November 2025

Birding Observer

Newsletter of the Five Valleys Audubon Society

CALENDAR

Monday, November 3rd, 6 PM: The board meeting will be held in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library.

Monday, November 10th, 7 PM: Please join us for our monthly chapter meeting as we welcome wildlife biologist, Torrey Ritter, who will present The Beaver-modified Landscape. See details to the right.

Saturday, November 15th, 10 AM: 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, December 6th: All Day Field Trip to the Mission Valley to observe overwintering species. This is a driving field trip with frequent stops for roadside birding so be prepared for variable weather conditions. Meet at 8am on the West side of the UM Adams Center parking lot or at 9am at the Cenex in Ronan.

Sunday, December 14th: Christmas Bird Count. Please see details on page 3.

Five Valleys Audubon Society Presents: Torrey Ritter on The Beaver-modified Landscape

Please join us at our monthly chapter meeting on Monday, November 10, 2025, at 7:00 PM to hear our speaker, Torrey Ritter, present his talk: The Beaver-modified Landscape.

Beavers are considered ecosystem engineers. The dams that they build direct waterways, replenish groundwater, and create wetlands that are vital to a range of wildlife. They are one of the most influential wildlife species in North America due to their ability to reshape habitats to suit their needs. In doing so, beavers bring about changes that can make stream systems more resilient to drought, wildfires, and flooding while providing some of the most biologically rich habitats in the nation.

In his talk, Torrey will recount the history of beavers in North America and highlight the immense impacts beavers have on the water and sediment that moves across the landscape. He will also talk about ways in which their activities are essential components of stream and wetland ecosystems.

Torrey Ritter is a nongame wildlife biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. He has worked on a wide range of species and habitats over his career, but beavers really captured his interest when he observed how many different species benefit from their activities on the landscape. Torrey studied beaver dispersal and settlement site selection for his Master's work and has since gone on to work with a variety of partners on efforts to restore beavers to areas of their former range and help people deal with beaver conflicts. Torrey spoke to Five Valleys Audubon several years ago, and we are excited to have him back!

The meeting will be held in Room 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) on the University of Montana campus. The building lies on the south end of campus on Beckwith Avenue between Maurice and Mansfield Avenues. You also have the option of watching the meeting over the zoom link listed below.

https://umontana.zoom.us/j/91924893854

Peeps from Your Board:
The Bird with Sad Eyes
By William Boggs

Birdwatching is partly remembering...

Upland Sandpiper
Photo by J.D. Phillips

I'm often haunted by a moment from a field trip I was on a few years ago northeast of Bozeman. It's not the most spectacular and beautiful moment of that trip either. *That* was a shortgrass prairie scene, seen on a section of school trust land that had never suffered the plow. There, several curlews were circling and calling, with their wild calls floating over a dun hillside where, below them, up from the grass, McCown's Longspurs were rising, gliding, then slowly spiraling down, singing their courting songs on the wing. All of them linked in an intricate avian music, with the peaks of the Crazy Mountains glowing white far away.

Rare and exciting birds, being their best selves, in a near-virgin landscape: for connoisseurs of the earth, a perfect scene.

But what I remember most vividly about that trip is another moment, occurring privately, silently–though also involving a rare bird. It happened a few hours before the curlew and longspur scene. My companion and I were (as was our custom) bringing up the rear of a five-car caravan making its way along section roads adjoining lightly-cultivated ranch fields. It was ten in the morning, we were tired from a too-early rising, hungry, aching a little–not in the best mood. Moreover, it looked like the caravan was losing us; I was squinting to make out the last car ahead in the dust.

"Stop!" Janet said. I stopped. "Look over here—slowly," she said. I looked to my right—very slowly. There, on a fence post, about six feet from our passenger door, stood an Upland Sandpiper—upright, perfectly still, looking at us with its big shining sad eyes. We looked back. There was silence. A long moment passed. The three of us frozen, a bird and two people—communing, it seemed. Then the bird started and flew, and we moved to catch up with the group.

"What was that sandpiper saying, with those sad eyes?" Janet asked. Without my meaning it to, the answer leapt to my lips: "'You'll be sorry when I'm gone.'"

I know—or suppose I know—birds don't foresee their own fate, much less comment upon how we'll react to it. Nevertheless, I remember that moment, because for me it defined a central paradox of human existence on earth. As a species, naturally, we're egoists; we're incorrigibly selfish; we always put our own interests first. But strangely, we *can't*. For happiness (our ultimate interest) depends, finally, on joy; and joy depends on love; and love depends on the lovable–on all that exists outside us, that invites our embrace. We're transitive souls. We are, in the heart, all we're not. For us to be *truly* selfish, to be genuine, thoroughgoing egoists, we would have to sacrifice everything to preserve the lovable beings of the earth.

But we're not sacrificing much yet—our egoists' wisdom's elusive—and so there's an undercurrent of sadness, even of mourning, beneath all our happy bird excursions now—a sadness shadowed with guilt. It's the sadness of killing what we love–without wishing to, helplessly, killing by merely living our lives. It's the sadness of a future where we'll look and look...but there'll be nothing to see.

We're loath to admit it, of course. We talk excitedly to one another with our little yellow radios. We laugh and keep lists. We want our caravans to keep circling the ranch fields in joy. But somehow that sandpiper says, it'll be a long way back to any innocence. Before we get there, we'll all be changed.

Upland Sandpiper
Photo by Alex Lamoreaux

Field Trip Report
Bird Banding at MPG Ranch
By Thomas Kallmeyer

On Wednesday, September 24th, ten birders and two intrepid newscasters from NBC Montana attended our last visit of 2025 to the UMBEL (University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab) banding station in the Bitterroot River flood plain on MPG Ranch. We were treated to a wealth of knowledge on banding, aging and sexing birds by the UMBEL staff, who were excellent hosts. The group was able to witness banding of both male and female Common Yellowthroat and observe 14 species during the field trip. Be sure to check our Events Calendar for more banding field trips to the UMBEL banding station at MPG as Spring approaches.

View the trip report on eBird:
https://ebird.org/tripreport/414875

Check out NBC Montana's story:
https://nbcmontana.com/news/local/bird-banding-project-gathers-scientific-data-in-bitterroot-valley

Field Trip Report
Town Bound Birding at Fort Missoula
By Thomas Kallmeyer

On October 4th, nine birders met at the Native Plant Garden at Fort Missoula. The original idea was to bird Sleven's Island and take a look at the habitat under threat by proposed development of the Historic Fort Missoula Hospital site, but we changed our plan as a rare vagrant, a Prothonotary Warbler, had been present for the previous two days just the West of this area. Beautiful Fall weather had given way to low cloud cover, fog and cool temperatures on this morning, but we did see some activity as we followed the slough along the shore of the Bitterroot River West. We surveyed the area where the Prothonotary Warbler had been seen for 20 minutes but came up empty handed! We then proceeded further west to the fence overlooking the river and the Fort Missoula Ponds, finally retracing our route back to the Native Plant Garden. We tallied 26 species for the trip.

View the trip report on eBird:
https://ebird.org/tripreport/423133

Save the Date: Sunday, December 14th
126th Annual Christmas Bird Count

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place on Sunday, December 14, 2025.

All observers of nature are welcome, regardless of experience. You can participate by joining a group in the field or by being a feeder watcher.

If you would like to take part in the field count, contact Larry Weeks at info@fvaudubon.org, or 406-540-3064. Larry will provide different options for you to choose from.

The Count is a circle with a 7.5-mile radius, centered at the intersection of Reserve St. and I-90. The area within the circle will be covered by small groups and individuals and will be assigned ahead of the count day.

We also tally unusual birds not seen on Count Day that are seen during count week. Count week includes the three days before and three days after count day.

The count day will end with a potluck dinner at the Headwaters Foundation's Confluence Center in the Headwaters Room, 119 West Main Street. Dinner will commence at 6:00 pm. Please bring your favorite potluck offering, or A-L, bring a salad or dessert, and M-Z, a hot dish. After the potluck, we will tabulate the results of the field count.

See a map of the count circle and learn the background of the Christmas Bird Count tradition here: https://fvaudubon.org/christmas-bird-count/

The Thrush
A poem by Edward Thomas

When Winter's ahead,
What can you read in November
That you read in April
When Winter's dead?

I hear the thrush, and I see
Him alone at the end of the lane
Near the bare poplar's tip,
Singing continuously.

Is it more that you know
Than that, even as in April,
So in November,
Winter is gone that must go?

Or is all your lore
Not to call November November,
And April April,
And Winter Winter—no more?

But I know the months all,
And their sweet names, April,
May and June and October,
As you call and call

I must remember
What died into April
And consider what will be born
Of a fair November;

And April I love for what
It was born of, and November
For what it will die in,
What they are and what they are not,

While you love what is kind,
What you can sing in
And love and forget in
All that's ahead and behind.

News from Montana Audubon

Audubon Wildlife Fund Grants

Since 1996, Montana Audubon has awarded small grants to individuals or organizations in support of research and education projects that directly benefit wildlife in Montana. In 2025, we awarded seven grants to support research, habitat clean-up, a hawk watch station, and raptor rehabilitation centers. Visit the grant website (linked below) to see updates from each recipient.

Applications for the 2026 cycle are now available. Proposals must be received no later than Friday, January 16, 2026. The winners will be announced in March 2026.

See grant guidelines, download the application form, and read updates from 2025 recipients here: https://mtaudubon.org/wildlifegrants/

Montana Audubon Citizen Science Reports

This year, Montana Audubon organized three Citizen Science surveys: a pilot project surveying for Nightjars; the second year of surveys for Western and Eastern Screech-owls; and the continuation of the long-running Long-billed Curlew Initiative, now in its 13th year.

Across all three projects, a total of 221 citizen scientist volunteers conducted a total of 167 survey routes, covering an estimated 1,287 miles! In total, 1,713 detections of target species were made, contributing to species conservation status and conservation action plans for these species.

Thank you to everyone who was involved with our Citizen Science surveys this year! These efforts would not have been possible without the dedication of volunteers, and we are grateful that so many joined us in looking for these birds in need. These projects would also not be possible without our sponsors and partner organizations, including Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; Montana Natural Heritage Program; Tracy Aviary; L.E.A.W Family Foundation; Blackfoot Challenge; and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Read the reports here: https://mtaudubon.org/2025-citizen-science-reports-now-available/

Welcome New Members

Cheryl Babcock	Martin Burke	Cindy Jimmerson
Kristin Kopplin	Donald Martyn	Bruce Sims
Stephen Speckart	Judith Uhreen	Mary Vero
Sonja Walesch	Kalyn Ward	Greg Weier
Bruce Whitehead	Sherry L Wood	William Blake

Be an environmental and fiscal champion.
If possible, please signup to receive newsletters via email instead of printed copies.

If your Audubon subscription is through National Audubon, we likely don't have your email. To get our local newsletter and birding news electronically, 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@fvaudubon.org.

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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