

June 2024

# Birding Observer

Newsletter of the Five Valleys Audubon Society



## Summer Event Calendar

**Saturday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 8:00 am:** Half-day field trip to the Bass Creek to look for Bobolinks, led by William Boggs. Meet at 8am in the west end of the Walmart 93 south parking lot, near the garden center. Expect one mile of level hiking.

**Wednesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 6:00am:** The Town Bound Birding Series goes to the Barmeyer Trail, where participants will see a rich diversity of birds and wildflowers. Meet the group at the trailhead at 6am and expect three miles of moderately challenging hiking.

**June 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup>:** Two-day field trip to Freezout and Benton Lakes. See details on page 3.

**June 11<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>:** Four-day field trip to Bowdoin NWR. See details on page 3.



**Saturday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 am:** Attend the Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center and expect two miles of level hiking.

**Sunday, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 7-9pm:** The Town Bound Birding Series goes to Silver Park to view Osprey nests. Meet the group at Bernice's Bakery.



**Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 am:** Attend the Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center and expect two miles of level hiking.

**Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 7:00am:** The Town Bound Birding Series will walk the Kim Williams Trail. We will be on the lookout for Evening Grosbeaks, American Redstarts, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Cassin's Vireo, Rufous Hummingbird, and more. Meet the field trip leader on the University side of the Van Buren Street Footbridge.

**Saturday, August 17<sup>th</sup>:** Attend the Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center and expect two miles of level hiking.

**Saturday August 24<sup>th</sup>, 7:00am:** Field trip to Freezout Lake or Ray Creek to look for migrating shorebirds. Expect 1 mile of level hiking. We will meet at 7am at the Missoula College parking lot.

**Peeps From Your Board:  
Birds Encourage Conservation  
By Jim Brown**



Our Chapter has been doing bird surveys on private properties for many years to promote conservation and enjoy birding in a variety of interesting landscapes. Data gathered on bird populations has proved helpful in securing conservation easements

on private ranches by boosting the priority for grant funding needed by land trusts such as Five Valleys Land Trust. Last year we did bird surveys on two large ranches west of Philipsburg. We fielded three teams of birders that hiked through and across extensive grassland, conifer patches, and riparian habitat along Rock Creek. We found healthy populations of grassland species including Western Meadowlarks, Vesper Sparrows and Horned Larks as well as several species of conservation concern. This data supports efforts to acquire grant funding from the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) dedicated for the protection of significant native grasslands. We birders got to experience the vastness and grandeur of large ranch landscapes and learn about the challenges ranchers face in managing their land. The remarkable diversity of birds often found on bird surveys can also inspire ranchers to pursue conservation actions for their land.

Bird population information gathered by boots-on-the-ground bird surveyors has gained the respect of City, County and State officials who often set limits on how land can be developed and managed. Five Valleys Audubon is recognized as an authority on birds and other wildlife and is on the County's list of organizations that automatically reviews all subdivision proposals in Missoula County. Since 2007, we have reviewed and commented on 162 subdivision proposals. We offer advice on how best to protect significant bird habitat and mitigate impacts on significant habitats such as wetlands and grasslands. A recent case in point was a development proposed on part of McCauley Butte, an iconic landscape feature in Missoula and significant grassland along an important migration corridor. The County Commissioners disapproved the proposed subdivision but were sued by the developer claiming that the County made an arbitrary and capricious decision. We had provided extensive bird survey data to the County from past surveys in the Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area that includes McCauley Butte. The

District Judge dismissed the lawsuit in part because of the data we had provided. The lawsuit ended up in the Montana Supreme Court that requested the County and developer work out an arbitrated solution. The important bird habitat was protected.

Our most recent effort involves opposing development of townhouses in Fort Missoula to be placed right next to Steven's Island. We are coordinating with several historic preservation organizations who oppose residential units in Fort Missoula. Current zoning does not allow residential development in that location. However, the developer had hoped to change that. The City Council denied the proposed development. But the future is still uncertain as the developer is seeking ways to circumvent the ruling by the City. Five Valleys Audubon has gained the reputation as a respected science-based organization that informs Missoula County leaders about impacts of development on bird habitat and ways those impacts can be mitigated. Bird surveys by Chapter birders make this possible.

## Summer Word Search



- |            |           |            |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| BBO        | ICE CREAM | SUN        |
| BEACH      | LEMONADE  | SUNGLASSES |
| BIKINI     | OCEAN     | SURFING    |
| CAMPING    | POOL      | TANNING    |
| FIREWORKS  | POPSICLE  | VACATION   |
| FLIP FLOPS | SAND      | WATERMELON |
| HAMMOCK    | SEASHELL  |            |



## Browns Lake Field Trip Summary

By Jim Brown

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Our trip started in light rain that stayed with us most of the day, but looking through speckled binoculars became second nature and hardly noticeable with the many interesting views of birds. When we pulled off the highway on the road into Ovando all 11 in our group of birders got out of their vehicles and began looking at two Long-billed Curlews. A pickup with two local residents pulled up alongside us and asked, "what are you looking at?" Given the concern for grizzly bears in that area we suspect they thought we were looking at a grizzly bear. We said we were just looking at birds out there. They looked happily surprised and drove off.

On a large pond just south of Ovando we were treated to good views of Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Northern Shoveler, Cinnamon Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Bufflehead, two pairs of Trumpeter Swans and two Sandhill Cranes. Leaving the pond, we saw three Long-billed Curlews close to the road. We continued to an area of conifers and aspen that can attract a variety of species. The drizzly day seemed to put the lid on bird activity but after some coaxing, we were rewarded with good views of Williamson's and Red-naped Sapsuckers. We moved on towards Browns Lake and en route saw three cow elk cross the road right in front of us. At the north end of the Lake eight Bald Eagles sat close together on adjoining fence posts for an unusual view. Calm water provided good viewing conditions that included eight female Hooded Mergansers in one tight group, a pair of Barrow's Goldeneyes, and a flock of about 200 Snow Geese with a few Ross's Geese mixed in. Perhaps the most exciting find happened when Rose Leach spotted a flock of eight Red-breasted Mergansers that were swimming and diving in a closely coordinated manner probably in a group feeding strategy to make capturing food more effective. We saw eight Common Loons, several Yellow-rumped Warblers, Red-necked and Western Grebes and several Yellow-headed Blackbirds feeding on the ground alongside us.



We finished the day on the Cut-off Road where a series of ponds gave us excellent views of many species including Eared Grebes, Marsh Wrens, Redheads and Canvasbacks. A large flock of circling Snow Geese provided an exciting backdrop to the many species of waterfowl that were either resting, courting, feeding and vocalizing. Experiencing these many sights and sounds made the wetlands an inspiring time to be a visitor. We finished the day with a sighting of eight or so Antelope. In all, we observed 72 species broken down into 29 species of waterfowl of which 19 were duck species, and seven raptor species including 27 Bald Eagles.

## Upcoming Multi-day Field Trips

By Larry Weeks

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**June 8th & 9th:** The two-day field trip to Freezout Lake and Benton Lake is scheduled for June 8th and 9th. The plan is to leave Missoula at 7:00 am on June 8th and drive to Freezout Lake. We will spend the night at the Stage Stop Inn (406-466-5900). Participants are asked to make reservations in advance. Plan to bring lunch for two days. We will eat dinner together at a local restaurant. Breakfast is provided by the motel. We will drive to Benton Lake on June 9th. Please contact Larry if you plan to attend and he will coordinate carpooling. There is a \$10 charge for multi-day field trips. Expect about 1 mile of level hiking. We will meet at 7:00 am in the Adams Center parking lot.

**June 11th – 14th:** A four-day field trip to Malta and Bowdoin NWR has been scheduled for June 11th – 14th. We will camp at James Kipp Recreational Area the first night and the city park in Malta the next 2 nights. Please contact Larry



if you plan to attend and he will coordinate carpooling and meals. There is a \$10 charge for multi-day field trips. There will be one mile of level hiking. We will meet at 7:00 am in the Adams Center parking lot.

***"Walking is the most perfect form of motion for a person who wants to discover the true life."***

~ Thoreau

## Fabulous Feathers – Time for a Change

Reprinted from *Wild Birds Unlimited* 2021

A quick quiz: What is a feather made of?

And it is not, “Snips and snails, and puppy dogs’ tails.” But it is made from the same thing as a little boy’s hair...protein! Over 90% of a feather, or a hair, is made up of a tough protein called keratin. In fact, a bird’s feathers contain over 25% of the total protein found within its entire body. Who knew?



Photo: American Goldfinch molting

Refresh and Refeather

A little longer quiz: How often do birds grow new feathers?

Not as easy to answer...it can vary depending on the bird species. All birds grow an entire body full of new feathers as youngsters in the nest. It is the only time in a bird’s life that it will grow all of its feathers at one time. It boggles the mind to think that a chickadee can grow all its feathers and be ready to leave its nest in as little as 11 days!

Feathers are amazingly tough...but they do wear out and need to be replaced. Most adult songbirds will molt (shed) and replace their feathers once a year, usually after their nesting duties are completed. A majority of backyard feeder birds perform this annual molt from July-September, but some, like Downy Woodpeckers and Eastern Bluebirds continue well into October. Having a strong set of fresh new feathers is of tremendous benefit to birds that are facing the rigors of migration or the struggles of surviving a long, cold winter.

Come nesting season, some of our backyard birds exchange just a portion of their feathers for more colorful breeding plumage. While American Goldfinches do molt and replace all their feathers (body, wings and tail) each autumn, come spring, they molt only their body feathers to transform into their showy yellow courtship attire.

Whatever the reason for growing new feathers, it comes at a high price. The demand for energy and nutrition during this process is through the roof, and large amounts of protein and fat are essential for being able to create strong and colorful feathers.

Can you say feeder frenzy?

Look around your yard today. Nesting is still going strong for some birds, while other adults are starting to take on that “shaggy” look that signals the start of their annual molt. Young birds that recently left their nest are also busy growing more “adult-like” feathers to replace their less efficient juvenile plumage.

If you want to have a blast watching your feeders, while also doing your birds a big favor, be sure to keep your feeders well stocked with the high-fat and high-protein foods that will keep them healthy and looking sharp for the coming year!

### June by John Updike



The sun is rich  
And gladly pays  
In golden hours,  
Silver days,

And long green weeks  
That never end.  
School’s out.  
The time is ours to spend.

There’s Little League,  
Hopscotch, the creek,  
And, after supper,  
Hide-and-peek.

The live-long light  
Is like a dream,  
and freckles come  
Like flies to cream.

# Welcome New Members

Lindsey Anderson	Terri Blattspieler	Brandon Ellis
Joni Finney	Harry Fritz	Erika Hildner
Carrol Karlsgodt	Patrick Merkt	Riddy Arman
Ben Essary	Claudia Narcisco	Deborah Schneider
Audrey Trautwein	Jess Walter	



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## 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/>

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|---|---|
| \$ _____ \$15 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via email.  | \$ _____ Phillip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research.                             |
| \$ _____ \$25 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via USPS.   | \$ _____ Total contribution   |
| \$ _____ Free for students, includes FVAS newsletter via email.   | _____ I would like to Volunteer. Please contact me.<br>(Please provide an email address below.) |
| \$ _____ 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. | _____   |

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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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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