nest. Not only was there a nest, but there was a Black Swift on the nest! This was the highlight of the trip. We stopped at Logan Pass and hiked up the boardwalk for about one half mile but there was little bird activity. The only bird action was near the visitor's center—White-crowned Sparrows, Cassin's Finches and a Townsend's Solitaire. An American Pipit was spotted near a herd of big-horned sheep, across the valley from the parking lot. Next stop was Siyeh Bend to hike the trail towards Piegan Pass. Near the start of the trail, we were treated to a great looks at a male and female Pine Grosbeak. Other birds on this trail included Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush and Clark's Nutcrackers. At this point, Cynthia and Robert, as well as Nate left the group and returned to their homes. Larry ended up hiking to Piegan Pass, but failed to locate a flock of Gray-crowned Rosy Finches that were seen by a Park Ranger. Jerry was able to get a campsite at the St. Mary Campground, where we had a stew dinner. After dinner, we birded by the St. Mary River and found Yellow Warblers, Cedar Waxwings, Song Sparrows, Gray Catbirds, and a Common Nighthawk.

The following morning, the remaining 5 hiked a 4-mile loop on the Red Eagle Lake Trail. There was a lot of bird

activity at the beginning of the trail just passed the old Ranger Station, including Gray Jays, Chipping Sparrows, Warbling Vireos, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Red-naped Sapsuckers, and a Hairy Woodpecker. Just before the beaver pond, there were 2 White-winged Crossbills feeding on Douglas fir cones. A Northern Waterthrush walked along the edge of the beaver pond in full view. After this hike, Larry returned to Missoula and Jerry and the girls headed toward Freezout. We had 57 species in the park, and beautiful scenery and weather. Highlights on the way home were Golden Eagles and a Prairie Falcon. I think we can talk Larry into guiding our chapter members back to Glacier during summer 2015.

FVAS Field Trip to Maclay Flats
By Hilary A. Turner

On Sunday November 23, 2014 I joined Terry Toppins and 12 others for a Five Valleys Audubon field trip to Maclay Flats Nature Trail outside Missoula. When I arrived, the group had already spotted the day's only Townsend's Solitaire. I was sad to miss out on this winter resident, but the walk started and right away groups of Red-breasted Nuthatches sounded the alarm. Usually at Maclay, I see these passerines in small mixed-species flocks, but today, most of the flocks only contained nuthatches. The nuthatches suddenly got quiet as a small accipiter flew in. It turned out to be an immature Sharp-shinned Hawk. We were lucky enough to view it through the spotting scopes before it took off. A Hairy Woodpecker was heard and then seen as it skylined itself with a Northern Flicker and a short dispute ensued at the top of a large Ponderosa Pine. A mixed-species flock was found in an aspen stand near the second flats area, and we counted Black-capped Chickadees, one Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatches, one White-breasted Nuthatch, one House Finch, and one Dark-eyed Junco. A male Downy Woodpecker was seen foraging near the activity as well. At the U-shaped turn of the trail, a Red-tailed Hawk was seen at a distance and the day's only flock of Rock Pigeons was found. Near the river, we found 3 Great Blue Herons, 4 Common Mergansers, 2 Hooded Mergansers, and a group of foraging Mallards. Bald Eagles were numerous throughout the day, with at least 3 adults and 2 subadults counted. A pair near the river vocalized. Overall, we had 21 species throughout the 3 hour trip. Thank you to the leader, Terry Toppins, and those who generously shared their spotting scopes and knowledge.

Hey, Bird Nerds
By Jerry Dirnberger

We have a winner of the $1,000 for the one who correctly answered last month's contest about migrating birds (I guess you should have read the REALLY FINE print). It was **I** who won and thanks goes to **me** for donating the check for $1,000 as it was deposited into **my** account. The correct answers were: the highest…bar-headed geese; the furthest…arctic terns; the fastest…great snipes; the tireless (of course, they don't have 'tires'!!)…bar-tailed godwits; and the fattest (even this word added an extra 't')…blackpoll warblers.

This month's question for all to ponder until the answer in next month's newsletter (remember to keep your membership current) is: How can you tell in a flock of snow geese which ones are the females? (I have given this answer in a few field trips in the past, but no one generally pays attention)

A New Year's Resolution
By Jerry Dirnberger

Buy a Duck Stamp!! The Duck Stamp program is a highly effective conservation program. The proceeds support the National Wildlife Refuges. It was formerly called the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp - which explains it all.

If you are one of the many non-consumptive users of National Wildlife Refuges, like the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge, you don't have to pay an entrance fee if you have a Senior Pass. But please think about buying one of these $15 stamps if you are under 65, as it will be your 'pass' for the year. We all have a common goal of habitat protection and healthy bird populations. When habitats are shrinking, this is one small thing we can do for the birds who rely on the refuges. So if you enjoy the refuges and have a Senior Pass, please consider buying a stamp anyway.

You can buy the stamps at your local Post Office, at most Refuge Visitor Centers, or on-line at the American Bird Conservancy's website: aba.org

Salmonella
From the Portland Audubon Society's newsletter

White-winged crossbill
Photo by Lillian Stokes

Salmonella is a type of bacteria that can affect birds, humans, dogs, cats, and other animals. It is normally found in the gut of wild birds and will pass through the feces without harm to the animal. However, during the cold winter months, when there are large populations of immunosuppressed birds congregating at feeders, eating and defecating in the same place, we will sometimes see an outbreak. Because of the large volume of birds at the feeders, the amount of Salmonella which normally wouldn't be a big deal is now a problem. Also, since these birds are spending a lot of time and energy just keeping warm, they don't have a lot of extra energy to fight off infections. Siskins, because of their tendency to congregate in large flocks at feeders, are the most common birds we see with this problem, but other species that utilize feeders can be impacted as well.

The good news is that each of us that feed birds in our yards can adopt practices that reduce the likelihood that Salmonella poisoning occurs at our feeders.

First, feed responsibly, following the simple steps below. Second, naturescape your yard to provide natural habitat and natural food sources. This allows birds to move from spot to spot while feeding, reducing risk of disease transmission. And third, pay attention to the birds at your feeder. Sick birds may appear lethargic, puffed up and thin, and may have swollen eyelids. **If you see sick birds, please stop feeding**!

Tips for Responsible Bird Feeding:

• **Only feed small amounts of food daily**. Multiple small feeders are better than supersized feeders. The more food you put out in one spot, the more likely it is to become moldy, contaminated, or mixed with bird feces.

• **Clean and disinfect feeders weekly** by soaking them for 15 min in diluted bleach solution (9 parts water to 1 part bleach). But for **hummingbird feeders: Do not use bleach**! Use vinegar and water in a 9:1 solution (9 parts water to 1 part vinegar) and a bottle brush to clean small crevices. **Rinse thoroughly**! Drying in the sun is ideal. A dry feeder will deter mold growth on seeds. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling feeders or baths!

• **Keep a tray under feeders to collect hulls and seed that fall**. Empty the discards every evening. This will prevent mold and disease for ground-feeding birds as well as avoid rodent infestations.

• **If you notice sick or dead birds**: Immediately remove feeders and bird baths and do not re-hang for at least one month. This allows the birds to disperse. Don't worry — there are other sources of food out there for them.

Please be a responsible feeder, even if you have not yet seen sick or dead birds. This will help protect local birds from Salmonella and other diseases.

Optimal Optics by Pete Dunne

I've said it before. I'll say it again. If you want to go birding, use binoculars that work in the birding arena. Most binoculars do not.

Birding binoculars must be light and portable. They must fit your hand so that your index finger falls easily on the focus wheel and offer an effort-free image when you raise them up to your eyes. They must be sharp and bright and offer a generous field of view -- at least 340 feet at 1000 yards.

There's more. Birder-worthy binoculars should have a generous depth of field -- so that you can find birds easily in a maze of branches and so that you aren't obligated to refocus every time a bird hops one branch closer or farther away.(This means 7x or 8x binoculars. The lower the magnification, the more user-friendly binoculars are.)

Birder-worthy binoculars must also offer minimal or zero color bias (i.e., they shouldn't turn the world green in the dubious aim of 'getting better contrast').

The greatest obstacle birders face is not inexperience or lack of knowledge; it is inappropriate optics. Don't use them.

wings MONTANA AUDUBON across the big sky

June 5-7, 2015 Helena, Montana

The Helena-based local chapter, Last Chance Audubon Society, has been busy planning a spectacular event for June 2015! Janice Miller and Jo Lace, the LCAS festival co-chairs, have surprises lined up for all attendees and we certainly hope you're planning to join us.

Our visits to the Red Lion Colonial Inn have resulted in securing wonderful space for our meetings, meals and speaker events. The open space and easy access to major roads will enhance our festival and field trip experiences.

The LCAS Chapter has hinted at fabulous birding tours—possibly river floats, as well as non-birding trips such as a historical tour of Helena and a trip to a local arts center.

Each month we will continue to feature developing news on the 2015 Bird Festival. Stay tuned as next month we'll tantalize you with a glimpse of some birding field trip destinations! For more information contact Montana Audubon's Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson: cerickson@mtaudubon.org.

Winter Birds Myth: Migration means north in the spring and south in the winter. **Winter Birds Fact:** Some bird species migrate to higher elevations in the spring and down to lower elevations in the winter. Examples include rosy finches and ptarmigans in the West.

Winter Birds Myth: If you leave town during winter, the birds that rely on the food from your feeders will die. **Winter Birds Fact:** Research has proven this one wrong. Scientists have shown that chickadees, for example, will eat only 25% of their daily winter food from feeders. They find the other 75% in the wild. In addition, with so many people feeding them nowadays, birds in your yard will simply fly to a nearby neighbor to get their food until you return home.

WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

Western Field Ornithologists Conference
June 10-14, 2015 Billings, Montana

Also in June, mark your calendar for the 40th annual Western Field Ornithologists (WFO) Conference in Billings. This will be the first time the conference will be held in the state of Montana.

Field trips will visit a variety of habitats from the high mountains (Black Rosy-Finch) to the grasslands (Sprague's Pipits). One can see courting McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs in their finest plumage, along with Upland Sandpipers and Lark Buntings. History buffs will delight in viewing the Little Bighorn Battlefield where Custer saw his last Sharp-tailed Grouse.

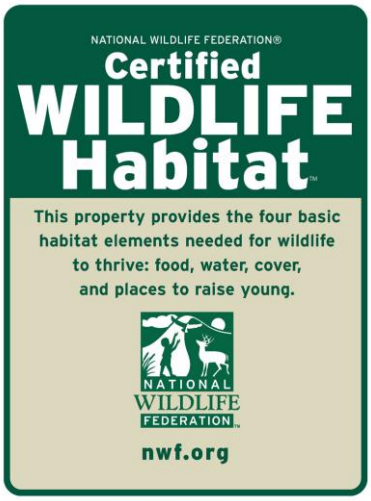
Black Rosy Finch

There will be workshops on field identification of sparrows (Jon Dunn) and flycatchers (Dan Casey), natural history of owls (Denver Holt), bird sound identification (Nathan Pieplow), raptors (Steve Hoffman), and more. Friday and Saturday afternoon science sessions will update you on the most current avian research from the region and the Saturday evening banquet will feature a keynote address by Stephen Dinsmore on Mountain Plovers. Ed Harper and Nathan Pieplow will again offer their ever-popular sessions on bird ID by sight and sound.

Registration for the conference will open in February 2015 with the exact date to be announced via a future WFO News email. If you are NOT currently on our electronic mailing list, please send an email to erpfromca@aol.com, include your full name along with city and state of residence, and we'll put you on. WFO members are able to register for our conferences at a reduced rate and have early access to registration. If you are not currently a WFO member, you can join at (https://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/join.php).

Community Habitats: Certify your Community

By Darcy McKinley Lester, Wildlife and Sustainability Educator
National Wildlife Federation



Have you ever wandered around Missoula and noticed a favorite bird species, and then wondered what you could do to ensure its habitat? In an environmentally-friendly town like Missoula, we are always working to protect and preserve our natural resources. The cleanup of the Clark Fork River has restored life to what was once an uninviting body of water. Open spaces and parks abound, providing areas for both people and animals. Yet habitat loss continues to occur as a result of both urban expansion and climate change, threatening many of the beautiful creatures that we have come to know and love. Accordingly, the National Wildlife Federation and other Missoula groups are working to protect and provide habitat right here in the city through certification as a Community Wildlife Habitat—and you can help too.

Community Wildlife Habitat certification is a national recognition program through the National Wildlife Federation that brings together community-wide efforts to create and conserve wildlife habitat in an urban environment. And while the term "wildlife" often brings to mind animals you don't necessarily want roaming your streets, like bears, deer, elk, and other large animals, "wildlife" also includes insects, smaller mammals, and birds—creatures a bit less dangerous and a bit more yard-friendly.

One of the most effective methods of assisting birds through CWH certification involves little more than your yard (or balcony if you lack a yard) and some basic gardening. The "Gardening for Wildlife" program (although in Missoula it could be more aptly termed "Gardening *with* Wildlife") is a subset of the CWH certification process. Through this individual certification program, you can turn your home or business's outdoor space into a habitat by providing at least three food sources, one water source, two places for cover, and two places to raise young. After your site has reached those goals, it can be registered as a Certified Wildlife Habitat through NWF. These efforts are especially important as our ever-growing town and changing climate continue to reduce available habitat.

With an active conservation community and fifty-nine homes, five schools, and one common area already Certified Wildlife Habitats, Missoula is well on its way to earning its Community Wildlife Habitat certification. However, there is still work to be done. Forming a Habitat Team, which is a group of volunteers dedicated to supporting and spearheading this project, and reaching education, community outreach, and certification goals are top priorities. While some of the goals are required (for example, 200 private homes, five schools and six common areas must be certified as Wildlife Habitat), the educational and outreach events are flexible. NWF doesn't mandate activities, instead offering suggested actions, each with its own point value. In order to achieve certification, each community must earn a minimum threshold of points. Because it is a community-led initiative, people are able to choose their emphasis, from educational goals to community outreach, even types of wildlife.

Missoula is a wonderful place to be wild, and together, we can get it nationally recognized with the NWF.

Questions? Interested in joining Missoula's Habitat Team? Contact Darcy McKinley Lester at mckinleylesterd@nwf.org

Welcome New Members

Carrie & John Arvish
Kenneth F. Brown
Betty Freudenberg
Shan Guisinger
Holly Kuehlwein
Judy Reese
Rene Veitenheimer

Go Green and Save!

Do you want to help Five Valleys Audubon Society save money, paper and volunteer time? Please consider reading your Birding Observer online. Your online copy will contain content in color, and you will receive your newsletter much earlier than the mailed hard copy! If you wish to receive your Birding Observer via email, just send us a request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrl.net. You can also find your current newsletter on the Five Valleys Audubon Society website at www.fvaudubon.org. Thanks!

Join 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:** _____

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Email: _____

Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

___ $15 is enclosed for Chapter-only 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

Join National Audubon Society
& Five Valleys 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*, and I may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

__ $20 for a 1-year individual or family membership

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