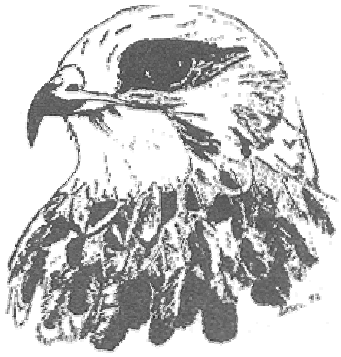
November, 2008

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

* Saturday, November 1, 2008: Half-day field trip to Maclay Flat led by Virginia Vincent. Meet in the Maclay Flat parking lot at 10am.

* Monday, November 3rd, 2008: Jim Brown will host the November Board Meeting.

* Monday, November 10th, 2008: At our November program meeting, Rob Domench will talk about his work with raptors on the Rocky Mountain Front, where he established a capture and release program during the fall migration season. Rob is doing graduate work in Ornithology at the U. of Montana.
Join us at 7:30pm at the Gallagher Business Building in room L14.

* Thursday, November 13th, 2008: The Montana Natural History Center will host a Project Feeder Watch class. This class will help you to learn how to identify and survey the common birds at your feeder during the winter months. The class will be held from 7pm until 8:30 pm. Call Jessie for details, at 327-0405.

* Sunday, December 7, 2008: Full-day field trip to the Mission Valley led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the UM field house parking lot at 8 AM.

* Saturday, December 20, 2008: Christmas Bird Count.

Looking Ahead: The Great Backyard Bird Count 2009

Bird and nature fans throughout North America are invited to join tens of thousands of everyday bird watchers for the 12th annual **Great Backyard Bird Count** (GBBC), February 13-16, 2009. A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this **free event** is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation.

Anyone can take part, from novice bird watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online. "The GBBC benefits both birds and people. It's a great example of citizen science. Anyone who can identify even a few species can contribute to the body of knowledge that is used to inform conservation efforts to protect birds and biodiversity," said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus.

Please go to the GBBC web site for details: www.birdcount.org.

Peeps from the Prez by Jim Brown

I am pinch-hitting for the president, Paul Loehnen, who is off to Australia observing the "Down-Under" birds; hopefully we will get a report when he returns. So I will take this opportunity to comment on something that might not be readily apparent or is easily overlooked. Yet it is important to meeting our conservation and education mission and that is the teamwork between Montana Audubon (MA) and Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). FVAS has a large membership guided by a volunteer board while MA consists of a small, capable full-time staff and volunteer board. Having been involved with the Chapter and State organizations for many years, it is clear to me that we accomplish far more working together than independently. I tend to see us as one organization that pursues local and statewide interests.

A good example of this teamwork is achieving conservation in the Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA). To establish the IBA, our Chapter conducted bird surveys under the guidance of Jeff Marks, then Conservation Director for MA. Jeff submitted our data and report to the State and National Audubon Society IBA technical committees for approvals. The greatest threat to the IBA comes from encroaching subdivisions and land development. To help protect vital habitat in the IBA and elsewhere in our Chapter's area we review all subdivision proposals for Missoula County. We submit written comments to the Office of Planning and Grants and testify at County Planning Board and Commissioner Hearings about impacts to bird habitat and how to mitigate them. The biggest issue is appropriate setbacks from riparian and wetland areas to avoid nesting disturbance and loss of habitat. The work of Janet Ellis, Program Director for MA, has provided us with the credible scientific information on which to base our opinions. She recently completed three publications that summarize the scientific knowledge about the importance of vegetative buffers for water quality, wildlife and fisheries. Because we can speak with scientific facts to back our opinions, we have gained considerable credibility with the planners and have been able to mitigate habitat loss. Janet Ellis is also working on a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks committee to increase consideration of wildlife in model subdivision regulations that local

governments can adopt. This potentially could give us more leverage in promoting conservation actions. Besides subdivision reviews we also work closely with Five Valleys Land Trust to help secure conservation easements on properties in the IBA. This sometimes takes large sums of money to procure easements. Amy Cilimburg, Conservation Director for MA, is helping design bird surveys needed for writing grant proposals.

In addition to working closely with our Chapter on specific projects, MA gives us a voice at the State level on many issues of concern. For example, Janet Ellis, one of the most experienced and effective lobbyists in the Montana Legislature, works hard to protect wildlife habitat and promote sustainable land use practices. Amy Cilimburg is leading an effort to organize grass roots action to combat global warming and promote environmentally sound alternative sources of energy. Paul Belanger trains Community Naturalists and is heading the development of an Audubon Conservation Education Center in Billings that houses a newly constructed wet lab for student research projects and education programs. All the MA staff participates on State level resource planning committees and coordinate Audubon's mission with other conservation organizations. You can learn more about these activities by viewing MA's website: http://www.mtaudubon.org/. Although the teamwork between FVAS and MA is not always readily visible, it is ongoing and significant. It is certainly noteworthy.

Rocky & Wal-Mart Support Audubon Adventures

For the fourth year in a row, Rocky Healey applied for a grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation to support the Chapter's education program called Audubon Adventures. Rocky presented a check for $1000 to the Chapter at the September meeting. Rocky and his wife Suzi both work for Wal-Mart's Supercenter on Mullan Road. Thanks again to both Rocky and The Wal-Mart Foundation.

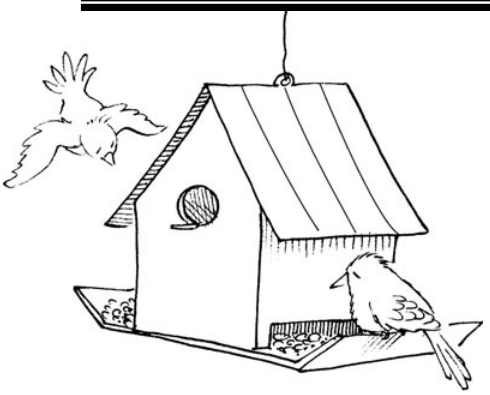
Missoula Christmas Bird Count

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Sat., December 20, 2008. The count area is a circle with a 7.5 mile radius which is centered at the intersection of Reserve St. and I-90. The area will be divided up and covered by individuals and small groups. You can participate by joining a group or being a feeder watcher. If you would like to take part in the field count, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or bwsgenea@onlinemt.com. Larry will work with you to find the group and area that will be the most fun for you. Plan on getting assigned well before the count day and, if you can, do some scouting in your area. If you are interested in being a feeder watcher, contact Elizabeth Johnston at 327-1525 or birder@bigsky.net. We also tally unusual birds not reported on count day that are seen during the count week. This year, count week runs from Wed., Dec. 17th through Tue., Dec. 23rd. If you see an unusual bird during count week, be sure to report it to Larry. The count day will end with a potluck dinner that will be held at the home of Ruth & Russ Royter, 520 Highland Park Dr. (telephone # 728-7984) which is up on Farviews on the East side of the golf course. Potluck guests are welcome to arrive at the Royter's beginning at 6:00 PM. Dinner will commence at 6:30 PM. Please bring your favorite potluck offering, or A-L, bring a salad or dessert, and M-Z, a hot dish. After the potluck, we will tabulate the count results. Besides being a fun day, the results are published in the American Birds magazine, and along with other counts throughout the hemisphere, contribute base information for a variety of studies. The CBC is an expensive production and participants are encouraged to contribute $5.

Submitted by Steve Hoffman of MT Audubon

Hey, Montana birders, would you like to see an Andean Cock-of-the-rock? Or, how about a Toucan Barbet, Beautiful Jay, or Golden Tanager? Upcoming 2009 Montana Audubon birding tours include 3 tours to **Ecuador**, where we expect to see these stunning birds, and many more! These tours are led by John Shipley, and will feature the colorful bird species of this charming South American country. You can find complete details and the tour itinerary on the internet at: www.kingfisherbirdtours.com. Participants will be able to count $500 of their tour fees as a tax-deductible contribution to Montana Audubon. Thus, your participation in these tours helps contribute to the conservation efforts of Montana Audubon! These Ecuador tours will find us viewing about 400 bird species, including Andean Condor, Torrent Duck, Giant Antpitta, and Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan. We have designed this itinerary so that most days will provide us with a procession of dazzling hummingbirds and flashy tanagers, interspersed with toucans, trogons, antbirds, flycatchers, and other birds! We should see 40+ hummingbird species on each tour, including such beauties as Booted Racket-tail, Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Ecuadorian Hillstar, and Shining Sunbeam. In other words, if you enjoy observing hummingbirds, this tour is for you! These tours begin in Quito, and will visit an array of habitats on the east and west slopes of the Andes Mountains. The lodges here are outstanding, and the meals are excellent. Come join us and fully immerse yourself in all that is Ecuador: wonderful birds, abundant orchids and wildflowers, snow-capped volcanoes, verdant valleys, and much more! One of these tours is already Sold Out, but spaces remain on the other two tours. For additional information on our Ecuador birding trips, please call John Shipley at (406) 465-8247.

Project FeederWatch Benefits Birds & People
Connection with nature promotes wellness



More than 100 studies have shown that getting closer to nature reduces stress and promotes a feeling of well-being in children and adults. So, filling feeders and counting the birds that visit may be just what the doctor ordered! For more than 20 years, that's what participants in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch have been doing-benefitting themselves and the birds.

The 2008-09 season of **Project FeederWatch gets underway November 8** and runs through April 3. Participants count the numbers and kinds of birds at their feeders each week and send the information to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants submitted more than 115,000 checklists during the 2007-08 FeederWatch season, documenting unusual bird sightings, winter movements, and shifting ranges-a treasure-trove of information that scientists use to monitor the health of the birds and of the environment.

"Being a FeederWatcher is easy and fun, and at the same time helps generate the world's largest database on feeder-bird populations," says project leader David Bonter. "We are grateful for the contributions our participants have made for the birds and are proud of the joy they say it brings to their busy lives. Since we started in 1987, more than 40,000 people have submitted observations, engaging with the wildlife beyond their windows."

Scientists learn something new from the data each year, too, whether it's about the movements of common backyard birds or unusual sightings of rarely-seen species. Highlights of the most recent season include the largest southward movement of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the history of the project-part of an expected influx of northern birds that fly farther south when their food supplies run short. Other northern species showing up in record numbers included Common Repolls and Pine Siskins. Among the rare birds reported was a Streak-backed Oriole in Loveland, Colorado - the state's first report of this bird, native to Mexico. A December nor'easter deposited a Dovekie in Newton, Massachusetts, the first time this North Atlantic seabird has ever been reported to Project FeederWatch.

Long-term data show some species increasing in number, such as the Lesser Goldfinch in the Southwest. Other populations continue a downward trend, such as the Evening Grosbeak. Once one of the most common species seen at feeders in the northern half of the continent, the grosbeaks are declining for unknown reasons.

Beyond the benefits to birds and science, however, is the benefit to participants. "Nature is not merely an amenity; it is critical to healthy human development and functioning," says Nancy Wells, Cornell University assistant professor of design and environmental analysis. Her studies find that a view of nature through the window or access to the environment in any way improves a child's cognitive functioning and reduces the negative effects of stress on the child's psychological well-being. Wells also notes that when children spent time with nature early in life it carries over to their adult attitudes and behavior toward the environment.

Project FeederWatch welcomes participants of all ages and skill levels, from scout troops and retirees to classrooms and nature center visitors. To learn more and to sign up, visit www.feederwatch.org or call the Lab toll-free at (800) 843-2473. In return for the $15 fee ($12 for Lab members) participants receive the *FeederWatcher's Handbook*, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds in their area, a calendar, complete instructions, and the FeederWatch annual report, Winter Bird Highlights.

Many FeederWatchers echo this comment from Mary Strasser of Wisconsin: "The greatest reward for me as a participant in Project FeederWatch these many years has been observing birds and behavior that I might have missed had I not been part of this project."

Field Trips by Larry Weeks

Saturday, September 20, 2008: The field trip to Rob Domenech's raptor banding site at Flesher Pass was limited to 10 people because of the limited space in the blinds. These 10 people began to assemble at 6:00 AM at the UM field house parking lot and then moved to the Lutheran Church's parking lot in Bonner. We finally got everyone together by 6:45 AM and started up the Blackfoot. We saw a herd of about 15 elk in the Ovando Valley. Rob was waiting for us at the looked gate at the Meek's property on highway 279. We started hiking up the steep trail to the banding site and soon met members of Rob's banding team returning on 2 ATVs to start ferrying people up the mountain. Five people hiked all the way while the other 5 rode the ATVs for part of the trail. Before trapping started, Rob talked about Raptor View Research and introduced his team which included Pat, Step and Tyler. Fred and Kathy Tilly were located on a hill about 1 mile North of the trapping site and acted as spotters to alert the banders to the approaching raptors. There was an East wind blowing which concerned Rob because the raptors migrate along the Front during these conditions because the wind creates an updraft when it hits the mountains. He expected the wind to switch to the South or West, but in the meantime, he suggested that we do some hawk watching outside the blinds. We did see one male northern harrier. When Kathy Tilly reported an incoming harrier, everyone scrambled for the blinds. Five of our people entered the ridge-line blind and the other 5 entered the main blind. I was with the group in the main blind. Each blind had 3 traps which were baited with a pigeon, a starling and a house sparrow. We had no more than settled in when Rob caught a female northern harrier. After extracting the bird from the net, it was measured and banded in the processing tent. The next action included 2 American kestrels which were flying around the lure birds. One even perched on one of the tether poles. Eventually, one of the kestrels landed on the house sparrow and was captured. While the kestrel was being processed, Rob caught an immature sharp-shinned hawk. The 4th bird that was caught at the main blind was a red-tailed hawk that attacked the pigeon from behind the blind without any advanced warning. Rob identified it as a hatch-year Harlan's red-tail. The last excitement at our blind involved a golden eagle. Kathy Tilly reported the flight of the eagle as it passed high over the blinds but then dropped rapidly. It ended up raking the pigeon with its talons but kept on going. There was no opportunity to safely spring the trap. The ridge-line blind ended up catching 1 Cooper's hawk and 2 sharp-shinned hawks. The total catch for the 6 hours that the tour spent at the banding site was 7 raptors. We saw 16 bird species during the outing and these did not include a broad-winged hawk and a ferruginous hawk reported by Kathy.

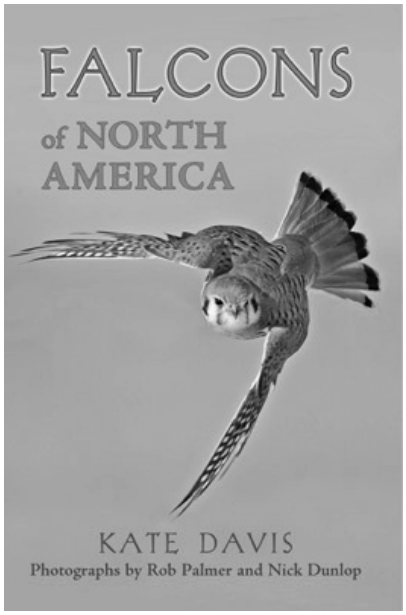
Saturday, October 18, 2008: Twenty-two people joined the author for the field trip at Smurfit-Stone. The trip got off to a good start with a yellow-rumped warbler in the UM field house parking lot. After getting everyone organized at the mill, it started to rain which lasted for about 1 hour. Fortunately, it cleared off and we even got some sun breaks later in the day. The first stop at a small sludge pond directly West of the plant had 30 long-billed dowitchers, 3 common goldeneyes and several mallards. As we approached the river, we found several song sparrows and 2 adult bald eagles, and heard a Townsend's warbler. Waterfowl was the main attraction for the remainder of the morning which included horned, eared, pied-billed, and western grebes. We did not find a surf scoter. There was one yellow-headed blackbird in a large flock of red-winged blackbirds, but only a few people ended up seeing the yellow-headed blackbird. We had one gull which turned out to be a first-cycle ring-billed gull. The afternoon session had the best bird of the day which was a single snow bunting in winter plumage. It was foraging among some weeds along the main road to the South. It ended up providing everyone with satisfying scope views of the bird at a distance of about 50 feet. Other good birds in the afternoon included northern shrike, peregrine falcon, American pipit, pileated woodpecker, wood duck, and American goldfinch. Forty-nine species were recorded for the outing.

Saving Paper

Many Five Valleys Audubon Society members have discovered the convenience of viewing their newsletter, *Birding Observer,* directly on the internet, http://www.fvamissoula.org/newsletter.htm. And, over two-dozen members now view their newsletter entirely "online". They have elected to not receive a postal-mailed newsletter in order to save paper and postage expense.

If you would like join these folks and view your FVAS newsletter "online", please let Vick know at k7vk@arrl.net or at audubonfo@fvamissoula.org. We'll omit you from the hardcopy mailings and send you an email alert when the latest monthly newsletter is available "online". Thanks and enjoy your *Birding Observer*.

***Falcons of North America*: A new book by Kate Davis**



The new book by Kate Davis, Director of Raptors of the Rockies is now available. *Falcons of North America* took two and a half years to write, and nineteen guest reviewers from around the world helped to keep Kate "honest." With a collaborative effort from the editors at Mountain Press Publishing Company the Falcon book made it back from the printers just in time for the international Raptor Research Foundation Conference in Missoula in September. Final numbers are over 200 photographs, 12 pen and ink illustrations, range maps, sidebars, and species accounts of our six native falcons. The photographers Rob Palmer and Nick Dunlop are recognized as the best in the world, and were here during the big conference week signing books along with Kate at the Holiday Inn.

Bill Clark, author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Hawks of North America* was the first to review it, and he writes, "This charming, well-written book tells us lots about our six North American falcons. Kate used her experience as a falconer, researcher, rehabilitator, educator, conservationist, and artist to give us an insight into how falcons live and their relationships with humankind. The book is a nice blend of personal experience, rendering of the literature, and behavioral observations, with sidebars on some interesting falcon projects, and more. And the vast majority of the photos are just stunning! A must for anyone who loves falcons and photos of them and wants to learn more about them."

A portion of book sale proceeds goes directly to the Raptors of the Rockies educational program, and will be used to buy quail to feed their resident falcons. Books are available at booksellers, and directly from Kate (for an autographed copy!)

The deadline for submissions to the December edition of the Birding Observer is Friday, November 14th. Please send articles to the editor, Beverly Orth Geoghegan, at orthbev@hotmail.com.

Thanks to Our Returning Members

Richard Auerbach
Elaine M. Corrigan
Richard Haines
Jan Mc Arthur
Carol & Terry Toppins
Patricia Vogel
Vivian Aylesworth
Susan Gutowski
Toni Julian
Joseph A. Moran
Bruce Turlington
Jeanne Worthy

Welcome to Our New Members

Anne Binninger
Kathy & John Gardner
Ellie Steinberg
Louise Cameron
Bob & Sally Mutch

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 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

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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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Program Director:	Janet Ellis	jellis@mtaudubon.org	Director of Education:	Paul Belanger	pbelanger@mtaudubon.org
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Five Valleys Audubon Society

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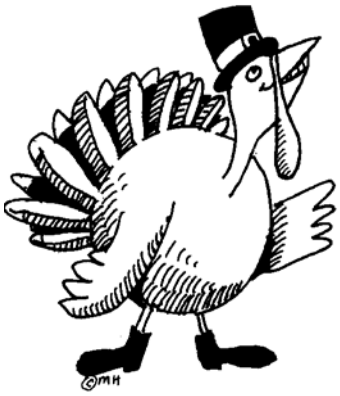

TO:

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