January 2018

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Tuesday, January 2nd, 6:45-8:45pm:** The board meeting will be held in the large meeting room in the Missoula County Library.
- **Monday, January 8th, 7:00pm:** Come learn about the relationship between the Clark's nutcracker and the whitebark pine. The presentation will be held in Room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building at UM.
- **Saturday, January 13th:** 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, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632.
- **Monday, January 15th:** The deadline for the February 2018 edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, January 20th:** Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

Clark's Nutcracker

BFF's Clark's Nutcracker & Whitebark Pine

Dr. Bob Keane is our speaker at Five Valleys Audubon's joint meeting with the Native Plant Society in January. He will present a talk entitled *Best Friends Forever: The importance of the mutualistic relationship of whitebark pine and Clark's nutcracker in an uncertain climate future*.

The iconic tree species whitebark pine has an interesting and mutualistic relationship with an avian corvid – the Clark's nutcracker. The bird uses the seed as an essential food source and the tree depends on the bird to disperse the seed. However, due to continued fire exclusion, severe mountain pine beetle outbreaks, and the introduction of an exotic fungus, white pine blister rust, the tree is rapidly declining across its range in North America, and to make matters worse, climate change appears to exacerbate the decline. What will become of the tree and its bird friend in the uncertain future?

Dr. Keane has been a Research Ecologist with the USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station at the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory since 1994. His most recent research includes developing ecological computer simulation models for exploring landscape, fire, and climate dynamics, conducting basic research in wildland fuel science and the ecology and restoration of whitebark pine. He received his MS degree in forest ecology from the University of Montana and his PhD degree in forest ecology from the University of Idaho.

Please join us on Monday, January 8, 2018 at 7:00 PM in Room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building at UM to hear Bob's fascinating talk.

Peeps From The Board: Birds and Windows
A Clear View of the Problem and Solutions
By Edward Monnig

You may be glancing out the window, checking the bird feeder, or scanning the sky for a hint of snow, and you notice the smear on the window. Perhaps a downy feather clinging to a bit of unidentified smutch, to quote the Yiddish of my German grandmother. And then you scour the ground under the window. Perhaps it was only a glancing blow and the bird shook it off and flew away, or perhaps the neighborhood cat (or yours) beat you to him, or perhaps there is a ball of feathers waiting to be retrieved and added to Larry Week's collection of "birds on a stick" to be presented at a monthly chapter meeting.

Whatever the outcome it adds to an astounding toll on birdlife from collisions with windows. According to Partners in Flight data an estimated 599 million birds are killed each year in the US in collisions with windows. This is the second largest source of mortality in the US, second only to cats with an estimated toll of 2.4 billion birds a year, but ahead of bird/automobile collisions at 200 million and powerline electrocutions at 25 million. Given all these threats and more to birdlife, I am amazed we have any left to enjoy.

So what can we do about this problem? How can we decrease the chances of bird collisions with windows? In the past recommendations have been made on placing bird feeders at various distances from your house. Current thinking is that distance does not make much difference. However, I still think there are some considerations in placement of bird feeders. In my observations birds at feeders are very prone to dart between the feeder and the hiding cover of nearby vegetation. If your feeder is close to your house and the closest bushes are around your house, the birds at the feeder will be flying toward your house to seek cover. That makes it more likely that the bird will mistake a reflection of a tree or shrub in a window as the real thing and THUNK. So place your bird feeder away from house where the nearest vegetation for hiding is behind the feeder and away from the house. I have done

this and very few birds fly near my house, and I still have an unobstructed view of the feeder.

The most effective methods to decrease bird collisions involve either modifying the glass surface or adding various materials outside the window. Unfortunately, the single decal of a bird silhouette on a window, even those decals with special "ultraviolet powers" does not do much. Coverage must be more extensive.

American Bird Conservancy has done comprehensive testing and review of both after-market products and products for new construction. The following link will connect you with an article with pictures of different products and the results of their effectiveness testing: https://abcbirds.org/get-involved/bird-smart-glass/ If you have an electronic copy of this newsletter you can click on it (another good reason to go digital!).

Of the various systems American Bird Conservancy reviewed the one that caught my attention for its simplicity and effectiveness is the Acopian Bird Saver. It can either be purchased directly or constructed at home with readily accessible materials, basically black parachute cord.

For you DIY diehards, here is a link to instructions on how to build your own Acopian Bird Savers: https://www.birdsavers.com/buildyourown.html. I will be experimenting with these approaches and will report on my efforts and success.

Thanks for your efforts.

2017 Field Trip Bird List
By Larry Weeks

During the 2017 calendar year, the Chapter conducted 17 field trips which included the Mission Valley (3), Freezout Lake (2), Metcalf (2), Brown's Lake (2), Ninepipes/Pablo Reservoirs (2), Warm Springs Ponds, Bandy Ranch, Bannack, Glacier, Point-of-Rocks Historic Trail, and Rogers Pass. If someone had participated in all 17 field trips, they would have seen, or had the opportunity to see, 209 bird species. The best field trips in terms of bird species seen were the April 29th trip to Brown's Lake (73 species), the May 20-21 trip to Freezout Lake (110 species), Bannack (73 species), and Glacier (80 species). The outstanding birds included Great Egret, Upland Sandpiper, Burrowing Owl, Gray Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Boreal Chickadee, Green-tailed Towhee, and Great-tailed Grackle.

Here is a preview of field trips scheduled for 2018.

2018 Field Trip Schedule	
Date	**Destination**
Saturday, January 13th	Owl Trapping – Missoula Valley
Saturday, February 24th	Mission Valley
Saturday, March 24th	Metcalf
Saturday, April 7th	Ninepipes – Short-eared Owls
Saturday, April 21st	Warm Springs Ponds
Saturday, May 5th	Brown's Lake
May 19th-20th	Freezout Lake
Saturday, May 12th	MT Waterfowl Foundation & Kicking Horse Reservoir - Ronan
June 1st-3rd	Bedowin NWR
Sunday, June 17th	Line Property
July 5th-8th	Glacier
Saturday, July 14th	Primm Meadow
Saturday, August 18th	Canyon Ferry – Shorebirds
Sunday, September 16th	Ninepipes/Pablo Reservoirs
Saturday, October 6th	Rogers Pass
Sunday, October 28th	Brown's Lake
Saturday, November 3rd	Metcalf
Sunday, December 2nd	Mission Valley

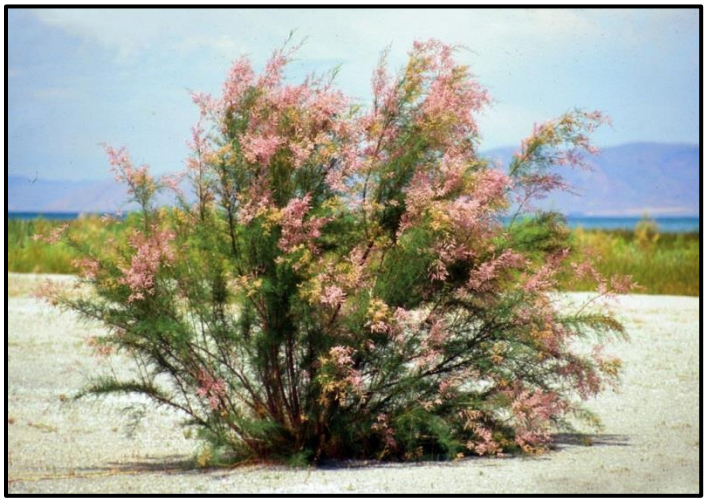
Statewide Group To Tackle Invasive Trees – a Montana Audubon Cause

On November 30, 2017, the Montana Invasive Species Council (MISC) created a formal subcommittee dedicated to invasive woody tree species. The subcommittee was created as an outgrowth of Montana Audubon's October 2017 Great Falls workshop on invasive salt cedar and Russian olive along Montana's waterways.

Russian olive leaves

The October workshop was attended by 30 scientists, resource managers, conservation groups, and other stakeholders. Their collective goal is to develop a more coordinated network for management of healthy riparian systems and control of these species. To learn more, and uncover some of the results from this workshop, visit the workshop summary page at: http://mtaudubon.org/birds-science/bird-conservation/montana-audubon-river-initiative/conservation-workshop/

The individuals who participated in the Great Falls workshop will continue to work together under MISC. The MISC subcommittee will focus on invasive woody tree species—initially concentrating on salt cedar and Russian olive, but it may expand to cover other invasive trees. MISC will offer the new group some staff time and a webpage.



The invasive Salt Cedar

Mission Valley Field Trip
By Jim Brown

We hosted our birding trip at Ninepipe Reservoir on December 3, 2017. The recent mild weather meant open water on the ponds and reservoirs with many waterfowl species still present. Mallards were particularly abundant. Easily identifiable from the dike were Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon and a pair of Trumpeter Swans that gracefully flew past us. Pat Little also spotted a Cooper's Hawk that quickly flew out of sight. The big surprise was a Short-tailed Weasel, all white with black tipped tail that scurried in and out of the rocks below us providing everyone with an entertaining view. We then worked our way north on the back roads toward Polson stopping frequently to view Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks. The varied plumages of immature, adult, light phase and dark phase presented a fun challenge to try and figure out. Besides raptors we were treated to close views of a flock of Gray Partridge, several Common Redpolls and scope views of a tan colored immature Northern Shrike. A lone Snow Goose was seen with a flock of Canada Geese, apparently a straggler from an unusually large Snow Goose migration through the valleys of western Montana earlier this fall.

While taking a break for a bite of lunch and whatever needed doing at a service station in Polson Pat Little spotted a Blue Jay behind the building. That brought everyone hurrying out back—sort of looked like a fire drill. The bird had disappeared but Larry Weeks played its call on his speaker device and that brought it out of cover for good viewing. Next stop at the sewage ponds provided good views of Barrow's and Common Goldeneyes and a flock of Lesser Scaup partially molted into their breeding plumage. Continuing on we had numerous good views of Rough-legged and Red-tailed hawks. In total we probably saw at least 100 of these wintering raptors including a small kettle of Rough-legs that appeared to be headed toward their Ronan roost area. Also a Merlin that was camped out near a large flock of blackbirds and starlings provided good viewing for everyone. A Prairie Falcon was also located but at considerable distance. At Crow Reservoir we found a Western Grebe along with a number of Common Mergansers. Clancy Cone then spotted a Townsend's Solitaire. Further on at our last stop next to a patch of cattails we found three sparrow species that cooperated with good views: Song, Tree and White-crowned Sparrows. In all we recorded 45 species including 17 species of waterfowl and 8 raptor species.

Photo by Don Berg

Photo by Don Berg

Northern Pintail

Winter Bird Myths and Facts
Reproduced from *Birds & Blooms*

Winter Birds Myth: Birds will freeze to death when temperatures drop far below zero.
Winter Birds Fact: Birds are well equipped to survive the coldest of temperatures. They store fat during the short days of winter to keep themselves warm during the long nights. During those freezing nights, they fluff their feathers to trap heat and slow their metabolism to conserve energy. They also look for good places to roost, whether it's a birdhouse, natural tree cavity, grass thicket, evergreen or shrub.

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.

Winter Birds Myth: Woodpeckers drill on house siding in winter for food or to create nesting cavities.
Winter Birds Fact: While some woodpeckers find food in wood siding (and may even nest inside the boards), nearly all the drilling in late winter is done to court mates. This is their way of singing to declare territory.

Five Valleys Audubon Society Membership Application

Please support Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). There are several ways to donate. Any method ensures that you will receive our *Birding Observer* newsletter and may participate in all chapter activities. Please help us reduce our $3,700 annual newsletter cost by signing up for email delivery. FVAS is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit.

Make checks out to Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to: PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807
Or donate on our website: fvaudubon.org/join

$_____$15 FVAS membership only, includes newsletter sent via email.

$_____$25 FVAS membership only, includes newsletter sent via USPS.

$_____ General Fund, use as needed for conservation, field trips, education and outreach.

$_____ Phillip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research.

$_____ Legacy Fund, creating and supporting local urban bird habitats for citizen enjoyment without leaving the city.

$_____Total contribution

_____ Volunteer - Please contact me. I would like to know more about how I may help birds and FVAS.

Name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Address: _____

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

Email: (Required to receive the newsletter and birding alerts via email.) _____

Please note: FVAS does not share email addresses with anyone except Montana Audubon. Your email address is safe with us!

Please be aware that membership in Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) alone does not confer membership in the National Audubon Society (NAS). FVAS and NAS are separate 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations. To become a new member of NAS and receive Audubon magazine (or to renew a current or lapsed membership) visit the website: fvaudubon.org/nas. Using this website will ensure that FVAS receives a $20 one-time credit for your NAS membership. All NAS members become members of FVAS. A third organization, Montana Audubon (MTA), is also an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MTA handles statewide issues and is responsible for its own fundraising. To assist in this important statewide work you may contact MTA through their website: http://mtaudubon.org/. Please give generously to each organization. Although independent, we work together to protect what we all love.

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