March, 2009

Birding Observer

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

Calendar

* **Monday, March 2nd, 7pm:** Char Murray will host the board meeting.

* **Monday, March 9th, 7:30pm:** Brian Martin will give a presentation on prairie conservation at the March meeting.

* **Friday, March 13th:** Deadline for submissions to the April *Birding Observer*.

* **Saturday, March 28th, 2009:** Full-day field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the Lee Metcalf Visitor's Center at 9:00 AM.

Brian Martin of Nature Conservancy to speak on the Conservation of the Great Plains

On Monday, March 9th, 7:30 pm, Brian Martin, with The Nature Conservancy's Prairie Wings Program, will give us a tour and an introduction to the loss of plants and animals on the Great Plains, when he talks on Natural History and Conservation of the Great American Prairie. This is one of the most endangered ecosystems on earth, threatened by plowing for continued expansion of marginal cropland and impacted by all forms of energy development. This is a joint meeting with the Native Plant Society and the Five Valley Audubon Society in Room 123 Gallagher Business Building on the University of Montana Campus. *Please note the room change.

2009 Workshop for Intermediate Birders

The Five Valleys Audubon Society will offer a workshop for intermediate birders again this year. This workshop should appeal to birders who enjoy birding and want to improve their identification skills. It will consist of three classroom sessions and one field trip. The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursday, April 9th, Thursday, April 16th and Thursday, April 23rd. The field trip will be held on Saturday, April 11th at Smurfit-Stone. The classroom sessions will be held at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Regional Office at 3201 Spurgin Road and will start at 7:00 PM and last until 9:30 PM. The program will include a full session on hawks, eagles and owls, and 30-minute to 60-minute sessions on waterfowl, woodpeckers, shorebirds, warblers, sparrows, and birding-by-ear. There will be a $35 charge for the workshop. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email him at, bwsgenea@onlinemt.com. The workshop will be limited to 30 participants.

Peeps from the Prez by Paul Loehnen

You may remember that in my last Peeps we were returning from a tour of the beautiful Atherton Table lands in Queensland. One of our most hoped for birds was the Cassowary. This flightless bird is the third largest bird behind the Ostrich and Emu and the heaviest weighing up to 150 lbs. They are shy and disappear into the rainforest long before humans know they are there. They are threatened for a number of reasons, the most important being habitat loss. However, dogs, feral pigs, and traffic also take their toll. Although shy, when threatened they can and do attack and are capable of inflicting a fatal injury to an adult human. They have three-clawed feet which they use to disembowel their enemies.

We drove to Cassowary House, a small lodge in the rainforest that has a reputation of attracting Cassowaries. For many years the owners have throw out fruit off their deck and somewhat unpredictably a Cassowary will appear. Because this lodge is in a rainforest we were entertained with a wonderful array of birds attracted to their multiple feeders. Eventually after about five hours an absolutely beautiful very primitive dinosaur like bird appeared. For me this was the most remarkable sighting of the entire tour. It ate and then silently disappeared. Very content we returned to Cairns.

Cairns is the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, allegedly the only living structure visible from space. We took a boat to Michaelmas Cay, a low coral island where thousands of Sooty Terns and Common Noddies nest. We only had access to a small roped off area of beach because of the nesting birds, which were literally nesting at our feet. Rare birds for this island were several Red-footed Boobies and a Masked Booby. Snorkeling on the adjoining reef was wonderful.

The next morning we flew to Brisbane and then drove to the world famous O'Reilly's Guest House. The O'Reilly family built a guest house in this area in 1926 and subsequently the Lamington National Park was created adjacent to it. This is a World Heritage site. This is truly a marvelous area for birding. Until recently they have been putting out bird seed, but it's become apparent that a number of local birds such as King Parrots and Crimson Rosellas were becoming obese! They have stopped the feeding but these birds are very tame and to tend to land on guest's heads and shoulders looking for a handout.

Some of the beautiful birds seen while visiting O'Reilly have included a Painted Button-quail and a Marbled Frogmouth, Logrunners and Paradise Rifle-birds. We struggled but eventually got a good look at an Albert's Lyrebird. Our final morning at O'Reilly's was devoted to seeing the Noisy Pitta. We had heard them on a number of occasions but then they disappeared before being seen. After much effort we eventually saw one bouncing across the forest floor.

Our final days of our tour were spent in Sydney. We went to the Sidney Royal National Park, the oldest park in Australia. We saw a Superb Lyrebird without much difficulty as well as the beautiful diminutive Emu-wren and Tawny-crowned Honeyeater. At the time conditions were quite bad with strong winds and cold temperatures. This actually boded well for our upcoming pelagic trip out of Sydney.

The pelagic trip proved to be the best they had ever experienced. On the way out we saw a Brown Skua close in and then some Albatrosses began to appear. We saw four species of albatross. Chum was thrown off the back of the boat and we saw a feeding flock of Wandering and Black-browed Albatrosses at close range, quite an amazing experience. Two Northern Giant Petrels joined them. The number of storm-petrels was unprecedented though the large flock only contained the usual two species-Wilson's and White-faced. We had 24 pelagic species that day and the local birders on board said it was the best boat trip of the year so far. On the way back in we

encountered a pod of Orcas (Killer Whales) the first time this species had been seen from this boat in 14 years of bird and whale watching trips out of Sidney.

The following day, our last morning of the tour, we returned to the park and ended up seeing the Rock Warbler, a suitably exciting ending to our time in New South Whales given that it is the state's only endemic bird. My next Peeps will take us to a unique island, Lord Howe Island, on a private trip with our Australian friends.

Field Trip by Larry Weeks

Saturday, January 17, 2009: Thirty-two people joined Denver Holt and his crew of 7 for an owl trapping field trip in the Missoula Valley under a thick layer of fog. We parked on Deschamps Lane and hiked about 1 mile to the usual trapping site. However, for the first time, Denver and his crew were unable to find any long-eared owls. They had been present as recently as 1 week before. One theory was that the recent thaw and subsequent freezing temperatures had formed a hard crust on the snow that made it more difficult for the owls to get at the voles. Denver did the best he could by talking about the owls and his part experience which covers 24 years of study and the banding of over 1500 long-eared owls. He searched one other long-eared owl roosting site and found the remains of a dead owl and 2 pellets, but no live owls. Denver has always cautioned these tours that there were no guarantees that they would capture an owl and it finally happened.

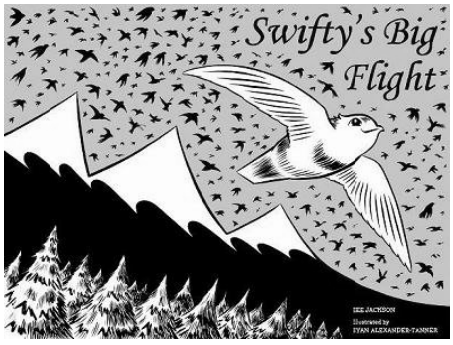
Colonial Waterbird Inventory:
A Citizen Science Opportunity
Submitted by Catherine Wightman

The Montana Bird Conservation Partnership is planning a colonial nesting waterbird inventory in 2009 and 2010. This statewide program will provide important information to scientists and managers on waterbirds in Montana that will be used to inform monitoring, research, and habitat projects. The Partnership is seeking volunteers to count nests on one visit at colonies throughout Montana during the month of June. Priority species include: American White Pelican, Clark's Grebe, Forster's Tern, Franklin's Gull, White-faced Ibis, Black-crowned Night-heron, Black Tern, Caspian Tern, and Common Tern. Species of secondary priority include: California Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, Ring-billed Gull, Western Grebe, Eared Grebe, Horned Grebe, Red-necked grebe, and Great-blue Heron. Funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks will be used to cover travel expenses (mileage, small per diem) for volunteers. A list of survey areas and protocols will be provided to your Chapter in the near future. This is a great opportunity to get involved in a statewide bird conservation program. For more information or to volunteer, please contact Catherine Wightman, Bird Conservation Coordinator with Fish, Wildlife and Parks at cwightman@mt.gov or 406-490-2329.

The Shamrock: a 3-Leaf Clover, is Ireland's most recognized National Symbol.
Here are some interesting facts about the Shamrock:

- Before the arrival of the Christians to Ireland the plant was sacred to the Irish Druids because the three leaves formed a triad.
- St. Patrick used the Shamrock leaf to illustrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity: How one God divided into three, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit.
- The word shamrock comes from the Irish word *seamróg* or *seamair óg*, meaning "little clover".
- The tradition of wearing Shamrock on Saint Patrick's Day can be traced back to the early 1700s.
- For good luck, it's usually in the bouquet of an Irish bride, and also in the boutonniere of the groom.

Swifty's Big Flight: A Book Review by Beverly Geoghegan



"A perfect way for grown-up birders to introduce the young people in their lives to the wonders and rewards of birding. *Swifty's Big Flight* calls for swooping up the kids, the rain gear and binoculars and heading outside."

~ The Oregonian Sunday Book Review. Reviewer: Hellen Babbitt.

Swifty's Big Flight is a new children's book by Portland, Oregon, author Lee Jackson and illustrator, Ryan Alexander-Tanner. It is the story of a young Vaux's Swift migrating south for the winter with his family. Somehow Swifty gets separated from his colony and has a frightening encounter with a hawk. It is an engaging adventure story, appropriate for elementary school-aged children, offering fun facts and lessons about Vaux's Swifts. A great read for kids and adults!

Proceeds from the sale of *Swifty's Big Flight* benefit the Audubon Society of Portland's Swift Watch program. An ornithologist at the Audubon Society of Portland reviewed the text and illustrations in *Swifty's Big Flight* and the society is now selling the book in its Nature Store. It costs $7.95, plus the cost of shipping. If you would like to order a copy, please visit www.flyingswift.blogspot.com or call 503-449-1029.

2009 Montana Audubon Bird Festival
Wings Across The Big Sky

Montana Audubon, in conjunction with the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society, will hold the annual bird festival in Great Falls, MT, June 5-7, 2009.

Please join your fellow Montana birders and featured speaker, **David Allen Sibley,** the author and illustrator of the comprehensive *Sibley Guide to Birds* and other books such as *Sibley's Birding Basic*s. **Vince Yannone**, retired MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologist and educator, who has appeared on Discovery Channel and Animal Planet, opens the festival Friday evening with live birds.

Choose from over 28 different field trips to wildlife refuges and birding hotspots from the Rocky Mountain Front to the prairie marshes and the storied Missouri River, rich in birds, other wildlife and history. Birds of interest include: McCown's & Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Sprague's Pipit, Burrowing Owl, Calliope Hummingbird, Baird's Sparrow, American Avocet and Ferruginous Hawk.

Attend birdwatchers' and bird conservation presentations/workshops. Bring the whole family and experience a morning of games, a bird banding demo, guided hikes and activities involving birds and birding. This festival will bring you and your family up close and personal with the birds of Montana and their magnificent habitat!

The festival will be held at the Holiday Inn, Great Falls, MT. For more information or to register visit www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival or call the Montana Audubon office at 406-443-3949.

*** Register by April 15 and have a chance to win two nights of lodging at the Holiday Inn during the festival!

Welcome New Members:

Carol Barbian
Rosalyn Clark
John E. Dunkum
Katie Guffin
Joe Kipphut
Gary Le Deca
Donna Love
Jane B. Thompson

Thanks to Our Returning Members:

Ann Ashby	John Bremer	Diana L. Clark	Gail Clarke
Ann Mary Dussault	Mary Ann Gardner	Gerry Geske	Don Gillingham
Cynthia Hudson	Julie M. Larson	Zona Lindemann	Roseann Moffatt
Byron Olson	Judith Olson	Suzy Archibald Wilson	Margaret R. Yobst

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View your ***Birding Observer*** newsletter even sooner, only on-line.
Just send us an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrl.net.
We will alert you each month when the newsletter becomes available on-line.

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

OFFICERS:				
President	Paul Loehnen	11556 Bench Road, Missoula, MT 59808	721 – 7517	loehnen@bigsky.net
Vice President	Gerhard Knudsen	4400 Scott Allen Dr, Missoula, MT 59803	251 – 2765	gmk@bresnan.net
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Treasurer	Alex Taft	439 Connell Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	218 – 8438	alextaft9@msn.com
DIRECTORS:				
2006-2009	Bill Ballard	5120 Larch Ave, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5097	wballard@onewest.net
2007-2010	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807	544 – 1060	goren@marsweb.com
2008-2011	Bill Boggs	PO Box 7881, Missoula, MT 59807	728 – 3088	claybody@cybrmail.com
2009-2012	Joyce Nave	4605 Rattlesnake Dr., Missoula, 59802.	721– 2981	nave@bresnan.net
2009-2012	Jeb Minarik	4705 Potter Park Loop, Missoula, 59808	529 – 2884	jminarik78@yahoo.com
COMMITTEES:				
Member Records	Vick Applegate	303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803	549 – 0027	k7vk@arrl.net
Membership Promotion	Vacant			
Program	Judy Bungarz	17579 Remount Road, Huson, MT 59846	626 – 5761	bungaiz@peoplepc.com
Conservation Advocacy	Vick Applegate	303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803	549 – 0027	k7vk@ arrl.net
Habitat Protection & Restore	Jim Brown	1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
Field Activities	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
Publicity	Elizabeth Johnston	1101 W. Greenough, Unit E-8, Missoula, 59802	327 – 1525	birder@bigsky.net
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University Liaison	Dan Pletscher	509 Arbor Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	543 – 4865	dan.pletscher@umontana.edu
Newsletter Editor	Bev Orth Geoghegan	3130 Corlear Ave, Bronx, NY 10463	(406) 750 – 0149	orthbev@hotmail.com
Newsletter Circulation	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5706	
Web Site	Clare Kelly	2909 Highwood Dr, Missoula, MT 59803	251 – 7207	
Archivist	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5706	
Audubon Adventures	Judy Bungarz	17579 Remount Road, Huson, MT 59846	626 – 5761	bungaiz@peoplepc.com
Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
Bird Hotline	Terry Toppins	1210 Tower, Missoula, MT 59804	721 – 9799	tertop@aol.com
Past President	Jim Brown	1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 8052	woodsy@onewest.net

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MONTANA AUDUBON – PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624 (406) 443-3949 www.mtaudubon.org

Executive Director:	Steve Hoffman	shoffman@mtaudubon.org	Board President:	Larry McEvoy	mcschmid@mcn.net
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Five Valleys Audubon Society

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