October 2009

Birding Observer

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

Calendar

* **Monday, October 5th, 7pm:** Paul Loehnen will host the board meeting.
* **Saturday, October 10th:** Half-day field trip to Smurfit-Stone. Meet at 9 am in the UM field house parking lot or at the pulp mill at 9:30 am.
* **Monday, October 12th:** Sherry Ritter will present on biomimicry at 7:30 pm in the Gallagher Business Building at UM.
* **Friday, October 16th:** Submission deadline for the November edition of the *Birding Observer*.
* **Saturday, November 7th:** Half-day field trip to Smurfit-Stone. Meet at 9:30 am in the middle of the UM field house parking lot or at the pulp mill at 10:00 am.

News from the FVAS board

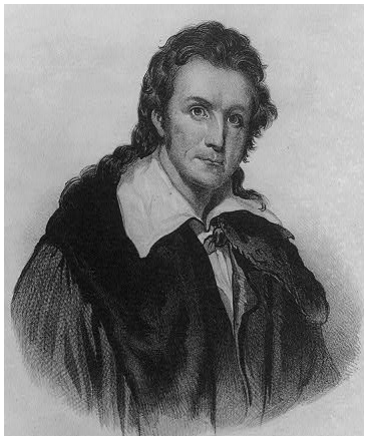
- Our chapter bought a laptop and projector that will be used for class presentations.
- The 2009 Birdathon brought in $7,972. Thank you to everyone who donated and to those who did a LONG day of birding.
- Mark your calendars! The Montana Bird Festival will be held in Missoula June 4th-6th, 2010. The Bitterroot Chapter is co-sponsoring it with Five Valleys. A committee is already at work, but they will need lots of help from everyone.
- Bird surveys were done on much of our Important Bird Area (IBA) this summer. The Montana Audubon Board met in Missoula recently and the focus was on our IBA, which includes the riparian area and adjacent grasslands that extend from Missoula to Huson.

Biomimicry: Sustainable Innovation Inspired by Nature

Biomimicry will be the topic of the meeting on October 12 at 7:30 pm in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level) on the University of Montana campus. Sherry Ritter will introduce the discipline known as biomimicry and talk about the importance of looking at the natural world as model, measure, and mentor. Biomimicry is a way of looking to nature for solutions to human technological problems. Biomimicry strives to demonstrate that we humans can fit in if we learn from nature's 3.8 billion years of research and development. Sherry will present case studies of how biomimics have extracted deep principles from the strategies of the natural world and applied them to their designs, whether to create a more energy-efficient fan, to stop an oil pipeline leak, or to treat wastewater.

Sherry Ritter works with the Biomimicry Institute as the content editor for AskNature.org. She also works with the Biomimicry Guild as a project manager, researcher, and Biologist at the Design Table for a variety of clients. Sherry has worked as a wildlife ecologist for state wildlife agencies and for the research branch of the U.S. Forest Service. She has a BS and MS in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Peeps from the Prez by Paul Loehnen



Although Audubon had no role in the organization that bears his name, George Bird Grinnell, one of the founders of the early Audubon Society, choose his name as the inspiration for the organization's earliest work to protect birds and their habitat. Today, the name Audubon remains synonymous with birds and bird conservation the world over. The following is a brief refresher biography of this incredible man. John James Audubon was born in Haiti in 1785. He was the illegitimate son of Jean Audubon, a French merchant and sea captain, and Jeanne Rabine, a chambermaid who died in a slave uprising shortly after his birth. Raised lovingly by his stepmother and father, in the French countryside around Nantes, he developed a love of wildlife, especially birds, and of sketching. At age 18, Audubon was sent to Pennsylvania to avoid conscription in Napoleon's army and to manage the family farm property near Philadelphia.

He lived with the tenants in what he considered a paradise. "Hunting, fishing, drawing and music occupied my every moment". He married his neighbor's daughter, Lucy Bakewell, and the young couple shared many interests and early on began to explore the natural world around them.

Shipping goods ahead, Audubon started a general store in Louisville, Kentucky, the most important river port between Pittsburgh and New Orleans. He was not thriving and moved his business to the less competitive Henderson, Kentucky, where he and his wife took over an abandoned log cabin. Though their finances were tenuous the Audubon's started a family and had two sons, who would eventually help publish their father's work. He frequently turned to hunting and fishing to feed his family. Audubon was quite successful in business for a while, but hard times hit and in 1819 he was briefly jailed for bankruptcy. With no other prospects, Audubon set off on his epic quest to depict America's avifauna, with nothing but his gun, artist's materials and a young assistant. Floating down the Mississippi, he lived a hand-to-mouth existence in the south while his wife, Lucy earned money as a tutor to wealthy plantation owners. In 1826 he sailed with his partly finished collection to England. His life size highly dramatic bird portraits in the "The American Woodsman was literally an overnight success.

The last print was issued in 1838, by which time Audubon had achieved fame and a modest degree of comfort. He settled in New York City and spent his last years in senility and died at age 65.

Audubon's story is one of triumph over adversity; his accomplishment is destined for the ages. He encapsulates the spirit of young America, when the wilderness was limitless and beguiling. He was a person of legendary strength and endurance as well as a keen observer of birds and nature. Like his peer, he was an avid hunter, and also had a deep appreciation for conservation; in his later writings he sounded the alarm about destruction of bird habitats. It is fitting that we carry his name and legacy into the future.

(Excerpted from the Audubon web site)

Words of John James Audubon

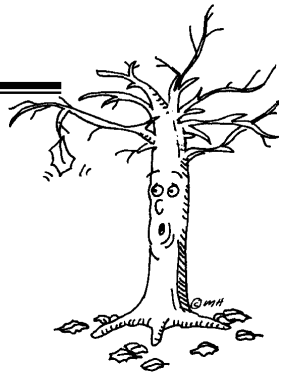
Almost every day, instead of going to school, I made for the fields, where I spent my day.

A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children.

During all these years there existed within me a tendency to follow Nature in her walks.

I never for a day gave up listening to the songs of our birds, or watching their peculiar habits, or delineating them in the best way I could.

Fall Foliage Facts



- Unlike the bright colors of flowers, which attract pollinators, or the bright "Warning Colors" of many kinds of animals, the bright colors of fall foliage are a byproduct of chemical changes as the trees start to go dormant. These colors have no apparent biological function or significance.
- The change in day length (photoperiod) that causes the chemical changes in the trees leading to the bright colors starts June 21, the longest day of the year.
- Leaves have just as much yellow pigment (xanthophyll) in July when they are green as they do in October when they are yellow. In July the darker green pigment (chlorophyll) masks the yellow color.
- Evergreen trees may shed their older leaves, which often turn bright yellow, in spring rather than fall, but they never drop all their leaves at one time, thus staying green all year.
- Bright sunlight is essential for the production of the red (anthocyanin) pigment in the fall leaves: if a black mask is placed on part of a leaf before it turns red, the part of the leaf under the mask will turn yellow while the exposed part will turn red.

Facts taken from *Fall Colors & Woodland Harvests.*

Field Trip by Larry Weeks

Saturday, August 15, 2009: The target birds for the August field trip to Smurfit-Stone are the shorebirds. Therefore, the first 2 hours of the birding was concentrated on the sludge ponds where the bulk of the shorebirds congregate. The first stop at Pond 3 included American avocets, lesser yellowlegs, Wilson's phalaropes, least sandpiper, and killdeer. The second stop at Pond 5 had several spotted sandpipers, a few killdeer and one semipalmated sandpiper. The third stop at Pond 4 had Baird's, semipalmated and spotted sandpipers, and killdeer. While at Pond 4, Pat Little spotted 2 peregrine falcons on a crossarm of a telephone pole. The falcons flew over to Pond 3 and we watched them both dive-bombing something several times before one finally caught something and they both flew off. We then birded a narrow strip of habitat along the river that had pine siskins, yellow-rumped and yellow warblers, American goldfinches, western tanagers, western wood-pewees, willow flycatchers, and Bullock's orioles. Rose Leach spotted a Vaux's swift flying amongst some swallows. Then 2 sandhill cranes and a lone white pelican. We got spectacular views of a merlin which must have been a juvenile because it allowed us to approach within 50 feet while it sat on a metal pole. During the second half of the tour, we found 6 red-necked phalaropes in winter plummage. After searching for a solitary sandpiper most of the day, Dave and Sally Crouch, the couple from Indiana, finally saw one. However, it flew before everyone could get on the bird. I was able to find a cinnamon teal for Dave, which was a life bird. Both phalaropes and a violet-green swallow were also life birds for Dave. 15 people attended the field trip and we saw 64 species.

Saturday, September 5, 2009: In 2008, the field trip to the Tower St. Open Space and Sleven's Island was held on Sep. 13th and it missed the warbler migration, which occurred at the beginning of September. So this year, the same field trip was scheduled for Sep. 5th to coincide with the 2008 migration. However, the warbler migration hadn't even started by the 5th. The group assembled in the Tower St. Open Space parking lot and we encountered the best mixed flock of the trip immediately after leaving the parking lot. It started with western wood-pewees, yellow-rumped warblers and black-capped chickadees. As we followed the flock, we added yellow warblers, and red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches. We also heard a downy woodpecker. We then hiked the major trails and one of the less-traveled trails. The only bird that we found that was not expected was several Vaux's swifts catching insects high above the river. Sleven's Island did not have much bird activity and the only birds we added to our list were red-tailed hawk, spotted sandpiper, song sparrow, and pine siskin. There were 21 people on the field trip and we had 30 bird species.

Bluebird Update by Kathy Heffernan

2009 proved to be another banner year for the bluebird population of Waterworks Hill. Of the 31 bluebird boxes maintained in the North Hills by Kathy Heffernan and Elizabeth Johnston, twenty-three were used by bluebirds to successfully fledge 147 bluebird babies. This number included 62 Mountain Bluebird fledglings and 85 Western Bluebird fledglings.

Tree Swallows used the eight remaining boxes to fledge an undetermined number of young. In addition, three boxes sized for wrens and placed in Chokecherry Draw were used by the smaller birds.

The bluebird count is up from last year's grand total of 92 fledglings. In 2007, only 13 bluebird fledglings were confirmed on Waterworks Hill.

Unusual this year were the number of unhatched eggs. Sixteen Mountain Bluebird eggs and five Western Bluebird eggs did not hatch. Most of these were in nests with eggs that hatched into healthy nestlings.

If you are interested in monitoring some bluebird boxes next season, we are looking for a few dedicated hiking birders to share in this exciting adventure. Commitment is April to August about once per week. Call Kathy Heffernan @543-4097.

Birders interested in putting up bluebird boxes can get information at the Mountain Bluebird Trails website (www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com). Habitat, hole size, and space are crucial considerations. Boxes placed near houses or barns are likely to be claimed by non-native House Sparrows. Worse yet, if a bluebird and House Sparrow lay claim to the same box, the more aggressive House Sparrow is likely to kill the bluebird. Placing boxes in open grasslands or park-like woodlands far away from houses/barns will give bluebirds the habitat they require.

While House Sparrows do not venture far from houses and farms, non-native Starlings will claim boxes anywhere. That is why hole size is so important.

Bluebird boxes should have 1-9/16" holes. These allow Mountain Bluebirds to enter but keep the bulkier Starlings out. (Note that most boxes for sale in stores have 1-1/2" holes – a tight to impossible fit for our Mountain Bluebirds!). If a woodpecker enlarges the hole, replace the box or fit a 1-9/16" hole guard over it.

Bluebirds are territorial so boxes should be a respectable distance apart. Mountain Bluebird Trails recommends 150 yards apart. Bluebirds will drive "too close" neighbors away, wasting valuable reproductive time and energy. However, they will tolerate Tree Swallows in neighboring boxes. Keep boxes away from prime wren habitat (brushy draws) as wrens will destroy the eggs of other birds in their territory.

And finally, when placing bluebird boxes, do not place boxes in fields frequented by free-roaming cats. Bluebirds are especially vulnerable to cat predation as they spend so much time eating insects on the ground. If you think your cat won't eat bluebirds, think again! No cat can resist an easy meal fluttering around in the grass! Protect our bluebirds by spacing boxes in proper habitat far away from cat hang-outs.

Looking for Newsletter Articles

Do you have an article you'd like to write, a story you want to tell, or an announcement you'd like to share with your Audubon friends? Please don't be shy. We'd love for you to submit material to the *Birding Observer.*

Please send all newsletter submissions via email, in an attached Word document, to Beverly Orth Geoghegan at orthbev@hotmail.com.

New Members:

Jeff Brooks
Kathy A. Frantzreb
Ellen Knight
Marisol Maddox
Bob Rolfson
Sehnert
Carrie Ann Smith

Jon Driessen
Lou Herritt
Peggy Knight
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Martha Thayer

Jean Erickson
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Denise Hamersley
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Timm Vogelsberg

Donna Finstad H. William Gabriel
Daniel A. Harper
Tim Spangler
John Swanson
Hedwig Wright

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:** _____

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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