September 2017

Birding Observer

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

Calendar of Events

- **Tuesday, September 5th, 7:00pm:** The board meeting will be held in the large meeting room in the Missoula County Library.
- **Monday, September 11th, 7:00pm:** Dr. Erick Greene will present on osprey and what they can tell us about the environment at the September program meeting. Please join us in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14.
- **Saturday, September 9th:** All-day field trip to Ninepipes and Pablo Reservoirs to look for shorebirds. Meet at 7:50 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot.
- **Thursday, September 14th:** Field trip to MPG Ranch—Please join us for a morning of bird banding and viewing. It is a good time to see migrating song birds coming through the area. Space is limited, so please make a reservation with Jerry Dirnberger at dirnberger@aol.com. Meet at 7:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot to carpool.
- **Friday, September 15th:** The deadline for the October edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, September 16:** Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

Banded Townsend's Warbler at MPG Ranch

September Program Meeting: Osprey

We welcome you to the chapter's first meeting of the fall on Monday, September 11 at 7:00 pm in Gallagher Business Building in room L14 on the UM campus. Dr. Erick Greene will present a broad overview of Osprey biology, as well as details about how Ospreys have been important environmental sentinels for over 50 years. Ospreys are amazing fishing raptors that are found on every continent except the Antarctic. Their natural history, ecology and behavior are fascinating.

Erick will also introduce the chapter to the exciting new Wings Over Water program. This is an educational project, focused on middle school grades, that provides a broad curriculum in science, math, physics, chemistry, biology, and the environment based on Ospreys. Five Valleys Audubon was the first group to provide funding to get this off the ground. So come hear about what your donation is helping to do!

Erick Greene is a professor in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program at the University of Montana. 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 worked on seabirds 800 miles north of the Arctic Circle with the Canadian Wildlife Service. He returned for undergraduate studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he studied biology, music and mathematics and worked on Ospreys in Nova Scotia for his undergraduate senior thesis. His PhD is from Princeton University. He has been able to come full circle and return to studying Ospreys in Montana.

Peeps From The Board:
Community Naturalist Program
By Larry Weeks

The 2016-17 Community Naturalist Program included 37 programs that reached 870 students and 158 adults. The majority of these programs were bird presentations to 3rd, 4th and 5th grade classes in the Missoula area. The schools included Bonner, DeSmet, Sussex, Hawthorne, Chief Charlo, Lewis & Clark, Target Range, Lowell, St. Joseph, Paxson, Philipsburg, Potomac, and the Clark Fork School. The bird presentation includes about 50 bird skins; waterfowl, hawks, owls, and song birds. One aspect that always amazes me is that most of the classes recognize the Great Horned Owl before I even unwrap it. They may not know their birds but they sure do know that one. The session at Philipsburg included 5 presentations to different age groups from both Philipsburg and Hall. When I showed them the Great Gray Owl, it was obvious that many of the students had seen that owl in the Philipsburg area. During the summer of 2016, I did a cattail decoy workshop at Metcalf for the Montana Natural History Center's summer camp for 2 different age groups. The exercise uses cattail leaves to make a small duck decoy that floats on the water. The younger group had more fun and did a better job of making the decoys than the older group. And they got to take their decoys home. Every year, James Quigley, 3rd grade teacher at Target Range, asks for a birding field trip to Maclay Flat. The thing that makes this challenging is that it includes all of the 3rd graders at Target Range. This year, it involved 67 students. I had assistance from Judy Bungarz, Rose Leach and Rose Stoudt.

Most of the adult participation was attending the Beginning/Intermediate Birders Workshop. This included 4 classroom presentations and a field trip to Metcalf. The subjects covered were bird anatomy, migration, birding-by-ear, waterfowl, shorebirds, warblers, woodpeckers, sparrows, and raptors. The presenters included Jim Brown, Jim Sparks, Ginny Fay, and the author. The field trip included a stop at the Raptors of the Rockies and Kate Davis gave the group a tour of her live birds.

A fire ecology program was presented to the 3rd grade class at St. Joseph School for the 13th consecutive year. This program includes 3 classroom presentations and a field trip to the Black Cat fire near Frenchtown. The classroom presentations included tree ID, roots of plants and felt board stories about a creepy crawler fire and a roaring tree top fire The field trip illustrated the impact of fires, the regrowth from plant roots, the role of wood-boring and bark beetles, and bird behavior. The field trip also included a Little Professor hike and a fire scavenger hunt. Lori Alrawi assisted on the field trip. The Chapter pays for the bus transportation to the Black Cap Fire. The cost for the bus is $200 but we received a grant from National Audubon for $150.

I also took Brian Morgan birding at Lee Metcalf and Bass Creek for a Father's Day gift from his wife Naeyshae. She made a $100 donation to the Chapter as a thank you.

For the coming year, I am planning to do an Advanced Birding Workshop in February and March.

Wings Over Water:
An Osprey middle-school curriculum

Dr. Erick Greene, Professor of Biology at the University of Montana, has been studying Ospreys for many years. He runs the Montana Osprey Project, with its two webcams, here in Missoula, and a worldwide audience. Last year Erick approached Five Valleys Audubon to see if we were interested in funding a grant request to NASA. We were. He got the grant. And here is what he did with it:

“We are so excited to let you know about our first ever WOW (Wings Over Water) educational program! For about five years, I have had the idea that Ospreys would be an ideal species around which to build an exciting, hand’s-on science curriculum. Last fall I approached Five Valleys Audubon with this idea, and you folks were the first to show us love!! Your chapter made a generous donation of $500 to support our idea. We were able to leverage this money into a major grant from

Montana Space Grant Consortium (which is funded by NASA). We have been able to hire Jenélle Dowling as a full time program manager (i.e. herder of cats), as well as bringing on Lisa Bickell (Education Director at Montana Natural History Center) and Amy Howie (Distance Education Expert at Montana Natural History Center). Together these funds have allowed us to develop an exciting curriculum for middle school grades. This is a truly collaborative project between the University of Montana, the Montana Natural History Center and the Five Valleys Audubon Society.

Ospreys are a great species because we can develop curriculum around flight and aerodynamics, environmental monitoring and chemistry, satellites and GPS, and ospreys as they fit into larger ecosystems. We have developed an exciting set of lesson plans that bring in math, physics, biology, chemistry, environment, and Native Education for All. Many schools in Montana are within a few miles of an osprey nest. Also, ospreys are just so darn cool! We focused our program on middle school grades since this is when many kids lose interest in science, especially girls and young women.

We just finished our first intensive, week-long workshop for teachers. We were able to bring in a small group of some of the best and most gifted teachers in the state. These teachers represented a wide diversity of populations and places: three teachers are from tribal school, and others are from rural areas. We pushed them hard from dawn to dusk, and we were able to do lots of exciting things together: learn about aerodynamics (of planes and birds and drones), go flying in Cessnas, fly birds in wind tunnels, band osprey chicks and take small blood and feather samples, visit our environmental chemistry lab, and much more. This was a truly symbiotic project, since we were able to learn so much from these master teachers. We will be working with them all year as they develop and teach this osprey curriculum at their schools.

So we just want to give you Audubon folks a HUGE THANKS!! You kickstarted this project, and we are excited to see where it goes. Give yourselves a big pat on the back, and stay tuned!"

Watching Ospreys on Their Nest

FVAS Open Positions

WANTED: Database Manager

The FVAS needs a new Database Manager to maintain our member database. The position requires approximately 3-4 hours a month. Well-defined process using Excel and Word. Some proficiency needed, but not expert. Training will be provided.

WANTED: Treasurer

The FVAS is also seeking a new Treasurer to manage the FVAS's funds. The duties of the Treasurer include: 1) Receive and deposit money collected of Society operations, 2) Maintain financial accounts held in the name of the Society, 3) Disburse funds as directed by the Board, 4) Report to the board at meetings as directed, and 5) Prepare an annual report on the financial status of the Society for distribution to the members at the annual membership meeting and forward a copy of this report to Montana Audubon.

Qualifications:

- **Bookkeeping experience and ability to create, read and interpret financial statements**
- **Proficiency in QuickBooks and Excel**
- **Willingness to be on and work with a wonderful board of directors of a stellar organization!**

Field Trips
By Larry Weeks

May 20-21, 2017: Eleven people went on this two-day field trip to Freezout Lake and the Rocky Mountain Front, and they were joined by three more people at Freezout. Before we got to Freezout, we tried for an Upland Sandpiper along highway 200 but we didn't have any success at 4 locations. As we approached Fairfield, there was a Swainson's Hawk on a cross arm not far from a known nest. The first stop at Freezout was the dike along Pond 6. There was a good variety of ducks, several American Avocets, a few Willets, a Marbled Godwit, a hundred Wilson's Phalaropes, about 20 Red-necked Phalaropes, and at least 20 Long-billed Dowitchers. We did see one large grebe which we decided was a Clark's Grebe. On the road to Pond 5, Rose Leach got a brief look at an American Bittern that flew up and immediately returned to the cattails. There were Western Grebes, Rudy Ducks and more shorebirds at the "neck". Marsh Wrens were very vocal at several locations and Soras were also vocal but not seen. At Pond 1, there were Black and Common Terns, California Gulls and more ducks. Pond 4 had the best collection of shorebirds. There were hundreds of Wilson's Phalaropes, a few Baird's Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, and more Long-billed Dowitchers. Two dunlins were found at Pond 4 later in the day. The Golden Eagle nest was active on Rattlesnake Butte and there were 4 Paririe Falcons flying around the cliffs on the back side. A drive up Bellview Road produced Bobolinks at the beginning and both Chestnut-collored and McCown's Longspurs on the bench pass the vacated missile silo. On Sunday, we drove to Teton Pass. Dave Hanna, TNC, had seen Harlequin Ducks on the north fork of the Teton River on the previous weekend but we didn't have any luck. Near the pass, there was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet that was displaying its ruby crown and very cooperative Lincoln's Sparrow. Other birds near the pass included Townsend's Solitaire, White-crowned Sparrow, Cassin's Finch, and Townsend's Warbler. American Dippers were found at 2 locations under bridges. The Deep Canyon Guest Ranch had a Rufous Hummingbird and Red-naped Sapsucker. Some of the participants started leaving the group so when we left Choteau, we were down to 8 people. Before Augusta, we detoured off 287 to look at a Ferruginous Hawk nest on private property. I had permission from the land owner, Roger Jones, to visit the site. There was an adult standing on the nest and a second hawk standing on the ridge above the nest. Although we suspected that there was young on the nest, we were not able to confirm. I have since learned that there were 3 juveniles on the nest. When we got to Augusta, Jean Duncan, Rose Leach and Rose Stoudt continued on highway 287 to highway 200 while Cathy Ream and the author drove highway 434. Jean and the 2 Roses found 2 Upland Sandpipers along 200 where we had failed the day before. The route along highway 434 yielded Barrow's Goldeneye and an Eared Grebe which were new for the trip. We saw a total of 110 species on the trip.

Red-necked Phalarope

June 3–4, 2017: The birding portion of the Bannack field trip started in Melrose at the Salmonfly Fishing Access. The cottonwood forest along the Big Hole River had Bullock's Orioles, Western Wood- Pewees, Evening Grosbeaks, Red-naped Sapsuckers, and Eastern Kingbirds. The tour then traveled east along Camp Creek Road. Steve Flood spotted a Swainson's Hawk on a fence post which gave everyone a good look. During stops along the riparian zone we had a Green-tailed Towhee and Lazuli Buntings. We heard several Yellow-breasted Chats, but never had one show itself. As we entered the rocky outcrops, we found a Rock Wren and heard a Canyon Wren. When the dirt road deteriorated, we returned to Melrose. We took I-15 south to the Apex interchange and took a dirt road east where we found Horned Larks and McCown's Longspurs. At one location, we had 7 or 8 longspurs perched on a barbed wire fence. We also had Long-billed Curlews and a Ferruginous Hawk that flew right over the cars. Rose Leach had received e-mail reports of Burrowing Owls on Dutchman Road and we found 4 owls in a field full of badger holes. After checking in at the motel, we visited a trailer court in south Dillon and saw 2 Great-tailed Grackles. Jack Kirley, who has been studying the grackles for 3

years, drove to the trailer court to talk to the group about the grackles. They have successfully raised young, cross bred with Common Grackles and one spent the winter in Dillon. The following day, we drove to the Bannack State Park with one stop on Badger Pass to see a Green-tailed Towhee. At the State Park, there was a Ruffed Grouse that approached some of the participants. Other birds included Yellow-rumped Warbler, Rock Wren and Spotted Sandpiper. Then we went to the sage brush where we got an excellent look at the Gray Flycatcher. Sage Thrashers and Brewer's Sparrows were very abundant but we struggled in our attempt to find a Sage-brush Sparrow. I talked to Gary Swant at the Festival and he said we didn't go far enough on the road. We spent so much time trying to find the sparrow that we had to eliminate the visit to Clark Canyon Reservoir. The trip returned to Missoula via Wisdom and the Bitterroot Valley. Stops for Hermit Thrush and Great Gray Owl were unsuccessful. There were 17 people on the trip and we had 73 species.

June 24, 2017: Twelve people participated on the field trip to the Historic Point-of-Rocks Trail west of Alberton. This trail follows a rocky section of the John Mullan Road and returns via the old Milwaukee RR bed. Before we left the parking lot, we had a pair of Cassin's Finches, a Black-headed Grosbeak, several Brewer's Blackbirds, and a fly over by a Lewis's Woodpecker. Along the John Mullan Road, we had Canyon Wrens in 2 locations, a very cooperative Rock Wren that was singing from the top of a snag, Spotted Towhees, Yellow Warblers, Violet-green Swallows, and a Peregrine Falcon perched in a snag on top of the ridge. Where the trail meets the RR bed, there were several Rough-winged and Bank Swallows around a clay bank that was full of holes. On the east side of the RR tunnel, we had a third Canyon Wren and a Cordilleran Flycatcher. We had 31 bird species.

July 13-16, 2017: The 4-day field trip to Glacier was attended by 12 people; Carla Adams, Janice Mazur (Whitefish), Christy Hill (No. Carolina), Peter Kearns, Nathan Johnson, Laxmi von Hoffmann, Jean Duncan, Rose Stoudt, Andrea & Don Stierle, Jeff Ipsen, and the author. Christy only joined us for 1 day and Peter stayed for 2 days. After meeting at the St. Mary Campground, the group drove to Many Glacier the following day and hiked into Grinnell Lake. The birding on this hike is always good and we had Boreal Chickadee, Tennessee Warbler, Fox Sparrow, Pacific Wren, Varied Thrush, Common Loon, and Gray Jay. Mammals included a cow moose in Lake Josephine and a brown bear that was spotted by Carla from the deck of the Many Glacier Lodge. There was an unusually large number of hikers on the trail to Grinnell Lake and Grinnell Glacier. After dinner on Friday, most of the group did a short hike on the trails to Baring Falls and St. Mary Falls. This hike was in the area that burned in 2015 and the birding activity was surprising good for late in the day. In addition to several different passerines, we watched an Osprey dive-bomb a Bald Eagle that was sitting in the water. There was a cow moose in St. Mary Lake and her calf on shore along with a large bull moose. Some of the people continued on to Logan Pass for a night sky presentation. The rest of the people returned to the campground and saw at least 17 elk on Two Dog Flat. On Saturday, we did a 3-mile loop on the Red Eagle Lake trail in the morning and visited McGee Meadow in the afternoon. We flushed an owl out of McGee Meadow which plunged into thick habitat and we weren't able to identify it. Other birds in the meadow included many Wilson's Snipes and a few Lincoln's Sparrows. That evening, 4 people attended a talk at the McDonald Lodge on some of the colorful characters from the Park's early history. On Sunday, we drove the Inside North Fork Road to the Howe Lakes and Camas Creek trailheads. A small black bear was seen by some of the people along the road. We flushed another owl on the trail to Howe Lakes that might have been a Northern Hawk Owl. When we arrived at the first lake, we flushed 3 Greater Yellowlegs which is an unusual bird for Glacier. We also saw Ring-necked Ducks, American Kestrels and Lewis's Woodpeckers, and heard a Sora. On the hike to the second lake, we met 2 ladies that had done a loon survey on the second lake and they advised us not to continue because of the presence of 2 baby loons. One of the ladies informed me that Northern Hawk Owls had been seen on the road from Camas Creek to Dutch Creek. After a short hike to Christenson's Meadow, 4 of us hiked 2 miles on the road pass Camas Creek but we did not see any hawk owls This field trip was especially good for mammals that included bear (2), elk (17), moose (4), goats (2), deer (6), and red fox (1). The bird list included 80 species. Some of the participants hiked 23 miles.

Status of Birds in the Clark Fork River Grass Valley IBA by Jim Brown

Calliope Hummingbird

It was time in 2017 to resurvey the birds using and breeding in the Clark Fork River - Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA). The Five Valleys Audubon Society has responsibility to evaluate the health of bird populations in this IBA and promote conservation of habitat. The last IBA bird survey was done 6 to 7 years ago. We wanted to find out how bird populations were faring especially for birds of conservation concern that nest here. Conducting bird surveys is a fun way for birders to contribute to citizen science. We began monitoring birds in the wetlands, grasslands and shrubby draws in the Greater Missoula Valley in 2002. As a result of our findings, our IBA was officially recognized in 2006 and rated as having continental significance by National Audubon Society.

Approximately 80 percent of our IBA, which extends from Reserve Street to almost Huson, is privately owned. So it is important for us seek permission from landowners to conduct bird surveys on their properties. We share our findings with them. They appreciate knowing about the birds that live on their land and this can be helpful in stimulating interest in conservation. A side benefit is that we get to go birding and see places that we would not be able to enjoy otherwise. We conducted surveys on about half of the IBA at 10 different locations mostly in the western part of the IBA along the Clark Fork River. It included seven ranches and three Fishing Access sites. To do the surveys we divide into teams of 2 to 4 people and hike through various habitat niches. A big thank you goes to those who helped on one or more of the surveys: Rose Leach, Rose Stoudt, Poody McLaughlin, Joe Regan, Andrea Stierle, Don Stierle, Cynthia Hudson, Robert Zirl, Cindy Swidler, Roger Hogan, Cathy Ream, Brad Johnson, John Brock, Janet Allison, Jerry Dirnberger, Weiber Grieser, Sarah Richey and Jim Brown.

We found that the cavity nesting species of conservation concern including Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker and Pileated Woodpecker seem to be holding their own and not losing ground. The Willow Flycatcher that has undergone drastic declines in SW United States seems to be doing well in our IBA. The Calliope Hummingbird, a nationally recognized species of concern, may have declined slightly in our IBA. One surprising find was a nesting pair of Bobolinks in an area where we did not know they existed. It was not surprising but interesting that the five most abundant species in order were European Starling, Tree Swallow, American Robin, Yellow Warbler and Red-winged Blackbird. Although not necessarily in high numbers, birds commonly encountered because they occurred on all surveyed sites were Northern Flicker, Eastern Kingbird, Tree Swallow, House Wren, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, and American Goldfinch. Other commonly occurring species also apparently doing well include Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Spotted Sandpiper, Eurasian-collared Dove, Western Wood-Pewee, Black-billed Magpie, Cedar Waxwing, Song Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird and Bullock's Oriole. A total of 103 species were observed. We hope to conduct bird surveys on the rest of the IBA next year to get a complete picture of how the IBA birds are doing. If you would like to view a spreadsheet that summarizes number of birds observed by location, send an email request to Jim Brown.

Bobolink

Birds are indicators of the environment.

If they are in trouble, we know we'll soon be in trouble.

~ Roger Tory Peterson

Our Newest Members

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Please email Vick at k7vk@arrl.net, and give him your email address.
We promise – we won't share email addresses with anyone except Montana Audubon.

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!

To become a new member, renew a lapsed membership or renew a current membership of National Audubon Society (NAS) and receive Audubon magazine, go to this website: fvaudubon.org/nas. This will ensure that FVAS receives a $20 one- time credit for your membership. All NAS members become members of FVAS. The other financial support we receive from NAS is $1,300 annually for being a chapter in good standing. Montana Audubon (MTA) is an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MTA is responsible for its own fundraising and FVAS donates $3,000 to MTA annually. There are various tax advantages for donating to MTA, you may contact them through their website: http://mtaudubon.org/. Please give generously to each organization, as we work collaboratively to protect what we all love.

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