FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY
1976 - 2026

March 2026

CALENDAR

Monday, March 2nd, 6 PM: The board meeting will be held in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library.

Thursday, March 5th, 7 PM: Beginning and Intermediate Birding Workshop: Warblers and Shorebirds. Details on page 4.

Monday, March 9th, 7 PM: Please join us for our monthly chapter meeting as we welcome Tricia Rodriguez, who will teach us about The Science and Impact of Bird Banding. Details to the right.

Thursday, March 12th, 7 PM: Beginning and Intermediate Birding Workshop: Woodpeckers and Sparrows. Details on page 4.

Saturday, March 14th, 8 AM: Town Bound Birding: Join us as we explore Council Grove State Park in search of overwintering species and early Spring migrants. Meet the field trip leader, Thomas Kallmeyer, in the parking area.

Thursday, March 19th, 7 PM: Beginning and Intermediate Birding Workshop: Raptors. Details on page 4.

Saturday, March 21st, 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.

Five Valleys Audubon Society Presents: Beyond Binoculars: The Science and Impact of Bird Banding

Please join us for our chapter meeting on Monday, March 9, 2026, at 7:00 PM. Our speaker will be Tricia Rodriguez from the University of Montana's Bird Ecology Lab (UMBEL), who will present her talk, Beyond Binoculars: The Science and Impact of Bird Banding.

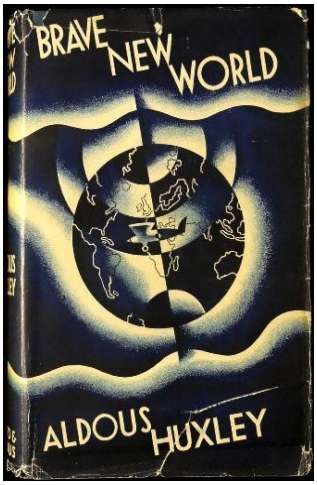
Field ornithologists collect information about wild bird populations in a variety of ways, with the goals or questions in a study guiding the choice of methodology. Banding is an excellent choice for researchers who need to mark and identify individual birds, assess health and body condition, collect measurements, and more. UMBEL has been studying songbird populations in western Montana since 2006, capturing and banding over 37,000 birds from 154 species. Tricia will familiarize you with bird banding efforts in Montana and around the world! She will share results with us from several local studies.

Tricia Rodriguez is a professional bird bander and avian ecologist. She was born and raised in Georgia, where she lived a suburban lifestyle without a bird feeder in sight. In her final semester at the University of Georgia, she took ornithology "just for fun," but it ultimately changed the direction of her life. After graduation, she traveled for eight years as a seasonal field technician, working on bird projects in places like Cape May, NJ, Denali National Park, AK, and Maui, HI. She has been an avian ecologist with UMBEL since 2012, managing the banding program but also jumping in to work on any of the other great projects at UMBEL whenever there's a chance. Tricia enjoys spending time on the river, camping in beautiful places, cooking, knitting, and playing with her two cats.

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/97859873399

Peeps From Your Board:
AI: A Cautionary Tale
By Andrea Stierle



I grew up on a steady diet of dystopian authors who made me leery of the future I was inheriting. *1984*, *Animal Farm*, *Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *A Handmaid's Tale*, were disturbing to say the least. The Foundation Trilogy assured us that a robot may not harm a human or allow a human to come to harm. But how does artificial intelligence define harm to a human?

So, full disclosure, I am not embracing the world of AI with open arms. Equally full disclosure, I am not an AI expert. According to Google AI (the horse's mouth), "AI (Artificial Intelligence) is the broad, foundational field of machines simulating human intelligence. Generative AI (gen-AI) is a subset of AI that creates new content—including text, images, video, audio, and code—by learning patterns from massive datasets. These models act as creative partners, transforming simple prompts into novel, human-like outputs."

As there are enough trillion-dollar corporations acting as cheerleaders for a world powered by AI, I won't focus on the positive aspects of AI. Instead, I will focus on the environmental costs of this technology.

The excitement surrounding the benefits of AI, from improving worker productivity to advancing scientific research, is hard to ignore. The explosive growth of this new technology has enabled rapid deployment of powerful models in many industries. However, according to MIT News, the environmental consequences of this generative AI "gold rush" remain difficult to fathom, let alone mitigate.

The computational power required to train gen-AI models with billions of parameters can demand a staggering amount of electricity, which leads to increased pressure on the electric grid as well as increased carbon dioxide emissions. Beyond electricity demands, massive amounts of water are needed to cool the hardware used for AI systems, which can strain municipal water supplies and disrupt local ecosystems. The increasing number of gen-AI applications has also spurred demand for high-performance computing hardware, adding indirect environmental impacts from its manufacture and transport.

As the demand for AI accelerates, data centers are consuming vast amounts of freshwater, raising concerns over potential strains on water supplies across the US. When AI is given a prompt, massive server hubs consume enormous amounts of energy to respond, causing the machines to heat up. Data centers often use fresh water to cool down those servers, which then evaporates. Approximately 80% of the water used by data centers evaporates, with the remaining water discharged to municipal wastewater facilities.

According to research from Purdue University, the average data center uses 300,000 gallons of water daily — roughly 110 million gallons per year - enough to supply 1,000 homes. Two-thirds of new data centers in the US are built in dry regions, such as Arizona and Texas. The Houston Advanced Research Center estimated that data centers in Texas will use 46 billion gallons of water this year alone and nearly 400 billion gallons by 2030. That's about 7% of the total water used in the entire state.

Larger data centers can each "drink" up to 5 million gallons per day, or about 1.8 billion annually, usage equivalent to a town of 10,000 to 50,000 people. Together, the nation's 5,426 data centers consume billions of gallons of water annually. Water consumption is expected to continue increasing as data centers grow in number, size, and complexity. According to scientists at the University of California, Riverside, each 100-word AI prompt is estimated to use roughly one bottle of water (or 519 milliliters). This may not sound like much, but billions of AI users worldwide enter prompts into systems like ChatGPT every minute.

Equally alarming is the loss of vast areas of open space – farmlands, grasslands, etc., that are sacrificed annually to Data Centers. Sadly, these open spaces were homes to birds and other wildlife and this displacement is costly to the natural world. Many communities see data centers as an economic boon and provide tax incentives to companies who will use this "worthless open space" for job creation. Sadly, this tragic loss of habitat is not

rewarded as anticipated. Most of the jobs created by Data Centers are associated with construction, not their ongoing operation, and thus are largely temporary.

Electricity consumption to run data centers will be a significant contributor to the climate crisis if more fossil fuel powered generation is used to meet data center energy demands. The US and China are by far the largest data center markets today. According to the International Energy Agency, in both countries, most of the electricity consumed by data centers is produced from fossil fuels, a trend which is projected to continue until at least 2030. Natural gas is currently the biggest source of electricity for data centers in the US (40%), followed by renewables at 24% (both solar photovoltaic and wind), nuclear power (20%) and coal power (15%). Data Centers have a huge requirement for electricity so the industry must get power plants up and running as fast as possible.

So, I remain a little leery about the rush towards AI. After all, my first real encounter with AI was informed by HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey*: "Open the pod bay doors, HAL: "I'm sorry Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that... I know that you and Frank were planning to disconnect me, and I'm afraid that's something I cannot allow to happen".

[If you would like to avoid Google's AI summaries in search results, we recommend the following Wired.com article: https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-hide-google-ai-overviews-from-your-search-results/]

"The more high-tech our lives become, the more nature we need to achieve natural balance."
~ Richard Louv

"In a world of constant change and streaming technology, I find solace in the forest, where a tree remains a tree."
~ Angie Weiland-Crosby

"We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."
~ Aldo Leopold

Town Bound Birding
By Thomas Kallmeyer

On February 14, 2026, Town Bound Birding went to the California Street Bridge. Our group had a blast with some wonderful light and a fair diversity of species despite the lack of snowpack and the unfrozen Clark Fork River. We started by scoping some Common Goldeneye from River Road at the southern end of the California Street Bridge, noting two hens and a first-year drake, which gave good opportunities to compare the two. We then birded from the bridge, noting the large numbers of Mallards, American Crows, and Eurasian Starlings while hearing the singing of House Finches and Song Sparrows. A single drake Common Merganser foraged in the river below. Three Bald Eagles made flyovers, one of which was carrying nesting material. As we approached the north end of the bridge a raft of Common Goldeneyes appeared downstream, with several drakes getting frisky and displaying courtship behavior. To the delight of the group a flock of passerines passed high overhead, pursued by a Merlin, which did us the courtesy of perching in a Cottonwood downstream for excellent scope views. As the last of the group departed the bridge the Merlin passed directly in front of us and went after an American Crow causing quite a stir before soaring away upstream.

View the trip report on eBird:
https://ebird.org/tripreport/476397

Common Goldeneye
Photo by Thomas Kallmeyer

Beginning/Intermediate Birders Workshop
By Larry Weeks

Five Valleys Audubon is currently conducting a birding workshop on Thursday nights from 7:00 – 9:00 pm at the Fish Wildlife and Park's meeting room at 3201 Spurgin Road. There are three sessions remaining:

- March 5 – Warblers & Shorebirds
- March 12 – Woodpeckers & Sparrows
- March 19 – Raptors

The cost to attend one session is $15. However, if you choose to attend all three remaining sessions, you will not be charged more than $40. To sign up, email Larry Weeks at birderweeks@gmail.com.

December Birding at Lee Metcalf
By Larry Weeks

The December 20th Beginning Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf took place with blue skies to the west and a big dark cloud that blocked the sun until noon. Even with the temperatures in the upper 30s and low 40s, there was a south wind that made it uncomfortable for the 9 participants. We started by scanning parts of ponds 5 and 6 by the visitor's center which held at least 14 Trumpeter Swans and 9 species of ducks. Green-winged Teal were especially abundant. There was one Northern Shoveler, a Ring-necked Duck and an American Coot. As we progressed northward on the Kenai Trail, we encountered a large flock of American Tree Sparrows where the wooden walk bridge crosses a small stream. Some of the sparrows were in the walkway and provided excellent viewing with a spotting scope. As we progressed, a Great Blue Heron and 2 Sandhill Cranes flew by. At pond 8, we found about 12 Common Mergansers, lots of ducks, a Northern Harrier, a Red-tailed Hawk that was hovering in the wind, and heard a Virginia Rail. A couple coming back on the trail reported seeing a Northern Shrike, but we were unable to locate the shrike. At the Wildlife Viewing Area, we encountered a flock of Wild Turkeys on the asphalt trail. Then we had 2 Pileated Woodpeckers, a White-breasted Nuthatch, a Downy Woodpecker, chickadees, and Northern Flickers in a winter-feeding flock. We were unable to find an American Dipper, but there was a male Belted Kingfisher perched across the river. We ended up with 29 species and a porcupine for the trip.

News From Montana Audubon

Help us build 50 screech-owl boxes in honor of our 50th anniversary! This year we're starting a new phase of our citizen science screech-owl project: building, placing, and monitoring screech-owl boxes!

Right now, we're on part one: building the boxes. Can you help? We're looking for volunteers with carpentry know-how and the tools to build boxes themselves. If that's you, please email Casey at casey@mtaudubon.org for more information and to volunteer.

If carpentry and woodworking aren't your thing, stay tuned. We'll have more opportunities coming soon. Thank you to our project partners Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and to Fencecrafters for their generous lumber donation!

Save the Date for the
25th Annual Wings Across the Big Sky Festival
Mark your calendars and join us this summer in Kalispell, June 12 -14, 2026, for the Wings Across the Big Sky Festival! Montana Audubon and our local chapter partner Flathead Audubon Society have been hard at work putting together a birding festival to commemorate the 50th anniversaries of both organizations- you won't want to miss this year's festival!

There are multiple field trips into Glacier National Park; tours of favorite local hotspots around Flathead Lake; a Friday afternoon pre-festival trip to Flathead Lake Bio Station; and for the more adventurous the opportunity to bike & bird Going to the Sun Road!

Registration will open in March 2026. Keep an eye on Montana Audubon's email newsletter and social media for updates.

Welcome New Members

Lynette Fritz	Carolyn Gard	Chris Jauquet
Avery Jordan	Mary LaPorte	R H Moore
Duanna Pickens	Gayla Rice	Sheri Thick
Debbie Thrailkill	Nathan Wise	Joyce Brobeck Dege
Lee Cromrich Lamb	Don Gardner	Braydon Luikart
Peggy Mallette	Mark Brennan	

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

There are several ways to donate and support Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). All options include the *Birding Observer* and allow you to participate in all chapter activities. *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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