February 2024

Birding Observer

Newsletter of the Five Valleys Audubon Society

CALENDAR

Mondy, February 5th, 6:00-7:45pm: The board meeting will be held in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library.

Sunday, February 11th, 9:00-11:00am: Attend this month's Town Bound Birding field trip at Maclay Flat to search for owls and other Winter species. Consider the weather when dressing for the outing and traction devices for icy trails, as well as some level hiking off trail in deeper snow. Meet in the Maclay Flat parking lot.

Monday, February 12th, 7:00pm: Attend our February program meeting to learn about wildlife and wildlands in America's Arctic. See details to the right.

Saturday, February 17th; 10:00 am: Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center and expect 2 miles of level hiking.

Saturday, February 24th, 8am: Thomas Kallmeyer will lead an all-day field trip to the Mission Valley to look for raptors. Meet at 8:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. No hiking involved.

Birds, Wildlands and Energy in the Arctic

Please join us on Monday, February 12, 2024, at 7:00 PM to hear our speaker, Stan Senner, present his talk on Birds, Wildlands and Energy in the Arctic.

Alaska's vast North Slope is home to about 10,000 mostly-Iñpuit residents, including in the northernmost community (Utqiagvik) in the United States. The North Slope also has a sprawling complex of industrial oil fields at Prudhoe Bay and beyond, and still-intact Arctic ecosystems with their full complements of native wildlife. Among the wildlife are millions of migratory birds that come from seven continents to nest on the tundra at places like Teshekpuk Lake, one of the most important habitats for birds in the global Arctic. Stan will highlight these Arctic-nesting birds and their amazing journeys. He will also share his insights from many years on the front lines of the on-going struggle to protect wildlife and wildlands as ever-expanding oil development and climate change threaten to transform America's Arctic.

American Golden-Plover
Photo by Milo Burcham

Stan Senner is an ornithologist and conservation biologist with a passion for shorebirds and Arctic landscapes. He retired in 2021 as National Audubon's Vice President for Bird Conservation and previously directed Audubon's Alaska state office for 10 years. Stan earned a master's degree in biology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and spent seven years coordinating state-federal restoration planning and science studies following the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989. He received Lifetime Achievement Awards for his contributions to bird conservation from the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group in 2019 and the American Ornithological Society in 2023. Stan lived in Alaska for 23 years and now makes his home in Missoula.

The meeting will be held in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building, Room 110, on the University of Montana campus. The building lies on the south end of campus on Beckwith Avenue between Maurice and Mansfield avenues. Due to our membership being composed of many older adults, masks are encouraged, but not required by the university. You also have the option of watching the meeting over the following zoom link: https://umontana.zoom.us/j/99610928428

Peeps From Your Treasurer
By Jean Duncan

As I write this, it is frigid outside. A look back on our finances for 2023, though, provides plenty of warmth. We were the recipient of a most generous donation by the Stickneys, and our fund-raising efforts were lucrative.

Donations to our chapter totaled $25,415, bringing our operating income for the year to $44,510. Expenses were $11,230, netting $33,281. The board decided to commit the net operating revenues at the end of each fiscal year to the Conservation Fund which is now $47,769. We are continuing to participate in county and city discussions dealing with the future of important bird habitats in our valley, including the Fort Missoula Ponds. We anticipate making a significant monetary donation to this project to back up our active participation in the planning process.

At the end of 2023, FVAS had assets of $235,696 of which $106,267 is in the Phil L. Wright Endowment. This endowment provides scholarships for UM student's bird and habitat related research projects.

Five Valleys Audubon donated $5,600 spread over several bird research and habitat protection nonprofits, as well as Montana Audubon.

Please direct any questions about the finances of FVAS to Jean Duncan, Treasurer@FVaudubon.org.

We're looking forward to another year of supporting birds and their habitat in Montana with your help and involvement!

2023 Missoula Christmas Bird Count
By Larry Weeks

The 2023 CBC ended up with 86 bird species and 5,884 total birds. The number of species was on the high side, but the total birds was low. The fact that we had fog all day impacted the total birds. There were 91 people in the field and 22 feeder watchers. The group that birded lower LaValle Creek, consisted of Andy Boyce, Adam Mitchell, William Blake, Pam Murphy, and Harry Croft, had the only American Goshawk and Lincoln's Sparrow. Will McDowell's group, which birded McCauley Butte, had the only Bufflehead and a Greater Yellowlegs. The author had heard a Greater Yellowlegs on the November 11th field trip to Maclay Flat. The group that birded Sleven's Island, included Jullian Leblow, Doug Heinan, Susie Wall, and Jean Duncan, had the only Swamp Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Bewick's Wren. The Council Grove group, which was led by Sara Herrod, had the only Long-eared Owl which was spotted by Mary Scofield who is a member of the Feminist Bird Club. Norm and Cathy Smyers led the group that birded the State Nursery and Tower St. Open Space and had the only Cooper's Hawk.

The only Wood Duck was found by Rose Leach's group who birded Mullan Road. Thomas Kallmeyer had the only Prairie Falcon on the Golden-Kiel Loop which is just east of the airport. Bob Petty and Ronni Flannery, who birded the Rattlesnake Greenway, had the only American Dipper. Jim Brown's group, who birded Grass Valley, had the only Northern Pintails and American Tree Sparrows. Brian Williams had the only Pacific Wrens on the Stuart Peak trail. The Kelly Island group led by Poody McLaughlin had the only Barred Owl and Lewis's Woodpecker. The Barred Owl caught a vole within 10 feet of 3 observers. The Lewis's Woodpecker is a resident at Eris Rasmussen's home. The only Snow Goose was found by the author at the Benson's farm at the corner of Reserve St and & 7th St. It was hanging out with 200 Canada Geese. Other group leaders included Steve Flood – upper LaValle Creek, Paul Hendricks – Marshall Canyon to Woods Gulch, Kristi DuBois – Mullan Road, Cindy and Barry Swidler – Kelly Island/Frey ranch, Elana Ulev – Moose Can Gully, Chris and Pam Scranton – Maclay Flat, Joy Earls – Snowdrift Lane, David Jones – UM/Greenough Park, Stan Senner – South hills/Fairview, Ed Monnig –

upper Clark Fork River, Zack Schlanger – upper-slopes of Mt. Sentinel/Crazy Canyon, the author – Grant Creek, and Roger Hogen – Council Grove Island/Kona Ranch.

The feeder watchers also contributed to the species Count. Kay Lambert had the only Varied Thrush, Kay's neighbor (McCallister) had the only Blue Jays, Don & Andrea Stierle had the only Cassin's Finches and Evening Grosbeaks, and Judith Kiely had the only Lesser Goldfinches. Three feeder watchers had Pine Siskins, which were not found on the field Count. The Count ended with a potluck at the author's home, which was attended by 14 people. My thanks to everyone who participated.

Missoula Christmas Bird Count 2023 Species List		
Great Blue Heron 22	Greater Yellowlegs 1	American Dipper 1
Canada Goose 530	Rock Pigeon 546	Golden-crowned Kinglet 6
Snow Goose 1	Eurasian-collared Dove 238	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2
Wood Duck 1	Mourning Dove 6	Townsend's Solitaire 17
Green-winged Teal 24	Great Horned Owl 5	American Robin 11
Mallard 451	Northern Pygmy Owl 2	Varied Thrush 1
Northern Pintail 4	Barred Owl 1	Bohemian Waxwing 150
American Wigeon 6	Long-eared Owl 1	Cedar Waxwing 67
Ring-necked Duck 14	Northern Saw-whet Owl 2	Northern Shrike 5
Common Goldeneye 217	Belted Kingfisher 15	European Starling 93
Barrow's Goldeneye 6	Lewis's Woodpecker 1	American Tree Sparrow 28
Bufflehead 8	Downy Woodpecker 38	Fox Sparrow 1
Hooded Merganser 13	Hairy Woodpecker 21	Song Sparrow 61
Common Merganser 44	Northern Flicker 184	Lincoln's Sparrow 1
Bald Eagle 29	Pileated Woodpecker 10	Swamp Sparrow 1
Northern Harrier 7	Canada Jay 6	White-crowned Sparrow 4
Sharp-shinned Hawk 6	Steller's Jay 26	Dark-eyed Junco 187
Cooper's Hawk 1	Blue Jay 2	Lapland Longspur CW
American Goshawk 1	Black-billed Magpie 365	Snow Bunting CW
Red-tailed Hawk 45	American Crow 66	Red-winged Blackbird 354
Rough-legged Hawk 6	Common Raven 104	Pine Grosbeak 60
American Kestrel 10	Black-capped Chickadee 575	Cassin's Finch 10
Merlin 4	Mountain Chickadee 42	House Finch 283
Prairie Falcon 1	Red-breasted Nuthatch 77	Red Crossbill 5
Gray Partridge CW	White-breasted Nuthatch 26	Pine Siskin 52
Ring-necked Pheasant 17	Pygmy Nuthatch 39	American Goldfinch 63
Ruffed Grouse 5	Brown Creeper 10	Lesser Goldfinch 5
Wild Turkey 65	Pacific Wren 2	Evening Grosbeak 6
Killdeer 16	Bewick's Wren 1	House Sparrow 433
Wilson's Snipe 6	Marsh Wren 6	Double-crested Cormorant CW
CW = Count Week	**Total Birds 5,884**	**Total Species = 86**

Workshop for Beginning & Intermediate Birders By Larry Weeks

The Five Valleys Audubon Society will offer a workshop for beginning and intermediate birders. This workshop should appeal to birders just getting started and to birders who want to improve their identification skills. It will consist of four classroom sessions that will be held at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks meeting room at 3201 Spurgin Road. The classroom sessions are scheduled for Thursday evenings on March 21st, April 4th, 11th, and 18th from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The program will include a full session on hawks, eagles and owls, and 30 – 60-minute sessions on bird anatomy, migration, waterfowl, woodpeckers, shorebirds, warblers, sparrows and birding-by-ear. There will be a $35 charge for the workshop or $10 per session. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 406-549-5632 or 406-540-3064 (cell), or you can email him at bwsgenea@gmail.com.

Your input needed! Upcoming hearing for proposed development at Fort Missoula By Poody McLaughlin & Jim Brown

On Monday, February 5th at 6 pm. the Missoula City Council will hold a public hearing to consider a developer's appeal regarding his proposed residential and business development at Fort Missoula. Last spring the city Historic Preservation Commission voted to deny historic preservation permits for this project. The proposal is to build 16 townhouses and several small businesses directly adjacent to Sleven's Island and the surrounding riparian area along the Bitterroot River. Although the developer also proposes to rehabilitate the Old Post Hospital, he downplays that the Fort's first residential development would sit smack dab next to one of the most valuable, bird-rich wildlife wetland locations in the Missoula Valley. This river corridor is a gift to the City of Missoula and a treasure needing protection for all citizens to enjoy now and in future generations.

We urge you to express your opposition to this project. **The deadline for comments is Wednesday, February 21st, but the earlier the better.** Whether you live in the city or county, your comments are important. Email comments to fortmissoulacommons@ci.missoula.mt.us. or submit them by mail to City Clerk, 435 Ryman, Missoula, MT 59802. To review the city's website for this project, go to https://www.engagemissoula.com/, and click on Fort Missoula Commons Historic Preservation Appeal.

The chapter's vision for this area: The Clark Fork-Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA) encompasses this corridor. This IBA is formally recognized as a cornerstone in the Missoula Urban Area Open Space Plan.

The proposed residential development for Fort Missoula will irrevocably degrade the sensitive habitats along the river, which make up some of the most ecologically important areas under our community's care. We believe that this entire three-mile reach of river corridor should be kept in its natural state for inclusion in a Fort Missoula Natural Area.

For more information about this proposal and the Historic Fort Missoula Coalition that has formed to oppose this rezoning (the chapter is a member), check out our website at https://fvaudubon.org/historic-fort-missoula-coalition/

Wings Across the Big Sky Festival Update Submitted by MT Audubon

This bitterly cold weather has us dreaming of the warmer days to come. So, this particular field trip jumped out at us, maybe thinking warm thoughts about visiting Warm Springs will keep us from getting too cold?

Typically difficult to access, the Warm Springs Ponds Complex field trip will visit areas not generally open to the public. This tour will traverse areas of riparian, wetland, and lake/stream habitats in the Deer Lodge Valley. Bird species will include waterfowl, grebes, Black-crowned Night-heron, Great Blue Heron, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, Osprey, Bald Eagle (nesting), Marsh Wren, Willow Flycatcher, and numerous sparrow species. The trip will be mostly driving interspersed with short walks on mostly level ground.

More festival information - including registration details - coming very soon!

How do birds keep warm in the winter?
By Tina Shaw

Reprinted from FWS.GOV

Have you ever wondered how birds can stay warm in the cold winter months? Birds of all shapes and sizes have special adaptations for living in cold climates. Here are a few examples of tough birds and how they stay warm.

Shivering

Just like people, birds shiver to stay warm. Birds have much higher metabolic rates and burn more energy to stay warm than we do. Black-capped chickadees weigh less than half an ounce and can maintain a body temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit - even when the air is 0 degrees! They do this by having great insulation, being very active and remembering where they store their food. A steady supply of food is essential because chickadees eat more than 35 percent of their weight every day! Compared to many other birds, chickadees have a large hippocampus - the part of the brain that's responsible for spatial memory. In the fall, this part of their brain gets even bigger!

Fluffing feathers

Whether fat, fur or feathers, insulation matters for most cold-weather animals. All cold-climate birds pack on body weight in the late summer and fall in anticipation of the long, cold winter, but feathers also play an important

role. All birds stay warm by trapping pockets of air around their bodies. The secret to maintaining these layers of air lies in having clean, dry and flexible feathers. The cleaning process, generally known as preening, depends on the species of bird. While all birds produce a special oil from a gland near the base of their tails, some cold-tolerant birds use this oil to weatherproof their feathers. Other birds like egrets, herons and mourning doves grow special feathers that disintegrate into a powder that they use to waterproof their feathers. Regardless of what weatherproofing method they use, preening helps birds keep a water-resistant top layer and a toasty warm inner layer.

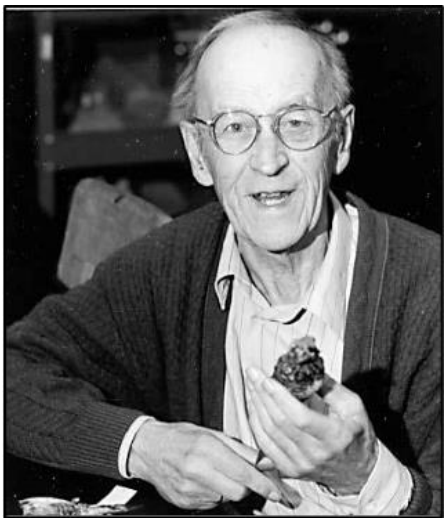
Roosting and cuddling

Similar to people who may cuddle for warmth, small birds like tree swallows crowd together in shrubs, vines and evergreen trees to share body heat. They can also slow down their metabolic rate to conserve energy. Cavity nesters like nuthatches, titmice and downy woodpeckers use tree cavities and nest boxes to stay warm. Cavities and boxes provide protection from the weather and help birds hide from predators. Larger birds like American crows and ring-billed gulls are also known to flock together for warmth.

Tucking feet and bills

Have you ever wondered how birds keep their legs warm? Waterfowl species circulate blood through a counter current heat exchange, isolating the blood that flows in their legs rather than circulating it throughout their entire bodies. This helps to keep their body temperatures higher. Birds also have specialized scales on their feet and legs that help minimize heat loss. Many ducks, geese, pelicans, gulls and swans further conserve body heat by standing on one leg or even sitting down. The Canada geese pictured here are tucking their bills under their back feathers, keeping their bills warm while also increasing breathing efficiency by utilizing warmer air.

Five Valleys Audubon Society Requests proposals for the Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Award 2024



Philip L. Wright was a professor of zoology at the University of Montana who taught mammalogy and ornithology and established the zoological museum that bears his name. Dr. Wright's infectious enthusiasm and his passion for the natural world inspired thousands of students during his tenure and encouraged them in their research endeavors.

In remembrance of Dr. Wright and his contributions to science and the community, the Five Valleys Audubon Society established the annual Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards. These awards provide support for continuing students undertaking research in the fields of ecology, wildlife biology, animal behavior, environmental biology, and conservation biology.

Research awards have will range from $500 to $2,000. Previous awards have gone to high school, university undergraduate, and graduate students. Preference is given to small projects to be completed in a few months. Accordingly, PhD research is excluded. Eligible expenses include: 1) direct costs of travel, meals, and lodging; and 2) consumable supplies and services used for the sole purpose of the project. Non-eligible expenses include wages and durable equipment (like binoculars) with a life longer than the project. FVAS does not pay for indirect costs.

Interested students should consult Dr. Andrea Stierle, Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, about the content of their application before applying (andrea.stierle@umontana.edu, 406-243-2094).

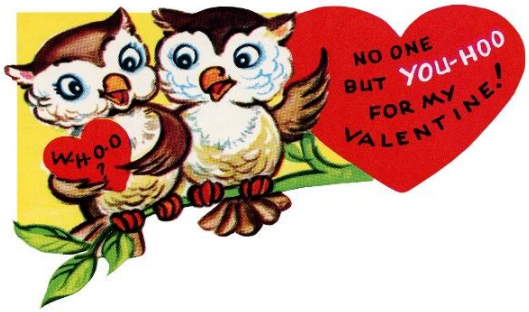
To apply for a 2024 award, please submit a brief proposal in the following format:

I. Title of proposed research. Date of proposal.
II. Name of applicant, a proper mail address and phone number (not a university department), and e-mail address.
III. Institution and status of the applicant (e.g. sophomore at the University of Montana, junior at Hellgate High, etc.)
- Body of proposal (no more than 3 pages) must contain the following:
- Statement of the problem or the question to be addressed (2-3 sentences).
- Introduction and background (1/2 page).
- Purpose of the proposed research (1-3 sentences).
- Significance of the proposed research (1/ 2 page).
- Methods and time frame (1/2 to 1 page). **The applicant should focus on what they personally plan to accomplish if the research is part of a larger group effort.**
- Anticipated results (1/2 page).
- Appropriate literature references
- Budget and Justification (1/2 page).
- Current funding and / or other funding anticipated by applicant (1-2 sentences).

IV. Name, address, and phone number of an academic reference (teacher, faculty, or research advisor).
V. Brief resume (no more than 1/2 to 2/3 pages) with name of applicant, address, phone, e-mail.

Successful applicants will be expected to provide a brief written research summary and make a short presentation (15 minutes) at a monthly meeting of the Five Valleys Audubon Society Spring of 2025.

Applications are due by 5:00 pm, Friday, March 15, 2024, and awards will be announced in April. Please send completed applications to: Shonna Trowbridge (shonna.trowbridge@umontana.edu), W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, FOR 204 |32 Campus Drive | Missoula, MT 59812



Welcome New Members

Carolyn Abbott
Lavonn Dennison
Mary McCrea
Gregory Peters
Debbie Thrailkill

Jean Callahan
Rita Docken
Gail Nevin
Suzanne Reed
Elena Ulev

Jillian Colescott
Joan Egan
Liza Nicholas
Gayla Rice
Nancy Winslow

Be an environmental and fiscal champion.
If you are able, please sign up for emailed newsletters rather than hard copies.

If you subscribe to Audubon through National Audubon, we may not have your email address. To receive our newsletter and other birding news by email, saving trees and reducing FVAS newsletter expenses, please send your email address to Treasurer, Jean Duncan at treasurer@FVAudubon.org or Membership Promotion Chair, Thomas Kallmeyer at thomas@tarns.net.

Join Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please support Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). There are several ways to donate. All options include the *Birding Observer* newsletter and allow you to 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: https://fvaudubon.org/make-a-donation/

$_____$15 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via email.

$_____$25 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via USPS.

$_____Free for students, includes FVAS newsletter via email.

$_____ Donate to our General Fund to support our habitat protection work within Missoula County, nonprofit organizations that care for birds, and education on birds and birding.

$_____ Phillip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research.

$_____Total contribution

_____ I would like to Volunteer. Please contact me. (Please provide an email address below.)

_____

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!

Please be aware that membership in Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) alone does not confer membership in the National Audubon Society (NAS). FVAS and NAS are separate 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations. To become a new member of NAS and receive Audubon magazine (or to renew a current or lapsed membership) visit the website: https://act.audubon.org/a/join. Using this website will ensure that FVAS receives a $20 one-time credit for your NAS membership. All NAS members become members of FVAS. A third organization, Montana Audubon (MTA), is also an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MTA manages statewide issues and is responsible for its own fundraising. To assist in this important statewide work, you may contact MTA through their website: https://mtaudubon.org/. Please give generously to each organization. Although independent, we work together to protect what we all love.

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