June 2020

Birding Observer

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

Calendar

All Five Valleys Audubon Society Chapter-sponsored meetings at the University and Chapter-sponsored field trips are canceled through August 2020. In the meantime, we are planning a full schedule of fascinating meetings and fun field trips for the 2020-2021 season. **If there is a special topic that interests you, please send your requests and suggestions** to Andrea: 406-728-6419 or andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu

Two Birds Meet Lewis & Clark
By Tom Gannon

Lewis's Woodpecker
They call me Lewis's Woodpecker.
I didn't choose that name, but after millennia of me
hammering at the dead wood of these pine hills . . .
they came: with maps, and a native woman, and a
whole mind's-load of old world naturalist terms &
knowledge.

In fact, I guess my real name is Latin now, but I can't even begin to pronounce it--so just call me "Lewie," after that guy who kept looking around and writing things down, in a fine script, as if he were capturing my feathered soul.
I heard that he killed himself, only a few years later.
Why he did is beyond my understanding, but then,
I am only a bird.

Clark's Nutcracker
Well, this Lewis fellow's sidekick was named Clark, and so here I am, or how you know me. The only thing else you need to know, apparently, is that I crack open pine cones for a living.

But did you also know that my nickname is "camp robber"? Yes, tourists, I'll steal your picnic table blind. But hey, that's nothing, compared to what Lewis & Clark started here, halfway on the way to stealing a continent.

I Saw A Bird: Audubon's Spring Migration Show - Tune in every Wednesday at 5pm (MT)!

While people across the country and globe are staying home to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, Audubon has launched *I Saw A Bird: Audubon's Spring Migration Show* to bring a bit of the bird world indoors for everyone, no matter where they are. This weekly Facebook Live show highlights funny, engaging, educational, and sometimes weird bird-related topics and discussion, all while fostering a sense of community for everyone who has found joy in birds while stuck at home.

Lewis's Woodpecker

Each week, Audubon's social media producer Christine Lin and chief network officer David Ringer will welcome celebrities and guests to offer a fresh look at the world of birds and birdwatching. Episodes will air every Wednesday at 7pm ET/ 5pm MT as a Facebook Live on Audubon's Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/NationalAudubonSociety/.
Or, if you would like to tune in via Zoom, visit: https://audubon.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rFurJI9UQkqKgGjMb6sYgw

Other Cool Links To Check Out While Social Distancing:

- **Bird Love on BirdCallsRadio:** https://birdcallsradio.com/bcr-197-wenfei-tong-ph-d-bird-love/
- **Bird Song Opera:** https://vimeo.com/243312820
- **MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks Wildlife Quarterly:** http://fwp.mt.gov/regions/r2/wildlifeQuarterly.html

Peeps from the Board:
Names Behind the Names
By Gerhard Knudsen

The names we apply to birds are based on any number of attributes. Some are known by appearance, like Yellow Warblers, or by habitat in the case of Sage Thrashers. Trumpeter Swans are among those birds christened for the sounds they make. Yet others, like California Condors, are named for the region where they live. Flycatchers have food serving as the foundation for their names and, in the case of woodpeckers, it's their behavior. Then there is the focus of this article, birds like Wilson's Warblers whose names memorialize people.

Clark's Nutcracker

Within Montana, we find a number of birds that are named after someone. Among them are two bearing the names of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark - the Lewis's Woodpecker and the Clark's Nutcracker. During the course of their cross-country mission, the intrepid explorers documented over 130 bird species. The Lewis's Woodpecker and Clark's Nutcracker were among those not previously known to exist. Interestingly, the only known bird specimen left from the expedition is that of a Lewis's Woodpecker.

John Kirk Townsend (1809-1850) is the namesake for two of Montana's forest dwellers – the Townsend's Warbler and the Townsend's Solitaire. Educated as a physician and pharmacist, Townsend also had a real interest in collecting birds. During an expedition from St. Louis to the west coast and then Hawaii, he collected a number of mammal and bird specimens; thirty were new to science. Among them was a Townsend's Warbler. Upon returning from his trip, he sold a number of bird specimens to John James Audubon. Over 70 served as models for Audubon's paintings in "The Birds of America." An expert taxidermist, Townsend died young from exposure to the "special" chemical he used in preserving his specimens – arsenic.

Brewer's Sparrows and Brewer's Blackbirds are named after Thomas Mayo Brewer (1814-1880), a Harvard-educated physician turned ornithologist. He only practiced medicine for a few years before turning to his life's passion – birds. He was a contemporary of Audubon and corresponded extensively with him. Brewer is best known as author of "History of North American Birds" along with Spencer Baird and Robert Ridgeway. At the time, some considered the three to be the best ornithologists in North America.

Swainson's Hawk

Three North American birds are named for William John Swainson (1789-1855). One, the Swainson's Warbler, was named as such by Audubon. The other two, the Swainson's Hawk and Swainson's Thrush, are birds found in Montana. Swainson likely never saw these avian namesakes, having spent his early life in England and later New Zealand. Since childhood, his passions were drawing and collecting anything from birds to plants to insects. His formal education was limited yet his love of the natural world led to his publishing over forty works, most with a focus on birds. Swainson is perhaps best known for his beautiful illustrations.

A Pennsylvania native, John Cassin (1813-1869) managed a lithography business while working as the unpaid curator of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. As curator, he was responsible for the largest bird skin collection in existence and developed a global knowledge of birds. He was considered America's first serious taxonomist and, during his lifetime, he described nearly two hundred new species. Five American birds feature Cassin's name and three are found in Montana: Cassin's Finch, Cassin's Kingbird and Cassin's Vireo. Like John Townsend, he regularly handled bird specimens preserved in arsenic and paid the price of an early death due to arsenic poisoning.

Alexander Wilson (1766-1813) was born in Scotland and emigrated to America in 1794. He was trained as a weaver but when he ended up in Pennsylvania, he became a teacher. It was there he met famed naturalist William Bertram who encouraged him to pursue his leaning toward ornithology and his talent as an artist. In time, Wilson became focused on cataloging the birds of America. During a seven-year journey of over 12,000 miles, he illustrated and described 268 birds; 26 were new to science. In 1808, decades before Audubon's better known "The Birds of America," he began publishing the nine-volume "American Ornithology." Acknowledged as the "Father of American Ornithology," Wilson has been honored with the names of five American birds; three are breeding residents of Montana: Wilson's warbler, Wilson's snipe and Wilson's phalarope.

A Message from the Owl Research Institute: Great Gray Owl Nest Characteristic Data Request for Help

Dear Great Gray Owl Enthusiasts,

For over 30 years, the Owl Research Institute has been identifying natural nest sites for owl species dependent on dead or decaying trees, often known as snags. In the case of small owl species such as Boreal, Pygmy, Saw-whet, and Screech owls, they are considered obligate cavity nesters. Simply put, they need natural cavities or holes excavated by woodpeckers for nest sites. In the case of the larger Barred or Spotted owls, they often need broken topped trees with a chimney to crawl down too, or large natural holes. In the case of Great Horned or Great Gray owls, they can use either large broken topped trees with a relative flush/flat topped surface, or a stick nest made by other birds, and in some cases mistletoe.

These trees, or snags, are hard to find and in short supply. They routinely fall victim to logging, firewood cutting, private land management, and natural toppling. There are many reasons why dead or decaying trees are removed by people: 1) safety concerns; 2) firewood needs – both - personal and commercial; 3) disease; 4) esthetics; 5) among other reasons.

Snags are an important part of forest ecosystems for owls and a host of other species. In order to provide snag conservation data for forest managers and the public, we are asking for your help.

Right now, the Owl Research Institute is collecting data on Great Gray Owl nests for distribution and habitat associations in Montana. In particular, we are interested if you know of any nesting snags? If so, we would like to take some measurement data. With large enough samples, we can establish the basic characteristics which are important to Great Gray Owls for nesting and overall conservation. Even if the snags have fallen, we can still get some measurement data.

We realize that many people do not divulge where Great Gray Owl nests occur. We understand this and are willing to send you forms to record the data we seek on your own. You can simply record a series of measurements and site characteristics after the owls have left the nest. Several wildlife photographers and private landowners have already agreed to this type of request.

The photo below shows the type of snag Great Gray Owls use to give you an idea of what we are requesting. We appreciate your time and efforts in helping to conserve this important element in Great Gray nesting.

Thank You,
Denver Holt, ORI Founder
owlmontana@blackfoot.net
www.owlresearchinstitute.org

Great Gray Owl Snag Nest
Photo by Kurt Lindsay

Great Gray Owl Facts

Source: https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/great-gray-owl

Habitat: Dense conifer forests, adjacent meadows, bogs. Generally favors country with mix of dense forest for nesting and roosting, and open areas for hunting.

Diet: Mostly small mammals. Feeds mainly on voles in many northern areas; in western United States, pocket gophers may be main prey. Also eats mice, shrews, squirrels, weasels, small birds, rarely frogs.

Feeding Behavior: May hunt by day or night. In summer, daytime feeding is usually near dawn or dusk. Usually hunts by listening and watching from a perch, swooping down when it locates prey; sometimes hunts by flying low over open areas. They can locate prey by sound.

Nesting: In courtship, male may feed female; members of pair preen each other's feathers. They usually use old abandoned nests of other large birds; sometimes nests on top of broken-off snag or stump, rarely on the ground. Site usually 10-50' above ground.

Eggs: 2-5. White. At times, may lay more eggs in years when food is abundant. Incubation is by female only, 28-36 days. Male brings food to incubating female on nest.

Young: Female broods young for first 2-3 weeks. Male brings food to nest, and female feeds it to young.

Five Tips for Summer Birding

by Bill Thompson, III | Editor, Bird Watcher's Digest
Reprinted from www.WatchingBackyardBirds.com 2014

Now that the buzz and tingle of spring migration is over, we birders can shift our attention to the low thrum of summer and the nesting season. This can be a tough transition. Bird numbers don't match those at the height of migration, bird activity such as singing is beginning to wane, and the weather (depending upon where you live) can get uncomfortably hot. A birding friend of mine said recently, "Summer birding is boring, if you don't know how to get into it." She's right. So here are some tips for "getting into it!"

The Early Birder Gets the Birds. Just like humans, wild birds try to beat the heat of summer by getting a start in the cool, early morning hours. From just before dawn until about 10 a.m. my yard is crazy with bird song, feeding, fighting, and attending to young. Once the heat of day is upon us, the birds seek the shade and wait out the midday hours. They may even take a siesta! Often bird activity picks up again in late afternoon or early evening when both the sun and the temps drop.

1) **Hot Days, High Hawks.** When the day begins to heat up, scan the skies for soaring raptors. These large birds of prey use the heat rising off the land (a phenomenon known as thermals) to aid their flying and soaring. When it's hot, look up. You might be surprised at what you see.

2) **Sit Still, Watch, and Listen.** Find a shady spot on the edge of the woods, or in the woods, and sit still for a while. If you can remain motionless, birds and animals will cease to perceive you as a threat. Then they will go about their business of living. I once had a wood thrush hop into view while I was sitting still at the base of a large oak tree in the middle of our woods. The thrush foraged all around my legs for more than 20 minutes—too close for me to use my binoculars. It was a stunning experience for me!

3) **Visit Nesting Colonies.** Early summer is a great time to visit a heron rookery, a beach-nesting colony of black skimmers, a neighbor's purple martin condominiums, or the cliff-face nests of seabirds such as gannets, kittiwakes, or guillemots. These concentrations of birds offer non-stop action as birds come and go from their nests and foraging areas.

4) **Behavior Watching.** Careful observers can discover which birds are nesting and where simply by taking the time to follow a bird's behavior. Birds flying past with a bill full of food are likely feeding nestlings. If they carry nesting material, could they be building a new nest for a second brood? When young fledglings are about, the action and behavior really ramp up as frantic parents struggle to feed and protect their offspring.

Always stay a respectful distance away from nesting birds. We humans leave scent trails that predators can and will follow to find nests and consume the eggs and young of nesting birds. If you are unsure what "respectful distance" means, watch to see if your behavior has the bird wary or not. If you are making the bird wary, or your presence is altering the bird's natural behavior in any way, you're too close. Back off a bit and watch again.

(About Bill Thompson, III - Bill Thompson, III, was the team captain for Watching Backyard Birds from its inception nearly 25 years ago through his death in March 2019. So much of what he wrote is timeless and remains informative, helpful, and inspiring.)

Attention Young Artists

Do you have a young artist wanting to channel their free time creatively? Mass Audubon's Museum of American Bird Art has announced their 5th annual juried youth bird art exhibition for participants, ages 4-18. The show, called "Taking Flight" will be on display at the Museum of American Bird Art. They hope it will foster the next generation of artists who love birds and wildlife. This year's theme is "Your favorite bird, or what birds mean to you," and most non-digital mediums are allowed. They will accept submissions until June 15, 2020. The show will be up in the museum in the fall.

Details can be found at their website and Facebook event. Also, you can contact Daniel Boudreau, Youth Education Coordinator, The Museum of American Bird Art at dboudreau@massaudubon.org.

Welcome New Members

Thomas Birch
Chad Burnett
Virginia Carroll
Randall T. Cox
Elizabeth Ferris
Wendy George
Joel Karki
Ted Muhs
David L. Schmidt
D. Smith
Jack Walrath
Claudia Brown
Roberta Burnett
Florence Chessin
Philip Donally
Phillip A. Gardner
Jessica Giuliani
Roger McDonald
LeClere Noneman
Kathryn Shanley
Jeanette Stangl

Due to COVID-19 concerns, Montana Audubon made the difficult decision to cancel this year's *Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival,* an important fundraising event — making your support more meaningful than ever.

Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to Montana Audubon during this difficult pandemic and empower them to continue their conservation mission. Visit their website at: www.mtaudubon.org/support.

Five Valleys Audubon thanks those who recently renewed their membership. If you signed up for email delivery but instead received a hard copy of the newsletter, the email address you provided has been returned as undelivered. Please send me a corrected address if you prefer email attachment. We encourage chapter members to receive newsletters via email. This conserves resources and saves chapter expenses. If you have any changes or questions regarding your newsletter preferences, please contact the Membership Chair, Poody McLaughlin at poodymc@gmail.com.

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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