January 2016

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Monday, January 4th:** The January board meeting will be held at 6:00pm at Andrea Stierle's house (4703 Larch Ave), with a quick potluck and festival planning before the regular business starts at 7:00pm.
- **Monday, January 11th:** Marisa Lipsey Sather will discuss vegetation, songbirds and conservation of Montana's grasslands at the Chapter's joint meeting with the Native Plant Society. The meeting will start at 7:30pm and be in room 123 (note different room) at the Gallagher Business Building at UM campus.
- **Friday, January 15th**: Submission deadline for the February edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, January 16th**: Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Saturday, January 30th**: Owl trapping field trip in the Missoula Valley with Denver Holt. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 9:00 am. For more information, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632.

Please see the list of 2016 field trips on page 2.

Western Meadowlark

Cows and Plows: Conservation in the Changing Landscape of Eastern Montana's Grasslands

On Monday, January 11th we'll ring in the new year at a joint meeting with the Native Plant Society. The meeting will be in room 123 (note different room) at the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus at 7:30 p.m. Marisa Lipsey Sather will provide an introduction to the northern mixed-grass prairie of northeast Montana and the unique flora and fauna that depend on it, with a special emphasis on grassland specialist songbirds.

Populations of grassland songbirds have been declining sharply across the US compared with any other group of birds, in some cases by >5% per year. Marisa will explore how patterns of land use change are likely behind these declines. Conservation of this system forces us to think at bigger scales than we have in the past, and she will outline a vision of how a strategy of "landscape conservation" provides hope for the future of grasslands.

Marisa received her PhD in Fish and Wildlife Biology at the University of Montana in May 2015. She is currently working as a private lands biologist for the Montana Partners for Fish and Wildlife (USFWS). She is originally from Nashville, TN but has done a lot of moving around since then. She received her undergraduate degree in Conservation Biology at Middlebury College in Vermont in 2006. This was followed by about 2 years in Southern Africa studying and working. She completed her MS in Applied Conservation Biology at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology (University of Cape Town) in 2008, where she studied bird distribution in endangered afro-montane grasslands of KwaZulu-Natal. She returned to the US and found work as an intern for the Bureau of Land Management in northeast Montana where she fell in love with Montana's prairies. Shortly after, she entered the graduate program at UM to study songbirds in that landscape.

Peeps From The Board:
Birding and Conservation Successes
By Jim Brown

Birding can be super fun and interesting but what makes it especially fun and worthwhile is when your birding adventures help protect important bird habitats. Our Chapter experienced two exciting conservation achievements this past year by helping protect important wetlands and grasslands. Montana Audubon recognizes these habitat types as the most at risk for assuring long-term survival of our State's native birds. But it does take time and perseverance to see good things happen.

Our first exciting conservation outcome began in 2006, when the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley Important Bird Area was officially recognized. We began talking with land owners about their important bird habitat, doing bird surveys and working with Five Valleys Land Trust (FVLT) to support their conservation efforts. One land owner whose family had farmed the land for over a century was particularly interested in seeing that his rich agricultural soils and wildlife habitat remain for the benefit of future generations. We carried out bird surveys in 2010, 2013 and 2014 on his wetlands and uplands. Most of our attention was on the wetlands that supported more than a dozen species of waterfowl including Barrow's Goldeneye and Wood Duck, Sora, Lewis's Woodpecker and many species of songbirds. In all Joe Boyer has placed nearly 1200 acres under a conservation easement with the final 118 acres of wetland officially protected this past December. This will assure that future generations can benefit from the agricultural and wildlife values in the rapidly growing greater Missoula Valley. To help in attracting grant funds to support the conservation easement Five Valleys Audubon contributed $5,000, which although a small amount relative to the value of the easement, it was considered to have significant influence on acquiring other funding.

Our second exciting outcome was in assisting efforts of FVLT to acquire funding to protect grassland and riparian habitats on a 4,000 acre ranch in the Flint Creek Valley south of Drummond. Our discovery and documentation of a substantial breeding population of Long-billed Curlews was significant in a big way. The continual decline of birds that require grasslands to survive has resulted in species, such as the Long-billed Curlew, becoming a focus of conservation by every level of government in the United States and Canada, as well as a major regional conservation effort in Mexico. The Long-billed Curlew is a beacon in the push to achieve conservation. Protecting and improving habitat for curlews benefits other grassland birds as well.

Our bird surveys conducted in April and June showed a high diversity of species including Golden Eagle, Red-naped Sapsucker, seven species of flycatcher including many Willow Flycatchers, Cassin's and Warbling Vireos, four species of warblers and Cassin's Finch. Several of these species are considered to be species of conservation concern. It was revealing and important to find a diverse, robust population of native birds on a working ranch. But the biggest find was at least five breeding pair of curlews on two sections of land and later a group of 50 curlews feeding on the area. Our survey results were included in the grant proposal to Natural Resources Conservation Service for funding to help protect agricultural and wildlife values on the ranch. The NRCS said the proposal was outstanding and awarded $900,000 toward purchase of a conservation easement. It was a rewarding effort to help protect native prairie and riparian habitats while at the same time sustain a ranching livelihood. A big thanks goes to the many Audubon members who helped with the bird surveys on these properties. Their reward was the enjoyment of birding in interesting places and contributing to conservation.

Tentative 2016 Field Trip Schedule

Date	Destination
Jan 30,2016	Owl trapping
Feb 27, 2016	Mission Valley
Mar 26,2016	Lee Metcalf
Apr 30, 2016	Brown's Lake
May 8, 2016	Smurfit-Stone
May 21-22, 2016	Freezout Lake
Jun 25,2016	Bandy Ranch
Jul 7-10, 2016	Glacier Park
Aug 20,2016	Smurfit-Stone
Sep 10, 2016	Ninepipes
Oct 1,2016	Smurfit-Stone
Oct 8, 2016	Nora Ridge/Roger's Pass
Oct 29, 2016	Brown's Lake
Nov 5, 2016	Lee Metcalf
Dec 4, 2016	Mission Valley

Mission Valley Field Trip
By Jim Brown

Rough-legged Hawk
Photo by Gerhard Knudsen

December 6, 2015: Our field trip began with the usual cold wind blowing through the Adams Center parking lot. But soon after heading north the weather was mild and pleasant, which made for an exciting day of raptor watching. Twenty three birders rendezvoused in Ronan to begin birding in earnest. We spent the morning birding around the Ninepipe area where early on we stopped by a dairy farm frequented by a large flock of starlings, Eurasian-collared Doves and Rock Pigeons. Luckily, a Merlin was visiting this raptor grocery store allowing good views for everyone. Further on a Prairie Falcon flew over our string of vehicles and landed on a power pole providing nice views. Nearby was a Northern Shrike that some folks saw well. After teasing up a Marsh Wren in a patch of bull rushes we traveled to the beautiful home of Dave and Ruth Ann Bunnell who graciously opened their home to a our large group of birders. They served hot coffee and variety of delicious homemade breads to go along with the chance to warm up and enjoy the spectacular views of the Mission Valley and Mountains. As we left some of the group flushed a Short-eared Owl.

After lunch we drove the back roads toward Polson stopping occasionally to view Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks in various plumages. Trying to sort out the immature, adult and light and dark color phases was an interesting challenge and part of the fun. Coming over a hill we encountered what Andrea Stierle declared on the radio as a convocation of raptors. A number of Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, 4 or 5 Bald Eagles, Kestrels and another Merlin provided good views. Two Harlan's Hawks (race of Red-tailed Hawk that breeds in Alaska and northern Canada) and a Northern Harrier were identified as well. Looping back south through Valley View we stopped next to a farm home that hosted a flock of American Robins and several Common Redpolls. In all we tallied 34 species including close to 100 Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks; and probably set records for the early December field trip by sighting 3 Merlins and 8 Great Horned Owls.

Advanced Birding Workshop
By Larry Weeks

An advanced birding workshop has been scheduled for February and March 2016 that will include seven sessions on Thursday nights from 7:00 – 9:30 pm at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Regional Office on Spurgin Road. The tentative schedule is incomplete at this time and the following represents the current statue:

Date	Bird Group	Presenter
Feb 18	Owls	Matt Larson
Feb 25	Shorebirds	Jim Brown
Mar 3		
Mar 10	Raptors	Steve Hoffman
Mar 17		
Mar 24	Forest Birds	Jim Sparks
Mar 31		

The other bird groups that remain to be scheduled are flycatchers, sparrows and gulls.

A person may decide to attend a single session, any combination of sessions or all 7 sessions. The cost will be $15 per session or $70 for all 7 sessions. To sign up, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or bwsgenea@gmail.com.

Would You Like to Contribute to Our Newsletter?

The Five Valleys Audubon Society welcomes you to submit articles, announcements and photos for the *Birding Observer*. Articles can focus on any topic that you think would interest Auduboners, such as birds, optics, environmental conservation, local events, nature travel, natural history/science, etc. Articles should not exceed 650 words. Please send your submissions to the editor, Beverly, at orthbev@hotmail.com .

Festival Planning Update

By Rose Leach

Thanks very much for all of the volunteers for our June 3-5, 2016 Festival. The areas where we need help now are generally during the day on Saturday. If any of you were not planning to attend a field trip but still want to help us have a successful festival, those would be great slots to fill. Please contact Rose Leach (see back of newsletter). For those of you who have already volunteered, we will be sending a confirmation email (I hope by February-March) on the times you are scheduled, to make sure there aren't any conflicts. We can make adjustments at that time.

We have negotiated so that there will not be any vendor fees, so please let us know of birding, sustainable community, or related vendors that would like to attend. Also, we have made arrangements to serve Smithsonian-endorsed bird-friendly coffee this year. Thanks to everyone who has stepped forward. Please join the fun. It's a great way to meet friendly people and help our community at the same time. Stay tuned, Rose Leach.

wings MONTANA AUDUBON across the big sky

FOR YOUR CALENDAR: Wings Across the Big Sky

June 3-5, 2016 Missoula, Montana

Time to begin making those summer plans! … **Montana Audubon's *Wings Across the Big Sky Festival*, co-hosted by Five Valleys Audubon Society,** will be held June 3-5 in Missoula. We invite you to spread the news and enthusiasm so we can all enjoy a fantastic turnout. Invite your out-of-state and nearby friends, birders and non-birders alike, to visit Missoula and surrounding areas to participate in abundant festival activities.

Included in this year's activities are close to 20 field trips scheduled each of two days. These include trips into the Rattlesnake Recreation area, Pattee Canyon, Lee Metcalf NWR, and Lolo Creek, among others, with the anticipation of seeing a varied array of species and habitats.

Festival headquarters will be located at the Holiday Inn Downtown at the Park, 200 S Pattee Street, Missoula MT. Rose Leach, local festival chairman, and Five Valleys Audubon have been working with us and the Holiday Inn team on event logistics and service, This venue is going to supply us with excellent opportunities to host an expanded display area, concurrent Saturday afternoon presentations, a fun Friday night festival kickoff event, a popular bat walk, our keynote speaker, and a Saturday evening banquet dinner.

We are very pleased to announce that our keynote speaker Friday night will be Erick Greene, professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program at the University of Montana. Kate Davis, author, photographer, artist, and "den-mother" to falconry birds, will be headlining the Saturday afternoon presentations.

Each month we will continue to feature developing news on the 2016 Bird Festival. Registration will begin in March. Stay tuned!

For more information contact Montana Audubon's Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson at: cerickson@mtaudubon.org.

Welcome To Our Newest Members

Michele Aitken
Anne Brooks
Alicia Gignoux
Holli Hopkins
Jeanne McGinley
Virginia Miller
Carol Wilson
Nicole Borchers
Erin Ellerbeck
Bob Hopkins
Terry Humo
Julie McMahon
Kathy Riley

Updated National Audubon Membership Data

By Vick Applegate

The National Audubon Society has transitioned to a simplified data base of its members. Members may notice that their newsletter label expiration dates have changed. Previously a complicated odd-even beginning-end of the month expiration was assigned. In the new data, new members will now see the actual date of their processed membership and their membership will expire 12 months later. Current members' subscription expiration dates are now listed at the beginning of the month. However, Audubon stressed that from these changes: "Please be assured that every member will continue to receive 6 issues of AUDUBON magazine." If you have questions about your expiration date or if the data seems incorrect, contact the National Audubon Society or Vick from the local FVAS chapter at k7vk@arrl.net.

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:** _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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

___ $20 for a 1-year, 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 *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 membership

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Please make check payable to National Audubon Society:

National Audubon Society, Inc.
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Attn: Chance Mueleck

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PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

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OFFICERS:			
President	Rose Leach	721-0779	rleach-2@bresnan.net
Vice President	Thomas Kallmeyer		thomaskallmeyer@yahoo.com
Secretary	Andrea Stierle	782-6419	andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu
Treasurer	Jean Duncan	396-1171	jeanclaire@montana.com
DIRECTORS:			
2015-2018	Paul Loehnen	721-7517	ploehnen@gmail.com
2015-2018	Catherine Goodman	549-5404	catherine.goodman08@gmail.com
2014-2017	Carolyn Goren	544-1060	carolyngoren@gmail.com
2014-2017	Gerhard Knudsen		
2014-2017	Scott Hampton	417-343-3499	wscotthampton@gmail.com
2013-2016	Ed Monnig	549-0580	emonnig01@gmail.com
COMMITTEES:			
Member Records	Vick Applegate	549-0027	k7vk@arrl.net
Membership Promotion	Jerry Dirnberger	360-5133	dirnberger@aol.com
Program	Vacant		
Conservation Advocacy	Vacant		
Habitat Protection	Jim Brown	549-8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
Field Activities	Terry Toppins	214-1194	tertop@aol.com
Publicity	Poody McLaughlin	543-4860	pmcregan@bresnan.net
Education	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
PL Wright Endowment	Bill Gabriel	273-6880	biograf@earthlink.net
University Liaison	Chad Bishop	243-4374	
Newsletter Editor	Bev Orth Geoghegan	406-750-0149	orthbev@hotmail.com
Newsletter Circulation	Hedwig Vogel-Wright	549-7251	
Web Site	Pat Little	493-7115	roughleg@gmail.com
Archivist	Shirley Holden		
Audubon Adventures	Barbara Ross	552-0500	bjmross@gmail.com
Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Past President	Pat Little	493-7115	roughleg@gmail.com

Montana Audubon
PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
(406) 443-3949
www.mtaudubon.org

Steve Hoffman, Executive Director
shoffman@mtaudubon.org

Janet Ellis, Senior Director of Policy
jellis@mtaudubon.org

Norane Freistadt, Director of Operations
norane@mtaudubon.org

David Cronenwett, Development Specialist
david@mtaudubon.org

Sara Lipscomb, Office Manager
mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org

Cathie Erickson, Accounting Specialist
cerickson@mtaudubon.org

Amy Seaman, Bird Conservation Associate
aseaman@mtaudubon.org

Trinity Pierce, Land Stewardship Coordinator
restoration@mtaudubon.org

Jonathan Lutz, Director, MT Audubon Center
jlutz@mtaudubon.org

Fred Weisbecker, Board President