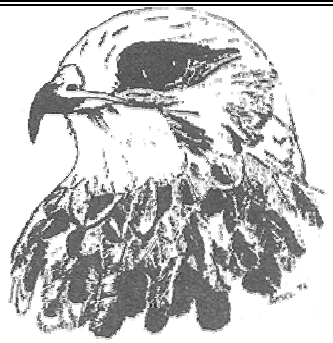
September 2010

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

*** Tuesday, September 7th, 7pm:** Jim Brown will host the board meeting.
*** Saturday, September 11th:** Full-day field trip to Ninepipes & Kicking Horse. Meet at 8:00 AM in the middle of the UM field house parking lot.
*** Saturday, September 11th:** The 10th Annual Mission Valley Hat Party. See page three for details.
*** Friday, September 17th:** Submission deadline for the October edition of the *Birding Observer*.
*** Saturday, October 2nd:** Full-day field trip to Flesher Pass to visit Rob Domenech's raptor banding site. 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, but Rob may transport people on ATVs. Good hiking shoes are a must and dress appropriately for the weather conditions. The trip will be limited to 10 people. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email at bwsgenea@onlinemt.com.
*** Wednesday, October 13th:** Pint Night at the Kettlehouse. See page two for details.

The Yellowstone Trumpeter Swan: Lessons from the Past, Predictions for the Future

Insights into the ecology of the Red Rock Lakes and Yellowstone Trumpeter Swan will be the topic of the chapter's first fall program on Monday, September 13 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level) on the University of Montana campus.

Terry McEneaney has spent 28 years studying this most iconic bird of Yellowstone National Park. He will cover the storied history and background, nesting and wintering ecology, management, conservation, and predictions for the future of the Trumpeter Swan in the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem.

Terry is a retired Ornithologist for Yellowstone National Park. Combined with his work as Biologist at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, he has 42 years of field experience in the Greater Yellowstone area. He is very familiar with Montana, having lived and worked in 13 towns throughout the state. Terry has returned to reside in Missoula after 37 years, but maintains a home and wildlife guiding business out of Gardiner, Montana.

He has authored three books (*Birds of Yellowstone*, *The Uncommon Loon*, and *Birding Montana*) and has written articles for *National Geographic*, *Birding*, *North American Birds* and *Smithsonian*. He is a guide for the world bird tour company Field Guides (Austin, Texas), and has a part-time guiding business, Yellowstone Wildlife Guides. For more information visit his websites www.ravenidiot.com for birds and www.yellowstonewildlifeguides.com for wildlife.

Peeps from the Board by Jim Brown

It is my turn to "peep" so I thought I would tell you about our recent efforts to protect important bird habitat. In Montana critical habitats especially involve wetlands and grasslands. The Clark Fork River--Grass Valley Important Bird Area has been the focus of our efforts. This 25,000-acre area includes riparian, wetland, and grassland habitats that provide homes to a dozen or so species of conservation concern. Although the IBA has been the focus of our work, we have expanded our efforts to adjacent areas and other important bird habitats in Missoula County.

We completed a 5-year re-survey of breeding birds in the IBA and extended the surveys to several adjacent areas as well. One highlight was the observation of 55 nesting pairs of Lewis's Woodpeckers in the IBA. Such a strong showing of this National Audubon Society Watchlist species reaffirms the main reason this IBA was classified as a Continental Level IBA. Importantly, our surveys were conducted on several private farms and ranches where we were able to encourage long term conservation of bird habitat. A big thank you goes to the bird observers: Vick Applegate, William Boggs, Jim Brown, Amy Cilimburg, Bill Gabriel, Cynthia Hudson, Elizabeth Johnston, Gerhard Knudsen, Paul Loehnen, Poody McLaughlin, Joe Regan, Terry Toppins, and Larry Weeks.

One species of conservation concern found in and around the IBA is the Swainson's Hawk. We are fortunate to have a small nesting population of this grassland dependent raptor in the greater Missoula Valley. In Montana it is primarily found in the extensive grasslands east of the continental divide. Our Chapter supported Rob Domenech and his Raptor View Research Institute to do a study of Swainson's Hawk nest sites and nesting success so we can monitor what is happening with this fragile population. The Swanson's Hawk gets along well with people activity but must have grasslands and agricultural lands where it can forage for small rodents, the main food for raising their young. We want the Missoula community to know about the Swainson's Hawk and other raptors such as the Long-eared Owl that depend on grasslands in the Missoula Valley. We plan to advocate for conservation of grasslands and agricultural lands that are threatened with development.

This spring Gary Knudsen and I examined a subdivision proposal for 59 lots on 200 acres along Blanchard Creek near Clearwater Junction. We thought that the proposed development called for too much development in the riparian habitat zone. Gary drafted a letter explaining our concerns that we submitted to the Missoula County Office of Planning and Grants. We expect to testify at a County Commissioner Hearing about our recommendation to reduce the number of lots (probably about 12) to protect the riparian habitat.

If you have birded with Larry Weeks at Smurfit Stone you have probably looked across the Clark Fork River to search for a Peregrine Falcon and White-throated Swifts in the rocky cliffs. Besides these species, the area around the cliffs supports a diversity of neotropic migrant songbirds such as Cordilleran and Hammond's Flycatchers, Warbling and Cassin's Vireos, Lazuli Bunting, Western Tanager and four species of warblers, all observed by Terry Toppins this June. This important habitat is owned by Plum Creek Timber Company. We have been exploring with Plum Creek, U.S. Forest Service, Nature Conservancy and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks how protection of this area might be achieved. It will take considerable funding to acquire this significant habitat and place it in ownership where protection is guaranteed. We plan to continue pursuing a conservation solution here but expect it will require a long term effort.

Pint Night at the Kettlehouse

Enjoy good beer?
Want to raise money for Five Valleys Audubon?

Then mark your calendars and plan to come to our Pint Night at the Kettlehouse North* on Wednesday October 13th.

For every pint of beer served that night between 5pm and 8pm The Kettlehouse will donate 50¢ to Five Valleys Audubon. So, you might want to invite some friends along!

* 313 N 1st St W, Missoula

The 10th Annual Mission Valley Hat Party

The 10th Annual Mission Valley Hat Party is Saturday, September 11th, at the Owl Research Institute! All Auduboners and friends are welcome!

The Hat Party begins at 4 p.m. with live music. Food service starts at 5:30. The bands continue till midnight, with three groups on the play schedule. Campfire music continues into the morning! A $20 donation provides you with all-you-can-eat barbecue: pork and beef brisket, pasta and green salads, pies and pastries, beer and wine, and soft drinks. You are also guaranteed a spot for overnight camping (both trailers and tents).

Don't forget your hat—the more creative, the better! Forgetting a hat will cost you $5. An especially creative hat could win you a prize.

The address is Ninepipes Center,
35490 Ninepipes Lane, Charlo, MT 59824. Signs are posted at intersections near the Hat Party.

From Missoula:
Take 93 N to mile marker 40.
Turn LEFT on Olsen Road and go 2 miles W.
Turn RIGHT at first four-way intersection (Ninepipe Road) and go 1 mile N.
Take first LEFT on Ninepipe Lane and go ½ mile.
The party is at first farm on RIGHT.

Hi Friends! Go Green!

View your ***Birding Observer*** newsletter even sooner, only **on-line**.

Just send us an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrl.net.

We will alert you each month when the newsletter becomes available on-line.
You can find the Five Valleys Audubon web site at: http://www.fvamissoula.org/

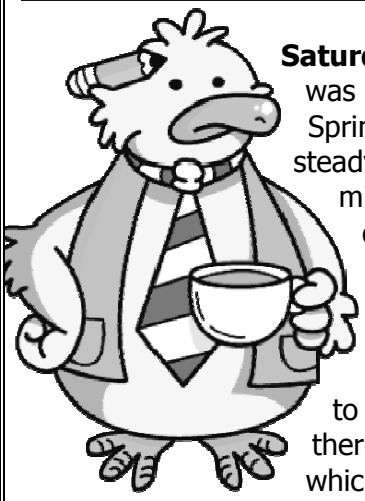
Students Teach 2nd Graders about Bluebirds

During a May 26th field trip, ten Sentinel High School biology students introduced twenty second-graders to bluebirds. The older students were enrolled in Mrs. Heffernan's Biology class. In preparation for teaching the younger students, the biology class spent the previous two weeks researching the ecology of Waterworks Hill. They learned about plants, mammals and birds and prepared visual aids. They spent an afternoon monitoring nest boxes. On another afternoon, they role-played presentations. On the day of the field trip, the biology students met Mrs. Loewenwarter's second grade at Rattlesnake School and hiked with them to Waterworks Hill. On the hill, the students divided into three groups. The older students described the plants and animals of Waterworks Hill, including bluebirds. Then they led the younger students to several bluebird boxes and quietly showed the children the eggs or nestlings inside. Both second graders and parent volunteers were entranced by the bluebird babies and eggs. The students were also able to meet the weed-eating sheep that were grazing the hill that day along with friendly but hard-working sheepdogs.

After saying goodbye to the second graders at Rattlesnake School, the biology students were able to make a side trip to observe Great Horned owlets on a nest.

Sophomore Mikayla S. reported that the field trip reinforced her desire to become a teacher. Sophomore SaNia S. described the second graders as "cool" and thought the field trip was a positive learning experience for both groups.

Field Trips by Larry Weeks



Saturday, May 29, 2010: It was a soggy day along the Spring Creek trail. It rained steady for almost the entire 4-mile hike. The rain had a detrimental impact on the bird activity and there was very little singing. I couldn't even get the birds to respond to a taped call. However, there was one exception which we referred to as the Maxwell House bird because it sounded like the Maxwell House ditty; weazy, weazy, seesee. Several of us had listened to Dick Hutto's lecture on warblers and remembered his reference to the Maxwell House ditty. However, none of us could remember the warbler. After the field trip, I emailed Hutto and he reported back that the Maxwell House bird was the Townsend's warbler. There was a very vocal wild turkey on Strawberry Ridge and the ruffed grouse were drumming. And we did encounter one mixed feeding flock that included Townsend's and yellow-rumped warblers, Cassin's vireos, chipping sparrows, western tanagers, black-capped chickadees, and red-breasted nuthatches. The thrushes were well represented with American robin, Swainson's thrush and Townsend's solitaire. Other birds included Cordilleran and Hammond's flycatchers, MacGillivray's warbler, golden-crowned kinglet, and warbling vireo. Six people participated and we tallied 20 species.

June 19 & 20, 2010: The 2-day field trip to Freezout Lake and surrounding areas was blessed with perfect weather and excellent birds. The first stop at Freezout involved a hike along a dike that extends out into the lake where the Clark's grebes nest. Not only were the Clark's and western grebes present, we saw 2 black-crowned night-herons, American pelicans, common terns, and a good collection of ducks. On the return trip along the dike, we were astounded with a 5 minute look at an American bittern that was foraging in the open. We then followed the interior roads to the North and we found a second American bittern in a classic pose but with its head and neck above the habitat. We stopped where the road goes between two ponds and found Wilson's phalaropes, black-necked stilts, American avocets, a marbled godwit, and a great egret. At the second outhouse, we found Caspian terns and 3 snow geese that apparently decided not to migrate North. We then checked the Mud Road on the North end of the lake, but we were stopped by the "gumbo". We walked down the road in search of the chestnut-collared longspurs, but had to turn back when our shoes picked up about 5 lbs of clay. Some of us found a willet but we didn't locate the longspurs until we got back to the parked cars. In a grove of large shrubs, we found 13 common nighthawks that were perched on horizontal limbs. We also found several Swainson's hawks perched in trees or sitting on nests. The last stop on Saturday was at a wet, grassy meadow along Bellevue Road which had bobolinks. We failed to find McCown's longspurs along Bellevue Rd. on Saturday, but found them on Sunday. As we approached the Pine Butte Preserve, we found alder flycatcher, sandhill crane and clay-colored sparrow. A stop at the Eureka Reservoir produced a common merganser with young and a red-necked grebe, but no least flycatcher. We then drove to the Bynum Reservoir and found 2 juvenile Ferruginous hawks on a large nest in a dead cottonwood. The reservoir had ring-billed, California, Franklin's, and Bonaparte's gulls. Ten people participated on Saturday and six people on Sunday. One hundred species were recorded.

July 8 - 11, 2010: The weather for this year's Glacier Campout was great with warm temperatures, lots of sunshine and little wind. We lucked out because the 4-day trip was preceded by cool, wet weather and followed by strong winds. The group consisted of Rose Leach, Cynthia Hudson, Jerry Dirnberger, Joyce & Mike Nave, Bunny & Dick Haines, Judy & Byron Olson, Catherine & Cliff Goodman, and the author. Alexis Volkerts and Russ Fletcher caught up with the group on Saturday. Things got started Thursday afternoon with a group dinner at St. Mary Campground which was followed by birding around the campground and by St. Mary River. On Friday, we drove to Many Glacier and had a welcoming committee of a cow and calf moose. On the trail to Grinnell Lake, we got a Tennessee warbler within

200 yards of the parking lot. Birds along the shoreline of Lake Josephine included fox sparrow, MacGillivray's warbler, northern waterthrush, Lincoln's sparrow, and Cordilleran flycatcher. An immature golden eagle was soaring near the mountain tops. After lunch at Grinnell Lake, some of us hiked the trail on the opposite side of Lake Josephine while 4 people rode the boats back to the Many Glacier Lodge. We then returned to the St. Mary Campground for an early dinner. After dinner, we hiked a 3-mile loop that included a historic ranger station, a beaver pond and part of the Red Eagle Lake trail. Birds on this hike included red-naped sapsucker, sora, bufflehead, common nighthawk, olive-sided flycatcher, and an unidentified owl that flew away from us through the old burn. As we neared the parked cars, we heard a common loon giving its tremolo call on St. Mary Lake. On Saturday morning, we hiked the Red Eagle Lake trail again and had good looks at clay-colored and Savannah sparrows, mountain bluebird, and Lazuli bunting. At 12 noon, we met Alexis and Russ at Siyeh Bend for a hike towards Piegan Pass. That hike yielded hermit thrush, winter wren, mountain chickadee, and pine grosbeak. Two of the couples were pulling trailers and had to travel to the West side via highway 2. We stopped at Logan Pass on the way to the Fish Creek Campground but birding was limited due to the 90% snow cover. However, Jerry did see an American pipit on his stop. Rose and Cynthia found a female Harlequin duck with young on McDonald Creek, On Sunday, we hiked the Howe Lake trail first because 2 people needed to return to Missoula by 4:00 PM, and I knew that hike would be the best chance for northern hawk owl. As we approached the first lake, we located one adult and one juvenile hawk owl. Everybody got several scope views of both birds. Shortly after continuing up the trail, we spotted 2 hawk owls which could have been the same birds. At one point, one of the owls was hanging upside down from a small branch. There was one adult common loon in the second lake and a ring-necked duck at the first lake. Other birds on the Howe Lake trail included Wilson's warbler and brown creeper. The hike on the Camas Creek trail was not very productive and the meadow was very wet. We did not find the LeConte's sparrow. The only new birds were a pair of sandhill cranes and an American kestrel. Rose and Cynthia did see 2 black swifts arriving and leaving their nest site at Haystack Creek on their drive to St. Mary on Thursday. The total number of species for the trip was 84. The total miles hiked were approximately 25.

Montana Audubon Bird Festival Field Trips
by Larry Weeks

June 5 & 6, 2010: Montana Audubon held its annual Bird Festival in Missoula this year. A major part of that Festival included 15 field trips on Saturday and 15 field trips on Sunday. One of the Sunday field trips was a 2-day trip to the Big Hole and Bannack area with an overnight stay in Dillon. I had the field trip leaders keep a list of birds seen on each field trip and then I compiled a bird list for the Festival. The number of bird species seen by all the field trips was 186. To put that number in prospective, the Big Day record for the whole State of Montana is 192. The trip to Smurfit-Stone saw the only northern pintail and Bonaparte's gull. Terry Toppins' trip to Lolo Pass saw the only spruce grouse and varied thrush. Kate Stone's trip to the Bitterroot IBA East of Florence saw the only gray partridge, Say's phoebe and lark sparrow. Gary Swant's trip to the Warm Springs Ponds saw the only black-crowned night-heron, white-faced ibis and common tern. Paul Hendrick's trip on the Sam Braxton trail saw the only sharp-shinned hawk. Kate Stone's trip to Glenn Lake (Bitterroot Selway Wilderness) saw the only northern goshawk. Jim Brown's trip to Brown's Lake had the only black tern. Pat Little and Denver Holt's trip to Ninepipes had the only long-eared and short-eared owls, canyon wren, and common grackle. Elaine Caton's trip to Upsata Lake and Monture Creek had the only rufous hummingbird. Ty Smucker and Megan Fylling's trip to the Bison Range had the only yellow-breasted chat. Sherry Ritter's 2-day trip to the Big Hole and Bannack area had the only burrowing owl, great gray owl, gray flycatcher, rock wren, sage thrasher, sage sparrow, white-throated sparrow, and McCown's and Chestnut-collared longspurs. The other field trip leaders included Jim Sparks, Brian Williams, Rose Leach, Bill Boggs, Rob Domenech, Jim Story, Amy Cilimburg, Cynthia Hudson, Dan Casey, Sue Reel, Dick Hutto, Jerry Covault, and Virginia Vincent. My thanks to all these leaders for donating their time and expertise to the Festival.

National Audubon Society's Response to the Gulf Oil Spill

With a century-long legacy of conservation in the Gulf Coast region, Audubon was quick to respond to the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster. Our Louisiana Coastal Initiative and Mississippi River Initiative staff were first on the scene to assess the impacts and help guide and coordinate the emergency response. Shortly thereafter, Audubon's Oil Spill Volunteer Response Center opened its doors in Moss Point, Mississippi. The facility is a hub for a range of critical response activities, from assisting with oiled and injured bird transportation to to monitoring the spill's impacts to protecting beach-nesting bird colonies to making nets, cages and other materials used in bird rescue. Many volunteers are helping to assess the impacts of the spill on birds through the Coastal Bird Survey – a new program that will help guide and inform long-term recovery efforts. Thanks to our grassroots network of concerned Americans and the thousands of concerned people who contacted Audubon to volunteer, we are making a difference now – and will continue to do so long into the future.

Audubon is:

- Contributing scientific expertise to state and federal disaster-response teams.
- Recruiting and coordinating thousands of volunteers to aid in wildlife rescue, clean-up and support of heroic emergency responders through our recently launched Volunteer Response Center in Mississippi.
- Guiding response efforts toward Important Bird Areas needing special protection.
- Training and organizing citizen scientists to capture vital population and habitat impact information through a new Coastal Bird Survey initiative, which will provide Audubon with data to guide long-term recovery planning and conservation.
- Leading long-term restoration of the vulnerable, diverse Gulf Coast ecosystem.
- Alerting the public to risks to birds and fragile resources.
- Working for safer energy solutions.
- Advocating for emergency-response funding and supporting sound public policy.

Birds at Risk

The oil spill occurred at the height of breeding season, with dire implications for many species. The following is a list of some of the birds at risk.

- Brown Pelican
- Least Tern
- Royal Tern
- Sandwich Tern
- Caspian Tern
- Laughing Gull
- Black Skimmer
- American Oystercatcher
- Wilson's Plover
- Snowy Plover
- Roseate Spoonbill
- White Ibis
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Reddish Egret
- Mottled Duck
- Clapper Rail
- Seaside Sparrow

For more information on how the oil spill is affecting bird species, please visit the National Audubon Society web site: www.audubon.org.

Writers Wanted

The Five Valleys Audubon Society encourages everyone to submit articles to our newsletter. In addition to articles about birds, we would greatly appreciate articles of conservation and scientific interest. You may submit articles up to ¾ of a page in length, in the form of paragraphs and/or a bulleted list of points. You may also submit photos; however, they must be sent electronically.

Please submit articles via email to our editor, Beverly Orth Geoghegan at orthbev@hotmail.com. And of course, please let the editor know if you any questions. We look forward to hearing from you.

Welcome New Members:

Dorleen Bakke
Ron Dulaney
Allison High
Roberta McIver
Patricia Stice
K. Thompson
Phyllis Wight

Barry Brown
David Emmons
Karla Long
Charla Murray
Susan C. Stubblefield
Aaron Toder

Bill Chilcote
Eamon E. Fahey
Dick Mangan
Rosemary Oechsli
E. Tande
Dr. Gary F. Walter

Thanks to our Returning Members:

Charles K. Allen
Rose Marie Bradshaw
Mary B. Hamilton
Donna Love
Jeannie Siegler
Dr. Gary Webber

Tony & Marlene Beltramo
Cyndy Braun
Susan Heagy
Mavis McKelvey
Jim & Rebecca Sparks
Richard & Adele Wolff

William Boggs
Susan Doores
Cynthia Hudson
Arlie G. Peterson
Stephen F. Speckart

Sara Boyett
Nancy Erickson
Ada Kelley
Tom & Susan Roy
John Swanson

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

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 a one-year membership for an individual or family

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. **C0Z N53 0Z**

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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