November 2017

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Saturday, November 4th:** All-day field trip to the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 8:50am.
- **Monday, November 6th, 6:45-8:45pm:** The board meeting will be held in the large meeting room in the Missoula County Library.
- **Monday, November 13th, 7:00pm:** Jay Sumner of the Montana Peregrine Institute will present on the status and conservation of Peregrine Falcons in Montana at the November program meeting. Please join us at the University of Montana, in room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building.
- **Wednesday, November 15th:** The deadline for the December edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, November 18th:** Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Sunday, December 3rd:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 7:50 am or at the Cenex Gas Station in Ronan at 9:00 am.
- **Saturday, December 16th:** Christmas Bird Count. Read details on page 3.

Montana Peregrine Falcon Survey

Are you curious about the status of Peregrine Falcons in Montana? Jay Sumner of the Montana Peregrine Institute will provide an update at our meeting on November 13th. Please join us at 7pm in room 123 of the Gallagher Business Building at UM.

The Peregrine Falcon, considered by most authorities to be the fastest animal on earth, was almost extinct in Montana in the early 1980s. The Peregrine Fund, in conjunction with federal, state and private organizations, introduced over 600 young peregrines into Montana, which kick-started the falcon's recovery. In 1999, Jay Sumner and Ralph Rogers brought their combined raptor research experience of over 80 years, along with federal and state biologists, to initiate intensive surveys of the Montana peregrine population. Documented over the last 18 years through the efforts of their nonprofit organization, Montana Peregrine Institute (MPI), data shows that the population of the Peregrine Falcon in Montana has expanded from 18 nesting pairs in 1998 to over 100 nesting pairs in 2017.

However, as an apex predator that feeds primarily on riparian birds, the falcon is at-risk. Because of their migratory behavior, general mobility, and proximity to water, these prey species tend to encounter more environmental toxins than do mammals. In turn, peregrines accumulate these more than do other raptors. Further, limited data indicate that the migratory destinations of many peregrines lie south of the American border in regions of the world where regulation of pesticides, including the chlorinated hydrocarbons, is virtually unknown. Plainly it's crucial to immediately identify any major downward flux in populations, lest infamous history repeat itself.

Jay is the Executive Director of the Montana Peregrine Institute. A Wildlife Biologist, he has a BS in biology from Montana State University-Billings and an MS in biology from the University of Montana. Jay has been studying Peregrine Falcons and other raptors for over 50 years. He has coordinated the Montana Peregrine Falcon survey for the past 18 years. He has also worked on grizzly bear population studies in Yellowstone Park, the Scapegoat wilderness, and the Bob Marshall wilderness. He enjoys hiking, rafting, fishing, and falconry.

Peeps From The Board: Project Night Flight
By Jean Duncan

Listen for birds at night? Right! But that's exactly what some folks at MPG Ranch in the Bitterroot Valley are doing. It all started with a few of the researchers at the ranch attending The North American Ornithology Conference in Vancouver in 2012 and being captivated by the acoustical monitoring equipment that was presented there. As soon as they got back to the Bitterroot they bought what was necessary to begin recording nocturnal flight calls at the ranch.

You may say, "What is the point of that?" Well, it seems many birds migrate at night and although there already are several tools available to measure bird migration, this tool is unique in that it detects individual species by their calls as they fly over at night and adds to the data that is being collected around the world for a more complete picture of who, when, and where birds migrate.

Debbie Leick, an enthusiastic researcher at the ranch, calls this a fun and exciting project. She has this to say about Project Night Flight: "This unique research project records the nocturnal flight calls (NFCs) of migrating birds. Many songbird species use these calls to presumably echolocate, communicate with one another, and/or maintain flock spacing as they fly at night. To capture and catalog the calls, we record every night during fall migration. We then process the audio files using Vesper, a customized software, to "clip" the flight calls out of the recordings. After the calls are clipped out, we can look at them in Vesper as a spectrogram and, in many cases, tell which species made the call. This visual technique turns a recorded "tseep" call into a Yellow Warbler, a long buzzy note into a Lazuli Bunting, or a distinctive "heee" into a Swainson's Thrush.

We have also installed our recording equipment up, down, and across the Bitterroot Valley on both private and public lands. Our "acoustic array" of over 20 microphones will help us determine how, when, and what species migrate through the Bitterroot Valley and learn more about variables that affect migration (e.g., weather, urban light pollution, and elevation). Over time and many sites, these data also have the potential to track changes in migration pathways and species populations."

The long view for Project Night Flight is to establish an array of acoustical monitoring sites across Montana with volunteers at each site sending the recorded calls to a central hub every morning during the fall migration where it can be accessed by interested birders and other research projects. Five years of data is already in the system which provides a baseline for trends in migration through the Bitterroot Valley.

In closing Debbie says, "In the coming months, we will continue to process the terabytes of data we have collected and share the results in a future newsletter. Stay tuned!"

Check out http://www.mpgranch.com/research for more information about MPG Ranch and its research projects.

MPG Ranch Banding Trip
By Jerry Dirnberger

On Thursday, September 14th, the MPG ranch invited members of the FVAS to view the researchers banding of migrating passerines. Twenty members were divided into 2 groups as there were 2 banding stations operating at the time, one in the floodplain and the other in a ravine. A total 74 birds were banded out of which there were 20 different species. The group list of the total number of species seen or heard was 43.

The group enjoyed seeing the birds up close and learning about the various specifications, which were noted for each bird. Other highlights included a Northern aw-whet Owl and a Peregrine Falcon, and, oh, yes, the Bull Moose.

A big THANKS to the ranch and its volunteers who made our trip a very memorable experience.

Audubon Adventures
By Larry Weeks

Five Valleys Audubon has purchased 11 Audubon Adventures (AA) kits for area teachers. AA is an environmental education curriculum created by National Audubon for grades 3 through 5. Each kit costs $43.95. The teachers that will be receiving these kits are: Kelli Mathery (St. Joseph), Kelli VanNoppen (Paxson), Margaret Petty (L&C), Susie Graham (Chief Charlo), James Quigley (Target Range), Michelle Riordan (Hawthorne), Betsy DeFries (Sussex), Holly Jasperson & Carol Addis (Lowell), and Emma Washer & Lesa Homer (Bonner).

Field Trips
By Larry Weeks

Saturday, October 7th: Eight people traveled to Rogers Pass to watch Rob Domenech's crew attempt to catch Golden Eagles. Rob did not operate his banding site at Nora Ridge this year and concentrated his efforts at the Rogers Pass site because it is more productive. To accommodate visitors, Rob built a viewing blind slightly uphill from the trapping blind. The weather was a factor during our visit. It was very windy and it snowed off and on all day. Sometimes the terrain was in the clouds and visibility was compromised. In spite of the challenging conditions, we did observe 18 Golden Eagles. The closest they came to catching an eagle occurred when one landed on the pigeon but the release mechanism on the bow net trap failed. The eagle even stayed on the pigeon until the trapper (Brian) left the blind to inspect the trap. During high winds, the net sometimes gets blown onto the pin that releases the trap, and prevents it from operating. Later in the afternoon, we had another Golden Eagle approach the pigeon but pulled up at the last second. Our visit can be summed up by saying we should have been there yesterday because they caught 6 Golden Eagles the day before. One of these years, our field trip is going to hit the "sweet spot".

Missoula Christmas Bird Count
By Larry Weeks

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 16, 2017. 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 within the circle will be covered by small groups and individuals. These areas will be assigned ahead of the Count Day. You can participate by joining a group in the field or by being a feeder watcher. If you would like to take part in the field count, contact Larry Weeks at bwsgenea@gmail.com, 549-5632, or 540-3064 (cell). Larry will provide different options for you to choose from. If you are interested in being a feeder watcher, contact Rose Leach at 370-1999 or rleach-2@bresnan.net. She will provide you with instructions on how to tabulate your bird sightings. We also tally unusual birds not seen on Count Day that are seen during Count Week. Count Week includes the 3 days before and 3 days after Count Day.

The Count Day will end with a potluck dinner at the home of Larry Weeks, 2428 West Kent, which is near Rosauers. Potluck guests are welcome to arrive 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 results of the field Count.

Montana Audubon Announcement
Welcome Larry Berrin, Executive Director

Montana Audubon recently appointed Larry Berrin as its new Executive Director. An avid birder, Berrin has dedicated his career of more than 25 years to conservation science and environmental education in multiple states including Pennsylvania, Vermont and Oregon. Montana Audubon is a leader in wildlife conservation in Montana and one of the largest conservation organizations in the state.

Berrin comes to Montana Audubon from Asbury Woods Partnership in Erie, Pennsylvania. As President & CEO, he led a major acquisition of the 205-acre Asbury Woods and Nature Center, which included securing over $1.3 million in government grants, representing some of the largest acquisition grants ever awarded to Erie County. During his tenure, he helped launch a $4.5 million capital campaign with $3.6 million raised to date.

Previously, Berrin served as Principal Executive/Manager at the Oregon Department of Forestry where he managed the Tillamook Forest Center and focused on legislative policy, partnership development, grant management and fundraising initiatives. Berrin has also served as Branch Director for Discover Your Northwest in Central Oregon at the Deschutes National Forest. Earlier in his career, Berrin served as State Education Director in Vermont for the National Audubon Society where he was the recipient of that organization's 2001 ACE Award in the category of Team Achievement.

"I'm so excited to be joining such a talented staff and an equally dedicated Board of Directors to help build on our conservation legacy in Montana," said Berrin. "I look forward to enhancing our role as a leader in the conservation of native birds, other wildlife and natural ecosystems and continuing to expand our impact through our policy work in Helena, conservation education programs at the Montana Audubon Center in Billings, grassroots efforts in communities throughout the state, and partnership opportunities with volunteer-run, National Audubon chapters."

"Swifting" Up High and Under Waterfalls
By Amy Seaman

Trainees at Lunch Creek Falls show how tiny a person can be in the nesting habitat of the Black Swift. Photo by Jeff Van Tine

Since the summer of 2013, Montana Audubon has been engaging citizen scientists in searching for one of Montana's least understood species, the Black Swift. When we started these efforts, just seven nest sites were known in the state, and it was clear the Black Swift remained among Montana's Species of Greatest Inventory Need. Building their nests up high, amongst rocky niches, and under waterfalls, the whereabouts of the colonial breeding Black Swift largely remains concealed even to the trained eye. In our first four years of surveys, efforts by Montana Audubon staff and a dozen volunteers turned up just three new nesting sites. Focused surveys in Glacier National Park confirmed six sites within the heart of the park in 2013, and alongside individual efforts and efforts by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, we had collectively amassed knowledge of 17 nesting sites state-wide at the start of the 2017 field season. We were making progress, albeit it slow! In an effort to speed up our rate of discovery, we took a different approach in 2017, hosting two in-person field and classroom trainings. 26 individuals ranging from agency personnel to seasonal technicians and volunteers joined us in Glacier National Park and Holland Lake for and intensive overnight introduction to these illusive creatures. Trainees spent over two hours together digesting the dusk survey protocol, learning how to navigate the physical demands of the field, and getting introduced to the unique biology of this extremely fast study species. As dusk approached each night we left the classroom work behind and headed to the falls. Trainees worked in small groups to score waterfall habitat characteristics such as height, type, flow volume, commanding view over the surrounding terrain, moss availability, shading of nest niches, and falls aspect – all characteristics known to influence the likelihood a waterfall will be used by Black Swifts. Talking through each group's scores together helps hone the individual observer's eye and adds an important element of objectivity when moving through a scoring process that relies on the viewer's observation point. Standardizing data collection in this way is what the state needs to carry out surveys that are effective at determining a species conservation status. We shared as much as possible about developing a good search image, including searching for white-wash and scouring the waterfall face for "mailbox–sized" nooks and crannies where nests may be hidden.

Despite the fact that the Lunch Creek waterfall had been occupied by swifts in 2016, we unfortunately found no swifts during this summer's training – and none turned up during later surveys this summer. Holland Falls on the other hand provided just the search image the trainees needed, as birds were observed almost a dozen times streaming out from the waterfalls sides, down the creek, and out over Holland Lake. The few fast glimpses allowed trainees to observe the lightning-like speed at which an adult Black Swift enters its nest location, and made clear a point we reiterated often during the training, "just don't look away". It is safe to say almost everyone that attended these trainings became hooked on how exciting it is to be in the presence such an amazing and uncommon creature.

After the trainings we coordinated with volunteers to accomplish 18 waterfall surveys and evening observations, resulting in the location of four new Black Swift colonies. Two of these are located in the park and two are outside, including the first find in the Cabinet Mountains. Volunteers put in over 400 hours of time and drove over 1,400 miles during the search – which luckily doesn't stop this year! In 2017 we just laid the groundwork, and this cadre of "swifters" is ready to hit the trails again next year. Between funded surveys and citizen science, 2017 was a year of great discovery, and our collective efforts have doubled the known number of sites to near 34. It's not enough to remove the Black Swift from the greatest inventory need list, but it is enough for us to know we are working in the right direction with the right group.

Funding for these trainings was provided by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Glacier National Park Conservancy, the LEAW Family Foundation, the Cadeau Foundation, and individual donors. For that, a BIG THANKS!

Trainees work in groups to score waterfall characteristics before comparing notes. Photo by Jeff Van Tine

Welcome To Our Newest Members

Mr. Robert DeRiemacker
Emily Harkness
Leslie Herbert
Ms. Dolores Hallman
Carol Hayes
Gale Shaffer

Help Wanted

Five Valleys Audubon Society is seeking a new Publicity Chair. Some of the responsibilities include:

- **Writing press releases to media outlets for all chapter activities.**
- **Updating media outlet list and their preferred scheduling each year (or as needed).**
- **Editing and writing the monthly program article for the newsletter, September through June.**

If interested, please contact Rose Leach for more details at rleach-2@bresnan.net or 721-0779.

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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