September 2015

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Tuesday, September 8th, 7:00pm:** The September board meeting will be held at Rose Leach's home, located at 4600 Edgewood Drive, Missoula, 7:00-9:00 pm.
- **Saturday September 12th**: Community @ the Confluence Program, in cooperation with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and Friends of Two Rivers, 1-5 p.m. Meet at the Overlook on Deer Creek Road to learn about the continuing Clark Fork River restoration and the new trails at the new Milltown State Park. There will be a series of guided walks with experts on different aspects of the Park. Participants thus far include:
  - Doug Martin (Montana Natural Resource Damage Program) River Restoration at Milltown
  - Rose Leach (Audubon) – Birds in the Riparian area and Wetlands
  - Jamie Jonkel (MT FWP) – Animals on the Move: Wildlife Migration Corridors at Milltown
  - Deb Fassnacht (Watershed Education Network)
  - Clayhill Singers, a tribal dance group from the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

  For more information, contact Michael Kustudia at Milltown State Park, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - Region Two, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804, 406-542-5533 or 406-829-8697 (cell).

- **Monday, September 14th**, 7:30pm: UM professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program, Erick Greene, will discuss birds' communication systems at our September program meeting. The meeting will take place on the first floor of the Gallagher Business Bldg, Room 122, on the UM campus. **Please see details on page 2.*
- **Tuesday, September 15th**: Submission deadline for the October edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, September 19, 2015:** All-day field trip to Ninepipes and Kicking Horse Reservoirs. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 8:00 am.
- **Saturday, September 19th**: Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Saturday, October 3, 2015**: Five-hour field trip to the old Smurfit-Stone Plant to look for late migrating shorebirds and early winter arrivals. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 8:30am or at the intersection of Mullan Road and Pulp Mill Road at 9:00am.
- **Saturday, October 10, 2015**: All-day field trip to Rob Domenech's golden eagle banding sites west of Lincoln. RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED. The trip will involve steep 2-mile hikes to reach the banding stations. The trip will be limited to 9 participants; 6 will go to the Nora Ridge site and 3 will be going to the Roger's Pass site. Participants will meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 6:00am. For more information and to make a reservation, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or 540-3064.

September Program Meeting
It's tough being a hawk - Early warning systems about danger in the woods

The chapter's new year begins with our meeting Monday, September 14, at which Erick Greene will discuss bird alarm calls and communication systems. Join us at 7:30 p.m. in Gallagher Business Building room 122 (on the first floor) on the UM campus. Birds use sounds to communicate lots of information to each other: they sing to defend territories and attract mates; they make many different types of chirps to keep in contact with their mates, offspring, and other members of large flocks. Birds are also good at detecting predators and have a variety of alarm calls that they produce to warn others. These alarm calls can convey very specific information (e.g. "snake," "perched raptor," "flying raptor"). It turns out that many species of birds (and mammals) understand the alarm signals of others. Together, all the watching eyes and ears in the forest form a complex communication network that acts as an early warning system about predators. These alarm systems make it very difficult for hawks and other predators to move unannounced. Dr. Greene's talk will share some of the latest results of cutting-edge research about how birds and mammals share information about predators.

Erick Greene is a professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program. He grew up in Quebec, Canada, with twin passions for music and nature. He first got interested in early music of the Renaissance and Baroque, and then later in jazz. Erick dropped out of high school and lived for a year in the Galapagos Islands, helping out on studies on Darwin's Finches. He then studied seabirds for five summers with the Canadian Wildlife Service. He received an undergraduate degree from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and later, a PhD from Princeton University. Erick has been able to combine his interests in music and biology by studying how animals use sounds to communicate with each other. These studies in bioacoustics show that animals convey a fantastic amount of information with their vocalizations.

An interesting article, "When Birds Squawk, Other Birds Seem to Listen," appeared in the New York Times on May 18 featuring much of this work by Dr Greene.

Peeps From The Board: Summary of Five Valleys Audubon Accomplishments, 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2015
by Rose Leach

Your Chapter and Board have been busy this year implementing our many planning goals. Chief among them are activities related to conservation, education, habitat protection, and land-use planning. Here is what we have accomplished. If you would like to be more involved in these activities, or in shaping the Chapter's future activities, please let a Board member know.

- The Chapter purchased 100 vault toilet vent screen covers (for a cost of up to $3,000), to protect birds and wildlife from entering the structures' vent pipes. Details on the screens and the need for them (birds and other wildlife can fly in but cannot get out) are at www.tetonraptorcenter.org/poo---poo---project Many covers were installed at US Forest Service and Fish, Wildlife, and Park sites during spring 2015, with great participation from the membership. For more volunteer opportunities, contact Ed Monnig at 549-0580.
- With MT Audubon, we finalized the site for Festival 2016—Holiday Inn Parkside (downtown Missoula) to be held June 3-5, 2016.
- The Chapter Board voted to help Five Valleys Land Trust with purchasing several Conservation Easements this year. We also prepared a letter of support for a $900,000 grant for the Land Trust. Supporting conservation easements and various forms of land protection is a key part of our mission in our 5-year plan.
- The Chapter Board voted to donate to upgrading the PL Wright Museum at the University of Montana. We took advantage of a 1-to1 matching donation to help our dollars go further. During the past year, the Chapter has been involved in discussions with the University on the pressing need to save the priceless collection from further degradation and deterioration. We hope that our membership will consider making donations as well. Contact-Dan Pletcher, retired chair, Wildlife Biology Program, 543-4865.

- Larry Weeks, our Community Naturalist, presented 38 programs throughout the year.

- Larry taught a combined beginning & intermediate birder's workshop— 40 people attended. Classes cover id skills, taxonomy, birding by ear, conservation, etc., with a variety of speakers and bird skins available. The class met 4 evenings (once per week), plus had one field trip (run twice to break the class up into smaller groups).
- Members completed several bird surveys during the planning period. One survey at a ranch near Hall, MT found over 50 Long-billed Curlews!
- Lead Bullets—the Chapter is working with Kate Stone from Bitterroot Chapter on the non-lead bullet campaign. We helped purchase an informational trunk on the benefits of using non-lead ammunition. We are also approaching local hunter-sportsmen shops to help pay for coupons or some other subsidy mechanism to encourage the use of copper bullets.

Mountain bluebird

- The Chapter received 10 applications for our annual grant program, which disperses funds from our P.L Wright Endowment, and awarded 4 students funds varying from $383 to $1,000 for the 2015 PL Wright scholarship program. Students will report their findings to the Chapter during our monthly meetings.
- Larry attended the Public Lands Rally at the 2015 Legislature.
- June 2015—2 teams conducted Bird-a-thons to raise money for our Chapter's conservation and education activities. We hope to equal or exceed our previous total of approximately $9, 500.
- Similar to past years, the Chapter sponsored Audubon Adventures in the schools during 2014-2015. We will continue this in 2015-16.
- Board members continued to review county subdivision proposals and attended city conservation forums as needed.
- Chapter had the largest number of participants in the state for the annual Christmas Bird Count—93 people! We tallied 83 bird species.
- The Chapter sponsored 18 field trips during the period.

Update from Waterworks Hill
by Kathy Heffernan

After an early, strong start, the bluebirds lost 11 nests in the North Hills of Missoula by late May. Some issues may be lack of insects or cool weather at just the wrong time. However, some missing females and pairs seem to be due to a Sharp-shinned Hawk. We watched it chase the resident Western Bluebird pair in our field. They were able to elude the hawk with help from the neighboring Tree Swallows which turned out to be fierce defenders of the shared territory. Unfortunately, this Western Bluebird pair had already lost their nest to either cold weather or disease. They are staunchly defending their new cedar box. On the bright side, 3 WBB nests have fledged young. Five WBB nests and 4 MBB nests are in progress. We are hopeful to see more successful nests this summer.

On the front lines, watching life and death unfold on the bluebird trail is Ahvi Potticary, a doctoral research student from the University of Arizona. Ahvi is banding all the bluebirds on Waterworks Hill this season. She also monitors nest temperatures with i-buttons. To band the adult birds, Ahvi feeds mealworms to encourage the bluebirds to land on a platform. She then traps them in a humane trap (see photo), then quickly bands and releases them. Ahvi is careful not to unnecessarily stress birds and does not trap or band birds during cool or windy weather. A wildlife biology graduate of the University Montana, Ahvi is happy to be working in Missoula this summer (as opposed to Tucson, AZ where she spends her winters). Previous research had her combing the forests of Borneo for bird nests.

Ahvi Potticary is a real gem. It is great to see brilliant young people like Ahvi becoming ecological researchers.

Welcome New Members

Elaine Brock
Tim & Joy Dye
L Leilani Hadd
Sharon & Rob Holden
Mary McCourt
Stan Moser
Anne Stone
Loretta Wisse
Alice Carroll
Jacqueline Fay
Lynne Hanford
Kathy Lockridge
Carol Miller
Lake Duane Shinn
Janet A. Vaughn
Emily Withnall
Helen Dobell
Sally Friou
Emmy Hartney
Dave & Beverly Loomis
Mary Morrison
Kenneth Stolz
Annette Walker

THE FESTIVAL IS COMING, *THE FESTIVAL IS COMING*

….Yes, from Friday, June 3rd to Sunday, June 5th 2016, the Montana Annual Audubon Festival, *Wings Across the Big Sky,* will be held in Missoula at the Holiday Inn Downtown.

And, YES, we need YOUR HELP. For those of you who have attended other Montana Audubon Bird Festivals, you know that the most successful ones are those that have the greatest support of their club members and the local community. If everyone can volunteer for even a few hours, we can accomplish our mission. Here are a few of the events that you can get involved in, or maybe, you even have a better idea!!

Thursday, June 2nd, as a pre-festival event, a BIG SKY BIRD PHOTO CONTEST is being planned, that will include prize money, exhibits (at local galleries), purchases of the art, and an evening social wine event. And Missoula holds a weekly Downtown Tonight event on Thursday evenings at adjacent Caras Park, with live music and numerous food choices.

Friday, June 3rd, pre-festival events during the day include a METCALF OPEN HOUSE at the refuge, where the Bitterroot Chapter provides classes for beginning and intermediate birders and tours of the refuge. In addition, there is a tour of the real 'western' Montana by visiting Stevensville, Hamilton, and Darby. In the afternoon THE GREAT MONTANA OPTICS RENDEVOUS takes place in the backyard of the Holiday Inn at which vendors (sporting goods stores) show their wares of scopes, binoculars, cameras, and digiscoping products, etc. Registration and the Festival begins in the early evening.

Saturday, June 4th, the Festival schedule includes morning Field Trips and other festival activities; afternoon Educational Events; and the evening Banquet and Dessert Auction. Non-birding attendees may enjoy the Saturday morning Farmers' Markets and Craft Market,and/or shopping and dining downtown or at the Mall. Missoula has free Bus service if needed.

Sunday, June 5th, the festival field trips and other festival activities are in the morning. In the afternoon, a BACK-YARD HABITAT display is open to the public (at a couple of local nurseries) in which visitors learn about the National Wildlife Federation's certification program.

For the *non-birding attendees* there will be a WILDFLOWERS and GARDENS DAY, consisting of walking tours (by the Native Plant Society) along the Kim Williams trail, or Greenough Park, or the L or M trails are available. Visits to Rose Park garden, Ft. Missoula Iris garden, and local nurseries are also options.

Monday, June 6th, the post-festival tours and activities include: TARGETED BIRDING for example, grouse in the forest, woodpeckers in the burn areas, or owl field trips costing $50 to $75 per person lead by local birders plus BIG DAY (5a to 5p) field trips costing $100 per person, for example, one in the Missoula and Mission valleys, one down the Bitterroot valley including Lolo pass, one along the Clark Fork and Beaverhead rivers.

Other possibilities being discussed for post-festival activities include a tour of the MPG ranch, a one-day trip with a local travel agency to Glacier Park (on a Beach bus from Missoula and then on a red bus inside the park), a fly-fishing trip and a white water rafting adventure.

Pursuing Conservation
by Jim Brown and Gerhard Knudsen

We thought readers would be interested in knowing what Five Valleys Audubon is doing to help protect birds and their habitats. Looking back to our origins, The Audubon Society was founded by a need to protect birds from negligent slaughter including the well-known custom of adorning ladies hats with egret feathers. Today the dominating threat to birds is loss of habitat. The goal of the Five Valleys Audubon Chapter Habitat Committee is to influence and bring about conservation of important bird habitats. We do this by explaining the needs of birds and advocating conservation to citizens, landowners, land planners, developers, and government decision makers. Here is a summary of our efforts over the past several years.

- Review subdivision proposals and provide suggestions on how to reduce impacts on critical bird habitat. Since 2007, we have reviewed 67 proposals and submitted comments on 25 (almost 40%). A field visit is often required to formulate reasonable suggestions.
- Participate in Missoula's effort to rewrite its subdivision regulations. Our comments resulted in an important change to the subdivision application procedure.
- Testify at Missoula County Planning Board and County Commissioner hearings to explain our concerns about impacts on bird habitat and emphasize needed measures of mitigation.
- Comment on impacts to birds and their habitat from rezoning proposals, for example proposals to allow gravel extraction and eventual residential and commercial development.
- Participate in Missoula City-County public listening sessions to explain wildlife needs in planning for future population growth and related development.
- Meet with City and County planners to explain where important bird habitat occurs and impacts of development on species of conservation concern. For example we have organized sessions with planners to explain the significance of grasslands to Swainson's Hawk and Long-eared Owl populations in the Missoula Valley and the conservation goals of the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA).
- Provide funding and field assistance for bird-focused research. This has included the study of the small, nesting population of Swainson's Hawks west of Missoula.
- Promote the significance of the Clark Fork River--Grass Valley IBA by visiting with landowners, governmental land managers and citizen groups to discuss bird habitat values and encourage conservation. A noteworthy result was that the IBA was designated a cornerstone in the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan and thereby a priority area for protection using funds from the 2006 open space bond.
- Conduct bird surveys to document bird occurrence, particularly for species of conservation concern, to help demonstrate the need for conservation actions. Contribute funds to help purchase conservation easements where our participation can influence protection of critical habitats.
- Make presentations to interested groups about birds of the Missoula area and conservation efforts that have been accomplished and are still needed or underway. Examples include Lion's Club, Presbyterian Church group, Retired Railroaders, Senior Forum, Missoula History Group.
- Interact with other conservation organizations to seek partnerships in conservation efforts, for example Clark Fork Coalition, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Five Valleys Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation, Montana Audubon, American Bird Conservancy, Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribe, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Hybrid Energy, and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks.

Would You Like to Contribute to Our Newsletter?

The Five Valleys Audubon Society welcomes you to submit articles, announcements and photos for the *Birding Observer*. Articles can focus on any topic that you think would interest Auduboners, such as birds, optics, environmental conservation, local events, nature travel, natural history/science, etc. Articles should not exceed 650 words. Please send your submissions to the editor, Beverly, at orthbev@hotmail.com.

Field trips
by Larry Weeks

American Avocet

Saturday, May 23, 2015: It was a mostly cloudy day with threatening clouds for the Smurfit-Stone field trip but it did not rain. The wind came up in the early afternoon but overall, it was an enjoyable outing. The day got off to a good start with killdeer, spotted sandpipers, an American pipit, and a Say's phoebe. The one pond that is flooded had several Canadian geese with goslings, ruddy ducks, mallards, gadwall, coots, and one eared grebe. While watching the cliffs across the river, a large falcon was in the air and eventually landed on a snag. Although it was a long distance, we identified it as a prairie falcon. There were numerous white-throated swifts flying around the cliffs and a couple of Vaux's swift over the river. A walk through the south habitat produced Bullock's oriole, many Calliope hummingbirds, yellow warblers, song sparrows, a kingfisher, irritated red-tailed hawks because we were near their nest, one cedar waxwing, and a black-headed grosbeak. At the New Wetlands, we had sora, marsh wren, yellow-headed blackbird, and lots of coots. We kept seeing flights of shorebirds during the day but it wasn't until the last stop that we found some Wilson's phalaropes. There were also 3 American avocets at the location. Other interesting birds included one sandhill crane, one Lewis's woodpecker, wood ducks in 3 locations, a young bald eagle on a nest, some young red-tailed hawks on a nest, and a male Barrow's goldeneye that has been staying in the same location for a month. The female Barrow's goldeneye must be nesting nearby. There were 19 people on the trip, and my list for the day included 76 species.

Saturday, June 13, 2015: Six people met Megan Fylling at the main gate to the MPG Ranch at 7:00 AM to observe a bird banding station in the Bitterroot flood plain. Megan works for the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab which is directed by Dr. Erick Greene. We then drove to the banding site where 5 technicians were busy processing captured birds and making net runs to 10 mist nets set up in the riparian habitat. We observed the operation for 3 hours and during that time, the crew handled 21 birds which included 2 yellow warblers, 1 red-naped sapsucker, 6 gray catbirds, 2 American goldfinches, 4 house wrens, 1 brown-headed cowbird, 2 Lazuli buntings, 2 black-capped chickadees, and 1 downy woodpecker. The most interesting aspect was the special study of gray catbirds. They are attaching a tiny GPS unit (only weighs 2 grams) to the backs of the catbirds. The GPS units are programmed to take 8 locations during the year. They must recapture the birds and download the GPS data to determine the birds migration and wintering area. They have recovered 3 GPS units so far. One bird went through Nebraska and wintered in the same bush in Texas. A second bird went through Arkansas and wintered along the gulf coast in Mexico. The third bird also wintered in Mexico. The Bird Ecology Lad also operates 2 other banding stations; the Valley of the Moon in Rock Creek and the Grant-Kohrs Ranch near Deer Lodge. We stopped at the Florence Bridge on the way to the MPG Ranch and found a least flycatcher and a red-eyed vireo. Other birds observed during the trip included 5 sandhill cranes near the banding station, Bullock's oriole, black-headed grosbeak, Lewis's woodpecker, red-tailed hawk, Brewer's blackbird, osprey, and Vesper sparrow.

Canyon Wren

Saturday, June 20, 2015: Rose Leach led a group of 7 birders on the Point of Rocks Historic Trail which is west of Alberton. This hike was discovered by Cynthia Hudson as she explored the country-side near her home in Alberton. This is a very interesting trail which included about 1 mile of the John Mullan Road through a rocky section of Montana and about 1 mile along the old Milwaukee railroad right-of-way. Both sections have several interpretive signs which explain the history of both roads. It is also of interest to birders because it contains canyon wrens. We heard the canyon wren along the Mullan Road and saw them near tunnel #18 on the railroad. We also saw rock wrens in several locations which included a family group of 3 juveniles and at least 1 adult. Other birds of interest included cordilleran flycatchers, several spotted towhees, a clay bank with several holes that were being used by rough-winged and bank swallows, and some Lewis's woodpeckers. The field trip ended with a stop at Bob & Judy Bungarz's home on Remount Road where we saw an immature red-tailed hawk on a nest and American goldfinches and a red crossbill coming to their feeders. Four-legged animals included a black bear spotted by Rose Stoudt on a hillside above Alberton and 3 large muley bucks we spooked while hiking the Mullan Road. We had 41 species for the trip.

July 9-12, 2015: The field trip to Glacier Park included 6 people: Rose Leach, Jean Duncan, Rose Stoudt, Cathy Ream, and Larry Weeks. We spent 2 nights on the east side at St. Mary's Campground and 1 night at the Fish Creek Campground. The group met at the St. Mary's CG on July 9th for dinner. The white-crowned sparrows were a constant presence at the campground. Other birds around the campground included veery, clay-colored sparrow, 2 Caspian terns flying down the St. Mary River, and common loons. On July 10th, the group drove to Many Glacier for a 7-mile round-trip hike into Grinnell Lake. The birding was especially good at the upper end of Lake Josephine. The highlight was a flock of boreal chickadees. Other birds at that location included Tennessee warbler, pine grosbeak, yellow-rumped warbler, northern waterthrush, and willow flycatchers. Other birds along the Grinnell Lake hike included fox sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow, gray jay, Steller's jay, Pacific wren, Lazuli bunting, and many varied thrushes. After dinner, 5 of the group did a 4-mile loop on the Red Eagle Lake trail and found a soaring northern goshawk, a Cassin's finch, red crossbill, and Barrow's goldeneye on the beaver pond. On July 11th, we repeated the loop on the Red Eagle Lake trail with an additional mile on the upper trail. We heard a northern pygmy owl, and saw a Savannah sparrow, Townsend's solitaire, and a sharp-shinned hawk. On the drive on the Going-to-the-Sun Road to the west side, we stopped at Haystack Creek for a look at a black swift on a nest. That bird had been located by Jerry on July 9th. And we also found a dipper on McDonald Creek while trying unsuccessfully to locate a Harlequin duck. After setting up camp and an early dinner, we visited McGee Meadow on the Camas Road. We walked out into the meadow and waited for the birds to appear. We saw Lincoln's sparrows, 2 adult sandhill cranes with one young, Wilson's snipe, a kestrel, and 3 gray jays. At the next turnout, we had an evening grosbeak. At the parking lot for the Huckleberry Nature Trail, Jerry found a warbling vireo nest with young and an adult arrived later to set on the young. On Sunday, when we arrived at the Howe Lake trailhead, there was a spruce grouse in the road. As we approached the grouse, it got onto a log by the road and was eventually joined by 4 young. Olive-side flycatchers were also very active at the trailhead, as well as a Wilson's warbler. As we approached Howe Lakes, we had an American redstart which was totally unexpected. There were no loons visible at the lakes but we did get ring-necked duck, bufflehead and sora. We had an orange-crowned warbler on the return trip. This hike produced some of the best birding of the trip. However, the Camas Creek trail was dead by comparison. There were 89 species identified on the 4-day trip and some of us hiked 25 miles.

Join 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:** _____

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Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

___ $15 is enclosed for Chapter-only 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

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& Five Valleys 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*, and I may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

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Address: _____

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Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

__ $20 for a 1-year individual or family membership

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