September 2009

Birding Observer

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

Calendar

* **Saturday, September 5th**: Half-day field trip to Tower St. Open Space and Sleven's Island. Meet at the Tower St Open Space parking lot at 8:00 AM.

* **Tuesday, September 8th, 7pm:** Joyce Nave will host the board meeting.

* **Sunday, September 13th:** Deadline for submissions to the October edition of the *Birding Observer*.

* **Monday, September 14th:** Bob Danley will be the speaker for the September general meeting. He is employed by the National Wildlife Service and works at Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge functioning at times as a naturalist. His program will focus on dragon flies, as well as birds. He will also give some tips on digital photography and identification of wildlife species. Bob has been at the refuge for several years and is very helpful in assisting the public in spotting birds plus other wildlife that inhabit the refuge.

* **Saturday, September 26, 2009:** Full-day field trip to Flesher Pass to visit Rob Domenech's raptor banding site or to watch raptors with Fred & Kathy Tilly. Meet at 6:00 AM in the middle of the UM field house parking lot. A strenuous 2-mile hike will be required to reach the banding site unless Rob uses ATVs to transport people. Good hiking shoes are a must and dress appropriately for weather conditions. The trip to the banding site will be limited to 10 people. People wishing to watch raptors with the Tillys will have a less strenuous hike and should bring a lawn chair. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632.

THE 9TH ANNUAL MISSION VALLEY HAT PARTY AT THE OWL RESEARCH INSTITUTE!
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2009

All Auduboners and friends are welcome!
The Hat Party begins at 4 p.m. with live music. Food service starts at 5:30. Live music continues until midnight, with three bands on the play schedule. And campfire music continues into the morning!

A $15 donation gets you barbecue pig and smoked beef brisket, pasta and green salads, pies and pastries, beer and wine, and soft drinks. It guarantees you a site for overnight camping, for both trailers and tents. And it comes with a full twelve hours of great music.

Don't forget your hat! The more creative, the better! Forgetting a hat will cost you $5.
Address: Ninepipes Center, 35490 Ninepipes Lane; Charlo, MT 59824
Signs are posted at intersections near the Hat Party.

Learn more about the party at www.owlinstitute.org

Peeps from the Prez by Paul Loehnen

As a child I dabbled with homing pigeons and although fascinated by the fact that they find their way back to their cages, never really thought about how this was possible. Several years ago we were vacationing in Hawaii and came across Laysan Albatrosses nesting in gardens, sidewalks etc. They had returned to their exact original, probably historic nesting places.

The first question is why birds migrate. They are seeking adequate food, water and cover in order to breed optimally. This may entail no migration, changing elevation or flying many thousands of miles. Changing seasons can transform a comfortable environment into an unlivable one: the food and water supply can dwindle or disappear, plant cover can vanish and competition with other animals can increase.

Hence the need to change addresses but how do they find home, sometimes thousands of miles away? If we think anthropomorphically, we are likely to assume that like human's birds orient themselves to important landmarks. However radar studies of flocks of birds indicate that they largely ignore important geographical features such as bends in major rivers and curves in coastlines.

It's been found that birds can determine directions according to the position of the sun. Many bird species seem to have "internal clocks" enabling them to behave as if they were making mental calculations with regard to the time of day and the position of the sun and hence the direction to fly. The classic experiment proving the internal clock theory was done by German Gustav Kramer in the 1950's. He placed caged Starlings wanting to migrate so that they could see the sun. The birds would sit looking in the direction they wanted to fly. Significantly, if the Starlings couldn't see the sun they didn't face any particular direction.

Also during the 1950's a similar experiment with birds that could and could not see the night stars gave the same results. Experiments with Mallards found that if the moon is so bright that important stars are hidden by the glare, released ducks can't orient themselves as well as on darker, moonless nights.

Can birds orient themselves relative to the earth's magnetic field? During the early 1970's Keeton did a series of elegant experiments to get the answer. On the backs of one group of pigeons he glued small, non-magnetic brass bars. On the backs of a similar group he glued miniature magnets which he thought might disrupt the Earth's magnetic field in the vicinity of the birds. When released at locations the birds had never seen before, the pigeons without the magnets found their way home much better than those with magnets.

Recently scientists found tiny iron-oxide crystals in the skin lining of the upper beak of homing pigeons, laid out in a three dimensional pattern in a way that the birds might be able to sense the Earth's magnetic field independent of their motion and posture, and thus identify their geographical position.

Therefore, certain birds can definitely use the sun, stars, the Earth's magnetic field, and who knows what else, to find their way home. Once they're very close to home they probably use local landmarks, and navigate to their very nests the way a human might, though that's just an anthropomorphic guess.

Very much is not known about bird migration. Only relatively few species have been studied. Also it must be assumed that migrating birds use more than one method, probably using the technique that feels most accurate at the time.

I value my garden more for being full of blackbirds than of cherries, and very frankly give them fruit for their songs.

~Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, 1712

Saturday, May 30, 2009: The field trip to the Bandy Ranch near Upsata Lake was a joint venture with the Native Plant Society. John Pierce was the botanist on the trip who shared his plant expertise and answered the multiple plant questions from the participants. At the turnoff from highway 200 onto the dirt road along cottonwood Creek, there was a trumpeter swan in a flooded section of the creek. We had sandhill cranes and a rufous hummingbird at a stop by the ranch. However, agricultural activities had impacted the bobolink habitat and none were found. We stopped at Upsata Lake and hiked around a cattail marsh. There was a sandhill crane on a nest in the marsh and scolding robins lead us to a great horned owl. When we returned to the lake, we spotted 2 common loons. After lunch, we hiked into a large reservoir which is used for irrigation on the ranch. There were 23 people on the field trip and I recorded 53 birds. The plant people were also happy with the native plants.

June 13-14, 2009: The two-day field trip to Bannack and Clark Canyon Reservoir was led by Nate Kohler. Ten people from Missoula met Nate in Melrose at the Salmonfly Fishing Access. After birding the fishing access, we headed East along Camp Creek which is a dry canyon with a nice riparian zone. Birds along this stretch included lark sparrow, Say's phoebe, prairie falcon, Lazuli bunting, rock wren, yellow-breasted chat, and green-tailed towhee. We then visited an area north of Dillon and found at least 2 burrowing owls, a few McCown's longspurs and several horned larks. We stayed in Dillon on Saturday night and drove to the Bannack area early Sunday morning. Birds along Grasshopper Creek included least flycatcher, red-naped sapsucker, wood duck, and northern waterthrush. We then drove a dirt road towards Grant which was marginal due to the rain it received the day before. The habitat along this road was mostly sage brush that contained quality birds such as gray flycatcher, sage thrasher, loggerhead shrike, and sage sparrow. At Clark Canyon Reservoir, there was a common loon, white pelicans, western grebes, and a few California gulls. We then birded the upper end of the reservoir along an old road to the town of Armisted, which was flooded when the reservoir was filled in 1959. There were a large number of yellow-rumped warblers and western tanagers foraging in the willows. We also had marsh wrens and a few Franklin's gulls. We had 99 species on the trip.

Saturday, June 27, 2009: Seven people joined the author for a 5-mile hike up Mt. Sentinel, down the Hellgate Canyon Trail and back on the Kim Williams Trail. We had excellent looks at spotted towhee, Lazuli bunting, western tanager, mountain chickadee, ruby-crowned kinglet, orange-crowned warbler, yellow-rumped warbler, and Cassin's vireo. The best bird of the trip was a rock wren which was singing on territory just below the access road to the "M". It is the first time I have ever encountered a rock wren on the West-facing slope of Mt. Sentinel. Other birds that were heard included hermit and Swainson's thrushes, Cordilleran flycatcher, warbling vireo, and Vesper sparrow. We had 32 species.

July 9,10,11,12, 2009: The 4-day field trip was neatly perfect in every way; weather, scenery, quality and quantity of birds, evening meals, and camaraderie. In other words, "it doesn't get any better than this". The 9 people who participated on the trip were Paul & Beth Loehnen, Keith Geller (Seattle birder), Dick & Bunny Haines, Mary Thomas, Elizabeth Johnston, Rose Leach, and the author. The group assembled at the St. Mary Campground on Thursday afternoon for dinner and some evening birding around the campground and the St. Mary River. On Friday morning, we birded the Many Glacier area by hiking along Swiftcurrent Lake and Lake Josephine to Grinnell Lake, and back. The best bird was a Tennessee warbler which we heard in 3 locations, and got a scope view of one near the parking lot. On the return drive from Many Glacier, the author and Beth saw a grizzly bear along the shoreline of Lake Sherburne. Other mammals seen on the trip included deer, mountain sheep, mountain goat, moose, and black bear. After an early dinner at the St. Mary Campground, we birded a trail that went by an old Ranger Station and a beaver pond, and returned by the Red Eagle Lake Trail. The best bird was a great gray owl which was spotted by Keith. On Saturday, we birded about 3.5 miles up the Red Eagle Lake Trail and about 2 miles up the trail from

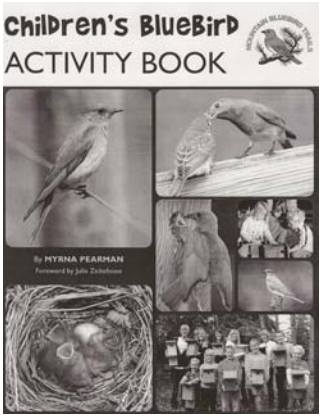
Siyeh Bend. Then we drove over Logan Pass to the Fish Creek Campground. I was delighted to discover that the Inside North Fork Road was open. It had been closed for the previous two years because a portion had slide off the mountain. As a result of the road being open, we were able to bird the Camas Creek and Howe Lake Trails. At Camas Creek, we flushed a Le Conte's sparrow and we were able to get a close-up scope view of the bird. A second Le Conte's sparrow was heard in the same meadow. At Howe Lake, we found a pair of common loons that were feeding a juvenile while a second juvenile floated nearby. On the return trip, we investigated some scolding by robins and found a northern hawk owl. Other noteworthy birds seen on the trip included pine grosbeak, clay-colored sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow, brown creeper, northern goshawk, northern 3-toed woodpecker, and Wilson's warbler. On the drive into the park on Thursday, Rose, Mary and Elizabeth watched a Harlequin duck feeding in the swift current of McDonald Creek. I estimated that we hiked 31 miles in the park and documented 94 bird species.

Montana Audubon Board Visits IBA
by Jim Brown

The Montana Audubon fall Board meeting will be in Missoula on September 11-12. Friday afternoon will be devoted to discussing the Important Bird Area (IBA) program in Montana and showcasing the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley IBA. Board members will tour a portion of this IBA to view the habitat and discuss conservation achievements over the past several years. For a quick update, since last spring we have conducted bird surveys in much of the IBA. A first impression from the data is that the breeding population of Lewis's Woodpecker is doing well but that Willow Flycatcher numbers are down. Both species are on the National Audubon Watchlist. Bird surveys on a large ranch west of Frenchtown were a big help to Five Valleys Land Trust in acquiring recent approval for grant funding to purchase a conservation easement on 750 acres. Chapter members are welcome to attend the Board meeting at Ruby's Inn beginning at 1 pm Friday and 9 am Saturday.

Children's Bluebird Activity Book
By Bob Niebuhr and Kathy Heffernan

In the 1970's, Art Aylesworth and other bluebird enthusiasts organized *Mountain Bluebird Trails* (MBT), an organization dedicated to the recovery of bluebirds in Montana and surrounding states. Education about bluebirds and other cavity nesters is a vital element in MBT's mission. Grade school teachers have been a key group requesting information. So when MBT received a generous donation from the Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation, the MBT Board decided to create a book specifically targeted to children in grades two through six.



Myrna Pearman, the author of the *Mountain Bluebird Trail Monitoring Guide*, teamed with Pauline Mousseau, a graphic designer, to produce *Children's Bluebird Activity Book*. This fun and educational book is posted on the MBT website (www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com). The colorful book is 40 pages long. It can be printed off the website at no cost. The book is filled with fascinating facts, color photos, puzzles, stories, bluebird house plans, and pictures to color.

The book is written at the 4th grade level, but teachers working with younger children can read the book to them. Mountain Bluebirds are featured, but the book contains material on all three species of Montana bluebirds as well as other cavity nesting birds. Great gift for children and grandchildren!

Print a book off the web or (if you want to save your color cartridge) pick up a bound book at the Montana Natural History Center @ 120 Hickory for $5. Also available from MBT for $9 (includes shipping and handling). Make check payable to Mountain Bluebird Trails and mail to: Bob Niebuhr, 600 Central Ave., Ste. 320, Great Falls, MT 59401.

Bob Niebuhr is a past president of MBT. Kathy Heffernan is local coordinator for MBT and 5 Valleys Audubon member.

Bob's Books Submitted by Bill Gabriel

In the fall of 2008 Bob Conway generously gave 32 like-new books about birds to Five Valleys Audubon Society with instructions that we hold a book raffle and devote the proceeds to the Philip L. Wright Memorial Endowment for student research. The FVAS Board gratefully accepted Bob's gift, but decided that a series of silent auctions, where people could bid for the books they most wanted, might be more equitable than a raffle. Accordingly, we offered six or seven books in a silent auction at each meeting from December to May.

Allison Easterling and Bill Gabriel each added a book, bringing the total to 34. The auctions drew 68 bids, for 33 books, and a total of $431.00 for the endowment. We appreciate the gifts, the participation of so many people, and the money. Thank you all.

New Members:

Charles K. Allen
Donna Finstad
Gene & Carole Kammerman
Margaret Scranton
Matt Stergios
W. D. Cambridge
Donald & Darlee Hjelmseth
Bob & Sharon Kortuem
George A. Seielstad
Tom & Susan Roy
Philip D. Difani
Mitch & Mary Jones
Kitty Mc Guin
Beth Seitz
Christine C. White
Linnea Faber
George Mullen
Judy Smith
Lyn Wicks

Returning Members

Tony & Marlene Beltramo
Pelah Hoyt
Mary J. Mc Allister
Stella Roberts
Kathy Steen
Sara Boyett
Judith Hutchins
Margaret Moffatt
George A. Seielstad
Jeff P. Stickney
Cyndy Braun
Bob Kane
David C. Moomey
Jessie Sherburne
Eileen Mike Zak
Phillip Fandozzi
Mary Langenderfer
Charla Murray
Bradley L. Stacey

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

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807
http://www.fvamissoula.org

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
MISSOULA, MT
59807
PERMIT NO. 490

TO:

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

FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS:				
President	Paul Loehnen	11556 Bench Road, Missoula, MT 59808	721 – 7517	loehnen@bigsky.net
Vice President	Gerhard Knudsen	4400 Scott Allen Dr, Missoula, MT 59803	251 – 2765	gmk@bresnan.net
Secretary	Char Murray	50 Brookside Way, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5223	murray555@bresnan.net
Treasurer	Alex Taft	951 Ronald Ave, apt. 109, Missoula, MT 59801	218 – 8438	alextaft9@msn.com
DIRECTORS:				
2006-2009	Bill Ballard	5120 Larch Ave, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5097	wballard@onewest.net
2007-2010	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807	544 – 1060	goren@marsweb.com
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	Jeb Minarik	4705 Potter Park Loop, Missoula, 59808	529 – 2884	jminarik78@yahoo.com
COMMITTEES:				
Member Records	Vick Applegate	303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803	549 – 0027	k7vk@arrl.net
Membership Promotion	Vacant			
Program	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807	544 – 1060	goren@marsweb.com
Conservation Advocacy	Vick Applegate	303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803	549 – 0027	k7vk@ arrl.net
Habitat Protection & Restore	Jim Brown	1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
Field Activities	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
Publicity	Poody McLaughlin	1629 Douglas Dr., Missoula, MT 59808	543 – 4860	pmcregan@bresnan.net
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
Newsletter Editor	Bev Orth Geoghegan	3130 Corlear Ave, Bronx, NY 10463	(406) 750 – 0149	orthbev@hotmail.com
Newsletter Circulation	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5706	
Web Site	Clare Kelly	2909 Highwood Dr, Missoula, MT 59803	251 – 7207	
Archivist	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5706	
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	woodsy@onewest.net

---

MONTANA AUDUBON – PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624 (406) 443-3949 www.mtaudubon.org

Executive Director:	Steve Hoffman	shoffman@mtaudubon.org	Board President:	Larry McEvoy	mcschmid@mcn.net
Program Director:	Janet Ellis	jellis@mtaudubon.org	Director of Education:	Paul Belanger	pbelanger@mtaudubon.org
Office Manager:	Loreene Reid	lreid@mtaudubon.org	Global Warming Advisor:	Amy Cilimburg	amy@mtaudubon.org