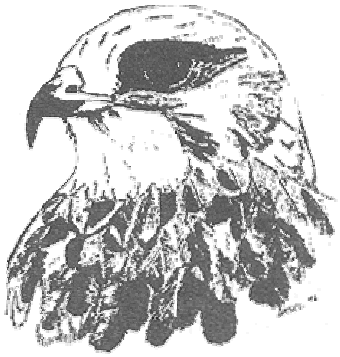
**March 2010**

# Birding Observer



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

## Calendar

*** Monday, March 1st, 7pm:**
Bill Ballard will host the board meeting.

*** Monday, March 8th, 7:30pm:** Come to the March program meeting to learn about invasive plants. The meeting will be held in room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus.
* Please note the different room location.

*** Friday, March 12th:** Submission deadline for the April edition of the *Birding Observer*.

*** Saturday, March 13th:** Cross-country ski trip at Lolo Pass to listen for owls. See the article on page three for details.

*** March 18th – 21st:** Rivers and Wildlife Celebration will be held in Kearney, Nebraska.

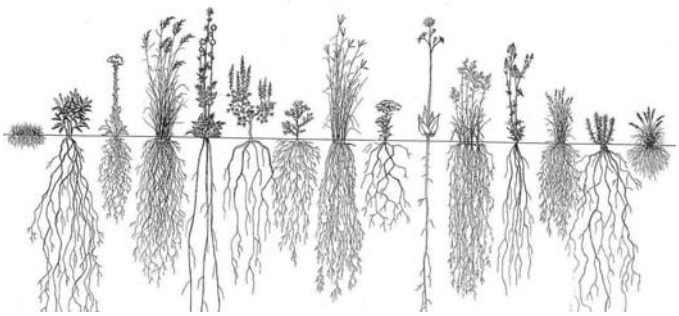
* **Saturday, April 17th:** Full-day field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet in the middle of the field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the Metcalf visitor's center at 9:00 AM.

*** June 4th – 6th:** Montana Audubon's Bird Festival will be held in Missoula. Please save the dates. The planning committee will be asking for volunteers to help out during the Festival.

## Exotic Plant Invasions in Grasslands

What birds, spiders, and mice tell us about exotic plant invasions will be the topic of a joint meeting of the Montana Native Plant Society and Five Valleys Audubon. Forest Service Ecologist Dean Pearson, who has studied grasslands for years, will present the program on Monday, March 8 at 7:30 p.m. in room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus. * Please note the different room location.

Following the discussion of exotic plants, Daniel V. Venturella, a recipient of a 2009 Phillip L. Wright memorial research award, will tell us what he learned on his study titled "Effects of an invasive plant, Euphorbia esula, on native bee communities." He is a junior at UM studying ecology and found his bees at various sites in western Montana.



**Rivers and Wildlife Celebration,** March 18-21, 2010, in Kearney, Nebraska

Celebration highlights include sunrise and sunset visits to crane viewing blinds along the Platte River, and a number of featured speakers, such as naturalist and author, Scott Weidensaul, nature photographer, Michael Forsberg, and Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Chris Wood.

For more information, visit http://www.nebraska.audubon.org/RWC.htm.

Our next adventure in Argentina was a tour of the Pampas, Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. The Pampas (from Quechua meaning "plains") are the vast South American lowlands. We began our trip driving south seeing remarkable birds such as the Southern Screamer and the Greater Rhea. In wetlands we saw the Brown-and-yellow Marsh bird, Chestnut-capped and Yellow-winged Blackbirds as well as Shiny and Bay-winged Cowbirds.

We went onto an estancia (a large ranch: 10x10 km: 22,000 acres) looking for the Many-colored Rush-tyrant, a spectacular bird as its name would suggest. We were successful, but suddenly there was a short cloud burst lasting just a few minutes. We were in the worst gumbo situation rivaling anything in Montana. After hours of pushing and digging we extracted ourselves. Exhausted, we went back to our hotel for hot showers and clean cloths.

We next flew south to Trelew, from where we travelled to a large Magellanic Penguin colony. This is in an arid desert. The penguins were all around us nesting under small shrubs, waddling a few hundred yards to the ocean to feed and get food for their chicks. A truly remarkable experience. In addition we saw American and Blackish Oystercatchers, White-headed Steamer ducks and Crested ducks. We lunched on a beach where a few dozen Southern Elephant Seals were sleeping. They molt all at once, a so called "catastrophic molt" and have to remain on the beach during that process. That evening on our way to Puerto Pirimides on the Valdez Peninsula, we came across a large flock of endangered Burrowing Parrots.

The Valdez Peninsula demonstrated the abundance of wildlife in this bleak, harsh terrain as we enjoyed views of Maras (a long-legged rabbit like mammal), Patagonian Foxes, and Southern Sea Lions, Southern Elephant Seals, Guanacos (Llama-like), Elegant Crested Tinamous, Tawny-throated Dotterels and many other species. That evening we went on a whale watching trip seeing many Southern Right Whales. They come to this area to calve. The local Kelp Gull population have worked out that these whales are an easy source of food as they swim slowly and surface frequently. The gulls hover and peck the whales as they surface. They are potentially causing problems for calves that are trying to feed, as the mother whales can't relax near the surface. It was painful to watch but I realized that this is nature playing its self out.

We next flew south to El Calafate. The Patagonian steppe and glacial lakes of southern Patagonia provided scenic relief after the starkness of the northern Patagonian desert. From the sighting of the Magellanic Plovers our first afternoon to the Chocolate-vented Ground-tyrant our final morning, our time in El Calafate area filled our checklists with new sightings including Spectacled Duck, Magellanic Woodpecker, Thorn-tailed Rayaditos, Rufous-tailed Plantcutters and a stunning view of the Chilean race of Bicolored Hawk.

We then visited the Perito Moreno Glacier in Los Glaciares National Park. This 97 square mile ice formation is 19 miles in length and is fed by the Southern Patagonian Ice Field. This ice field is the world's third largest reserve of fresh water. It is one of the few glaciers that are not receding. The terminus, which we visited, is 3 miles wide and 240 feet above the surface of Lake Argentino. We were already in awe only added to when an Andean Condor circled over our heads! Next month Tierra del Fuego and Iguazu Falls.

**Workshop for Beginning Birders**
by Larry Weeks

The Five Valleys Audubon Society will conduct a workshop for beginning birders. It will consist of two classroom sessions and a field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursday, March 11th and Thursday, March 18th. The field trip is scheduled for March 20th. 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. Half of the classroom presentations will be devoted to the common birds that are found in four basic habitats. This discussion will include the major field marks for identification, behavior and songs. The rest of the presentations will include ethics, bird anatomy, field guides, migration, and optics. There will be a $20.00 charge for the workshop. To sign up, please call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email at bwsgenea@onlinemt.com. The workshop will be limited to 30 participants.

**Workshop for Intermediate Birders**
by Larry Weeks

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 8th, Thursday, April 15th, and Thursday, April 22nd. The field trip will be held on Saturday, April 10th at the Lee Metcalf NWR. 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.

**Cross-Country Ski Trip**
by Larry Weeks

On Saturday, March 13th, there will be a cross-country ski trip at Lolo Pass. We will meet at the West end of Rosauer's parking lot at 4:00 PM for carpooling, drive to Lolo Pass, ski into Packer Meadow in the twilight, and listen for owls on the return trip. For people that will be driving directly to Pass, you should plan on arriving by 5:00 PM. Dress warm and bring a headlamp, a lunch or snacks, and your cross-country skis. You can rent cross-country ski packages at the Army Navy Economy Store for $8.00 per day. Drivers will have to purchase a $5.00 day pass to park their vehicles at the Pass. These can be purchased at the Lolo Pass Visitor Center. Call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 for additional information.

The crow wished everything was black,
the owl, that everything was white.

~ William Blake

Alone and warming his five wits, the white
owl in the belfry sits.

~ Alfred Lord Tennyson

The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five pound note.

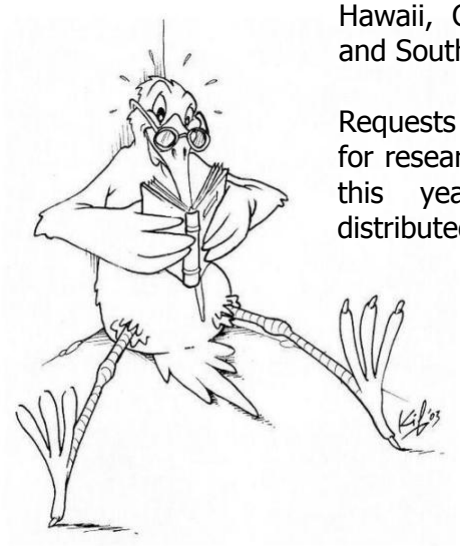
~ Edward Lear

## Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

by Bill Gabriel

In 1987 Five Valleys Audubon Society began a program of awarding small amounts of money to help students fund small research projects. Originally called the Field Biology Research Awards, in 1992 the name of the program was changed to the Philip L. Wright Research Awards in recognition of Dr. Wright's contributions to science, Montana, and Missoula. In those 23 years, 49 university and high school students have received a total of $19,585.50 from the program. The amount per award has ranged from $100 to $1,010, and the average is $399.74.

Subjects of the research have been distributed as follows: birds 20, plants and habitats 11, mammals 7, amphibians 7, insects 3, fish 2. And, while most of these small studies have been carried out within Montana, some have been in Arizona, California, Hawaii, Central America, and Southeast Asia.



Requests for proposals for research to be funded this year have been distributed to schools. Proposals for the 2010 awards will be due on March 26, 2010.

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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.

## Swainson's Hawk Study

by Jim Brown

We are looking for volunteers to help locate Swainson's Hawk nest sites in the greater Missoula Valley. The study is being conducted by Rob Domenech with the Raptor View Research Institute because of the declining population of this grassland species in Western Montana. The Swainson's Hawk is a National Audubon Society Watchlist species and has been nominated for inclusion on the 2010 Montana Animal Species of Concern List. There is a small reproducing population of Swainson's Hawks in the Missoula Valley, which is unique to west central Montana. Swainson's Hawks nest near river bottoms and in lightly wooded areas, but they hunt in grasslands and agricultural land. Unfortunately, the future of these raptors is threatened by pressures of expanding subdivisions on the remaining grasslands and agricultural lands in the Valley. In order to protect vital habitat for this raptor and help maintain its existence we need to gather data about the number of active nest sites and where they are located. This information will help us explain to city/county planners and land developers the importance of retaining grasslands and agricultural lands for survival of the Swainson's Hawk in our Valley.

Volunteers are needed from mid April to mid June while the birds are setting up territories and nesting. The job will entail patrolling a given area to watch for appearance of Swainson's Hawks and track where they go. Some searching can be done by car and some will involve hiking areas that are difficult to view from roads. Gas expenses will be reimbursed. If you would like to volunteer or learn more about the study please contact by phone or email Jim Brown or Gerhard Knudsen (see newsletter directory) or Rob Domenech (258-6813).

**Welcome New Members:**

Robin Childers
Gary Le Deau
F. Nordgulen
Jo Van Demark
Barbara Harris
Geneviene Marsh
Julie Pavloch
Catherine B. Everingham
Scott Morgan
Bob Rost
Ruby & Doug Kikkert
Nancy Murphy
B. Thomas

**Thanks to Our Returning Members:**

Dorenda Berry
Shirley A. Chase
Sue Furey
Pelah Hoyt
Sharon Lukomski
Mary & Tom Steenberg
Margaret R. Yobst
T. Botsford
Jon Driessen
Kathy & John Gardner
Tony Hoyt
Miriam Morgan
Suzann Stickney
Carol Brett
John E. Dunkum
Maryjean Goldberg
Carol Kinney
Richard Petaja
Virginia Vincent
Ed Brunsvold
Ann Mary Dussault
Barbara D. Harris
Zona Lindemann
Minie Smith
Eleanor Weidman

**Important Note To Our Valued Members:**
Please note the expiration date of your membership on the address label of this newsletter. We wouldn't want your membership to expire. We would miss you! A renewal form is on the last page of every newsletter for your convenience. Please renew your membership so that you don't miss any newsletters or any of the upcoming events of the Five Valleys Audubon Society.

### 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 a one-year membership for an individual or family

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. **C0Z N53 0Z**

### 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:** _____

**Phone:** _____

**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**
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**http://www.fvamissoula.org**

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**Note To Members: Please Check The Mailing Label For Expiration Of Your Membership.**

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| Secretary | Char Murray | 50 Brookside Way, Missoula, MT 59802 | 549 – 5223 | murray555@bresnan.net |
| Treasurer | Alex Taft | 332 S. 1st St. W., apt. A, Missoula, MT 59801 | 218 – 8438 | alextaft9@msn.com |
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| 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 | Pat Little | 1710, 34th St., Missoula, 59801. | 493 - 1745 | roughleg@gmail.com |
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| Conservation Advocacy | Vick Applegate | 303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803 | 549 – 0027 | k7vk@ arrl.net |
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| Education | Larry Weeks | 2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801 | 549 – 5632 | bwsgenea@onlinemt.com |
| PL Wright Endowment | Bill Gabriel | PO Box 520, Florence, MT 59833 | 273 – 6880 | |
| University Liaison | Dan Pletscher | 509 Arbor Dr, Missoula, MT 59802 | 543 – 4865 | dan.pletscher@umontana.edu |
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| Audubon Adventures | Jackie Alford | 215 Brooks St, Missoula, MT 59801 | 549 – 0917 | jalford@bresnan.net |
| Christmas Bird Count | Larry Weeks | 2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801 | 549 – 5632 | bwsgenea@onlinemt.com |
| Past President | Jim Brown | 1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802 | 549 – 8052 | brownjs2@bresnan.net |

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**Program Director:** Janet Ellis jellis@mtaudubon.org **Director of Bird Conservation:** Amy Cilimburg amy@mtaudubon.org
**Administrative Officer:** Kathy Martin kmartin@mtaudubon.org