May 2018

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Saturday, May 5th:** All-day field trip to Brown's Lake. Meet at 7:50 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot.
- **Monday, May 7th, 6:45-8:45pm:** The FVAS board meeting will be held in the Large Room of the Missoula County Library.
- **Saturday, May 12th:** All-day field trip to the Montana Waterfowl Foundation in the Mission Valley. Meet at 7:20 am in the Snow Bowl parking lot just north of the gas station on Grant Creek Road. See details on page 5.
- **Monday, May 14th, 7:00pm:** Kerry R. Foresman, retired professor of biology and wildlife biology, will present on how highways affect animals, in Room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building at the University of Montana.
- **Tuesday, May 15th:** The deadline for the June 2018 edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **May 19th & 20th:** Trip to Freezout Lake. See write-up on page 4.
- **Saturday, May 19th:** Bird walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00 am-Noon. Meet field trip leader Lynn Tennefoss at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Please note that the Visitor's Center is not open on weekends, so no restrooms.
- **June 1- 3:** Trip to Bowdoin. See write-up on page 4.

How Does the Small Mammal Cross the Road?
Creating Safe Passage for Wildlife on Our Roadways

For over 80 years, people have documented the threat highways pose to animals. Highways have significantly increased in size resulting in greater vehicle speeds and volumes producing an even greater threat to wildlife. A majority of research on wildlife/highway mitigation has focused on larger species such as deer, elk, and bears where the threat of collisions is more apparent, however smaller mammals such as skunks, raccoons, bobcats, and lynx are more significantly affected by the formidable barrier which a 4-lane highway presents. These species are often killed because the crossing distance is great and vehicles are moving so quickly, and the traveling public can be injured swerving to avoid such collisions. At our May chapter meeting, Kerry Foresman will present his talk entitled "How Does the Small Mammal Cross the Road?" - Creating Safe Passage for Wildlife Species on Our Roadways. He will tell us about his research that has addressed these concerns and that has allowed him to develop a shelf system which can be placed in highway culverts (from small drainage culverts to large culverts handling stream flows) to mitigate these problems.

Kerry R. Foresman was Professor of Biology and Wildlife Biology at the University of Montana, who retired in 2013 after 35 years of teaching and research. He is the author of *Mammals of Montana*, the first comprehensive, illustrated account of ecology, behavior, distribution and reproduction of all Montana mammals. Since 2001 he has been developing methods to enhance safe movement of small mammals across highway corridors and has founded, Critter CrossingTM Technology, a company that addresses these issues.

Please join us on Monday, May 14th at 7:00 PM in Room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building at UM.

Peeps From The Board: Swifts – A Life on the Wing
By Gerhard Knudsen

Within the fascinating bird world are species that have almost unbelievable abilities. The non-stop migrations of Bar-tailed Godwits that exceed 7,000 miles are mind-boggling as are the power dives of Peregrine Falcons that reach speeds topping 200 miles per hour. Equally amazing are swifts with their ability to spend a large portion of their lives in flight. They drink, feed and mate while flying, landing only to roost at night or to rear their young. Some species of swifts even sleep on the wing and remain aloft for months.

An understanding of these unique birds begins with the fact that swallows and swifts may appear alike, but they are not closely related. Swallows are perching birds that belong to the largest bird order, the Passeriformes. Swifts are Apodiformes, a separate order that is shared with hummingbirds. The order name, meaning without feet, is fitting for swifts since they have very short legs and are unable to perch. Swifts cling to vertical surfaces when it's time to land. The similarity of swallows and swifts is a result of convergent evolution where these unrelated bird species have adapted to comparable ecological niches. They independently evolved similar traits in pursuit of the same goal – to fly rapidly and catch insect prey on the wing.

Swifts have a near-worldwide distribution and the species number around 75. Four swift species occur within North America, all of which breed and nest in Montana: Vaux's, Chimney, White-throated and Black. Vaux's Swifts are confined to western Montana whereas Chimney Swifts are limited to the eastern half of the state. White-throated Swifts have the largest range in Montana, extending from western through south-central Montana to the southeast corner of the state. Black Swifts, the largest of the four swifts and the state's least understood bird, are found in western Montana.

Mastery of the air is evident in the swifts' speed and agility as they crisscross the sky in search of insects. In part, this capability is due to their streamlined bodies and long, curved, blade-like wings, suggesting a cigar attached to a boomerang. Also, swifts are able to change wing shape while in flight, greatly increasing their efficiency at different speeds. They use this wing-morphing capability and, like swing-wing fighter jets, fold their wings back to increase speed and turn rate. When extended, their wings develop greater lift and prolong the bird's gliding time.

White-throated Swift

Peregrine Falcons are champions of the sky when it comes to speed achieved by a bird. However, that's in a steep dive. Bird speed in level flight is a different matter. The titleholder in that category is a swift. Some observers consider a Central Asian swift, the White-throated Needletail, to be the fastest at a speed of 105 mph. Since that speed has never been scientifically verified, Europe's Common Swift, at a speed of nearly 70 mph, has been confirmed as the champion. Interestingly, the birds only fly that fast during aerial displays in the breeding season. Normally, they cruise along at 25 mph or so.

Speed aside, the time swifts spend flying is perhaps their most amazing attribute. Their daily routine involves nearly uninterrupted flight. There is one species of swift, however, that takes the notion of continuous flight to a nearly incomprehensible record level. Using micro data loggers, Swedish scientists have shown that, during the non-breeding season, Europe's Common Swifts remain aloft for ten months! How are the birds able to remain active in energy-demanding flight for so long? How and when are they able to sleep while in flight? At this point in time, researchers can only suggest what might be occurring. At dusk and dawn, the birds climb to very high altitudes, often over 10,000 feet, and then nap while slowly gliding downward.

In many regards, swifts remain birds of mystery. Certainly, their aerial lifestyle makes for challenging research. However, with what is known, we can only look upon them in amazement. In her poem, "Swifts," writer Anne Stevenson eloquently characterizes the fundamental attribute that makes these birds so unique. Swifts she says, "… live in another firmament." They are, "…the air pilgrims, pilots of air rivers." "Earth is forbidden to them …"

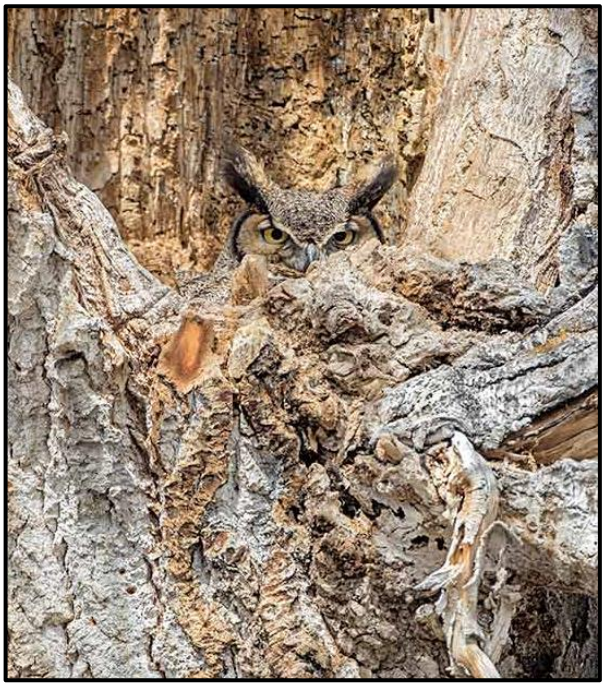
They have a life on the wing.

Field Trip Summaries
By Larry Weeks

Saturday, March 24th: Only 7 people showed up for the field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. Now that Bob Danley has retired, the Visitor's Center is not open on Saturdays so people will need to plan accordingly on future trips to Metcalf. Pond 6 next to the Visitor's Center had a good mix of waterfowl. There were lots of diving ducks which included Ring-necked Ducks, Scaup, both goldeneyes, and Hooded Mergansers. I studied one of the Scaup for a long time and finally decided it was a Greater Scaup based upon the low and rounded head and a green sheen on the head. Before we left the Visitor's Center, a flock of swans flew by and based upon the calls, they were mostly Tundra Swans. There was also a Red-tailed Hawk perched near a Great Blue Heron in the pine tree rockery to the west. As we started hiking on the Kenai Trail, we immediately found a Northern Shrike. The Red-winged Blackbirds were singing up a storm and there were at least 2 Virginia Rails in the cattails. There was one lone Tundra Swan in Pond 8 and lots of Northern Pintails. We also saw at least 3 Northern Harriers and had a fly-by by two noisy Sandhill Cranes. Birds that we looked for but did not see were Snow Geese, Cinnamon Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, and Marsh Wren. On the trail that goes directly west to the river, we had American Goldfinches and Pine Siskins at the bird feeder across the river. Then we had a mixed flock that included Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Black-capped Chickadees, and a Downy Woodpecker. Before we finished the loop, a weather front moved in with strong winds and snow. The weather hampered our birding on the other trail but calmed down before we returned to the parking lot. On the way back, I stopped by a large cavity in a cottonwood tree and said that would be a good place for an owl to nest. Jean Duncan looked at the cavity opening with her binoculars and realized that there were tail feathers sticking out of the cavity. It was a nesting Great Horned Owl. (See photo on the right.) On the way back to Missoula, we stopped at the lower end of the refuge along the east side highway and found a large flock of Trumpeter Swans. We ended up with 43 species. One of the most unusual birds for this time of year was a Turkey Vulture.

Great Horned Owl
Photo by Tad Lubinski

Saturday, April 7th: The primary purpose of the late afternoon field trip to Ninepipes was to observe the Short-eared Owls doing their courtship flight. Seven people left Missoula and we added 3 more people at the 44 Bar. The low turnout was probably impacted by a heavy rain just before we left, but we ended up with sunshine in the Mission Valley late in the day. After looking at a Rough-legged Hawk on Logan Road, we stopped to look at some Ring-billed Gulls. While scoping the gulls, we found a large flock of American Wigeons foraging on the ground beside some standing water. By carefully looking over the Wigeons, we found 2 Eurasian Wigeons in the flock. Another stop on Logan Road produced a good variety of ducks and swans. As we approached the dam on Ninepipes Reservoir, we had a Northern Shrike. While looking over the reservoir from the dam, Denver Holt showed up. Denver and Matt Larson had been guiding field trips. During our conversation, Denver mentioned that he was watching a nest that was being contested by a Great Gray Owl and a Great Horned Owl. He also talked about a Great Horned Owl project which has identified 47 nesting owls in the valley. After a pit stop at the Cenex in Ronan, we hiked the second shelter belt on Duck Road and flushed a couple of Long-eared Owls and a Great Horned Owl. Then we went on to Ninepipes Road, where we watched at least 4 Short-eared Owls flying over the habitat. A couple of the owls flew quite high and did some variation of a courtship flight. Some of the owls just hovered in the air. Two Sandhill Cranes did a little dancing. We had 39 species on the trip.



Upcoming Field Trips
By Larry Weeks

The 2-day field trip to Freezout Lake and the Rocky Mountain Front has been scheduled for May 19th and 20th. The plan is to leave Missoula at 7:00 am on May 19th and drive to Freezout Lake. The group will bird Freezout on Saturday and the Rocky Mountain Front on Sunday. We will spend the night in Choteau and the motel options are the Stage Stop Inn (1-406-466-5900), Bella Vista Motel (1-406-466-5711), Gunther Motel (1-406-466-5444), and Big Sky Motel (1-406-466-5318). Participants are asked to make reservations in advance. Most of the participants will be staying at the Stage Stop Inn. Please contact Larry Weeks if you plan to attend and he will coordinate carpooling. Plan to take lunches for 2 days. We will eat dinner together in a local restaurant. There is a $10 charge for multi-day field trips.

A 3-day field trip to Malta and Bowdoin NWR has been scheduled for June 1-3, 2018. We will camp at the city park in Malta. If someone wishes to stay in a motel, the options are the Royal Inn (1-866-538-0357) or the Country Inn (1-866 925-4143). This is an old car show scheduled for the same weekend so reservations may not be available. There is also a hotel in Malta but I understand that it is expensive. We will plan to leave Missoula at 7:00 am, drive to Lewistown and bird highway 191 to Malta. We will bird Bowdoin on Saturday. If you are planning to attend, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or 540-3064, or email him at bwsgenea@gmail.com. Larry will be planning potluck dinners and coordinating carpooling.

The 4-day campout to Glacier Park is scheduled for July 5-8, 2018. We will camp at St. Mary Campground on July 5th and 6th, and Fish Creek Campground on July 7th. I have reserved campsites at each campground which will allow up to 6 cars and 24 people. We will bird Many Glacier on Friday, the Red Eagle Lake trail on Saturday, and Howe Lake and Camas Creek trails on Sunday. If you plan on going to Glacier, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or 540-3064 or email him at bwsgenea@gmail.com. Larry will be planning potluck dinners and carpooling. We will meet at 5:00 pm at the St. Mary Campground (campsites C-112, C-114, C-116) on July 5th. There is a $10 charge per individual on multi-day field trips.

Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards
By Bill Gabriel

This year our review committee received seven proposals from University of Montana students, and on April 5, 2018, we made the following five awards:

- Forest Hayes, $960, to evaluate moose nutrition and calving success in Colorado.
- Connor Kurz, $731, for a black bear stress research project.
- Cedar Mathers-Winn, $790, to study how forest gaps disrupt communication among birds.
- Dakota Vaccaro, $731, to investigate impacts of first year post-fire burned habitat on wildlife presence in high elevation coniferous mountain forests.
- Katie Zarn, $906, for quantifying bias in mitochondrial DNA production for improved aquatic community monitoring.

The recipients have been invited to report how they used the grants, and the results of their investigations at a Five Valleys Audubon meeting early in 2019.

In 38 years of small research grants, FVAS has awarded $45,284.50 to 88 students of which 55% were male and 45% were female.

Field Trip Saturday May 12
Mud Creek Rehabilitation Center
Montana Waterfowl Foundation

Please bring your scopes and join us for a trip to Ronan for a unique opportunity to bird an area that contains habitat and old growth forest like before the Mission Valley was logged. John Jarvis who manages the land says the birding is great, and we should see a variety of species. They have approximately 100 Wood Duck boxes installed, and they can have anywhere between 50 and 100 Wood Ducks nesting on the site at one time. It is possible to see Sandhill Cranes, Pileated Woodpeckers, Humming birds, Swans and numerous others.

Nestled in the scenic Mission Valley between Flathead Lake and Nine Pipes Wildlife Refuge, the thirty-acre Montana Waterfowl Foundation is on a major migratory path for waterfowl. The Foundation grounds range from dense forest to marshy bottomlands and include nine ponds of varying sizes.

Once we have had our fill of birds at Mud Creek, we will head over to Kicking Horse Ponds. These ponds, like Mud Creek Rehab, need scopes and Audubon rarely visits these ponds. So, all of you with scopes please bring them along and if you only have binoculars please join us as many Audubon folks are willing to share views through their scopes as well as their knowledge.

This is an all-day trip, please plan accordingly with clothing, food and drink. We will gather 7:20 a.m. at the Snow Bowl parking just north of the gas station on Grant Creek Rd., near the interstate. Those who wish to meet us in Ronan, we will be at the Cenex on the south side of town at 8:30 a.m.

For more information call Rose Stoudt 406-880-8060.

Wood Duck Pair
Photo by Gerhard Knudsen

Five Valleys Audubon Society
Board Announcement
Election Were Held in March

Five Valleys Audubon Society is pleased to announce that Rose Leach was elected to another 3-year term as President. Andrea Stierle was elected to another 3-year term as Secretary. Larry Weeks was elected to the Board for a 3-year term, and will continue his other duties as well. Thanks, everyone for stepping up!

Paul Loehnan will cycle off of the Board. A big thanks to Paul for his many years of service on the Board, as well as being an officer!

We appreciate all of our volunteers. It is fun, the people are great, and it is easy to become involved!

New Ornithology Course at Flathead Lake Bio Station
July 23-27, 2018

The University of Montana's Flathead Lake Biological Station is offering a special course entitled, Field Methods in Ornithology, during the week of July 23-27, 2018. Megan Fylling, Director of Banding and Education Programs, will lead this immersion-style course at the Bio Station with field trips to area locations for hands-on training. Participants will:

- Gain conceptual and practical understanding of advanced techniques in ornithology.
- Learn high-level field research skills in avian biology from instructors/trainers certified by the North American Banding Council.
- Develop experience identifying birds (including molt, ageing and sexing).
- Participate in mist-netting and banding, point count surveys, telemetry, recording and bioacoustical analyses.

The cost of the program is $490. Please note that this does not include food or housing. If you have questions about the program, please contact Administrative Associate, Marie Kohler (marie.kohler@umontana.edu or 406-982-3301, ext. 235) or the Instructor, Megan Fylling (megan.fylling@mso.umt.edu or 06-243-2056). If you would like to register please visit: http://flbs.umt.edu/apps/education/.

Which Birds Produce the Most Hybrids?
The three groups you should pay close attention to.
By Kenn Kaufman
Originally published April 20, 2018 on www.audubon.org

For keen birders, a search for wild hybrids can be an absorbing challenge. As a cross between two full species, these birds may not count as anything on our lists, but it's still exciting to see them. Hybrids are rare-yet-possible in practically all major avian categories, though a few groups are known for mixing it up more than average. Among ducks and among hummingbirds, for example, blends of species turn up surprisingly often.

At first glance—and even at a long, careful second glance—ducks and hummingbirds might seem about as different as any two groups of birds could be. However, they have some traits in common when it comes to mating systems. Typically in both families the females wear cryptic camouflage while the males, adorned with colorful plumes, put on elaborate courtship displays to attract attention from mates. If not shown enough interest, the males in both species might aggressively pursue the females.

Also, neither of these families is known for responsible fatherhood. Hummingbirds form no pair bonds at all—they mate and then split, and the male goes looking for another date. Male ducks typically remain with their mates until about the start of incubation, but often they actively pursue other females on the side. And in both ducks and hummingbirds, the females do all the work of incubating the eggs and caring for the young; so if the male is from the "wrong" species, there's no problem caused by different approaches to parenting.

A Northern Pintail and Green-winged Teal Hybrid

It isn't totally clear why these traits should lead to more frequent hybridization, but these two groups are famous for their variety of mash-ups. Birders watching hummingbird feeders in the Southwest or studying duck flocks anywhere on the continent are advised to stay alert for weird and wonderful individuals that don't fit the marks of just one species.

Knowing these patterns—gaudy and promiscuous males, females that function as single moms—we can look around for other avian groups that fit the profile. The birds-of-paradise of New Guinea, which have unbelievably colorful, ornate males, also produce a variety of odd hybrids.

In gulls, we get a different phenomenon. Rampant interbreeding isn't a trait across the entire family; smaller gulls don't hybridize any more frequently than other kinds of birds. But among the larger gulls, every combination seems to be on the table. In the Pacific Northwest, Western Gull and Glaucous-winged Gull hybrids can outnumber either of the parental species. In southeastern Alaska, Glaucous-winged Gull and Herring Gull hybrids are common. Across the Arctic, Herring Gull and Glaucous Gull hybrids show up frequently. And Iceland and Thayer's Gulls are so mixed up, they were summarily lumped into one species last year. Numerous other examples appear all around the northern latitudes.

Well, what's up with these birds? Evidently, several of the large, white-headed gulls of the north have evolved and separated into species only recently. They haven't had enough time to become reproductively isolated yet, so when their populations meet again, they end up interbreeding with their close cousins. That doesn't mean they're all going to be lumped into one species—but they do present endless ID challenges for birders.

One other category that's prone to breeding across boundaries: birds in captivity. The unnatural surroundings of aviaries seem to break down some constraints. Even species that live side by side in the wild, without ever producing hybrids, may mix it up when they're brought into captivity. And of course, captive collections bring together many species that would never cross paths out in the natural world. So, if you're birding in the zoo, remain alert. You might see some truly bizarre hybrid combinations.

Welcome New Members:

Judy Brodsky
Julie Burckhard
David Claman
Patrick Freeborn
F J McMichael
Christine Reck
Anne Robertson
Sharon Toussaint
Copeland Burchenal
Alice Carrol
Mike Duffield
Nancy Hirschenberger
Marcia Porter
Kathy Riley
Jessie Rogers

The Five Valleys Audubon Society would also like to thank those of you who renewed your membership this past month. We generally encourage our members to receive your newsletter via email (to conserve resources and our expenses), which is the default mailing option if provided by new members. If you want to change how your newsletter is delivered or have any changes to your mailing preferences, please contact the Membership Chair, Poody McLaughlin, at pmcregan@bresnan.net.

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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