FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY
1976 - 2026

April 2026

CALENDAR

Happy Spring!

Saturday, April 4th, 4-9pm: Five-hour late day field trip to the Ninepipe area in the Mission Valley to look for Short-eared Owls. Meet the field trip leader at 4 pm in the Missoula College parking lot, 1205 E Broadway. No reservations required.

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

Monday, April 13th, 7 PM: Please join us for our monthly chapter meeting as we welcome Kate Stone, who will talk to us about Northern Saw-whet owls. Details to the right.

Saturday, April 18th, 10 AM: Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet at the Visitor's Center and expect two miles of level hiking.

Saturday, April 25th, 8-10 AM: Town Bound Birding explores the Upper Rattlesnake. We will walk a loop up Sawmill Gulch and search for forest birds and newly arrived Spring migrants. Meet the field trip leader at the Rattlesnake trailhead. All are welcome!

Five Valleys Audubon Society Presents: Northern Saw-whet Owl

Northern Saw-whet owl Photo by Kate Stone

Please join us for our monthly chapter meeting on Monday, April 13, 2026, at 7:00 PM when Kate Stone will present her talk: Northern Saw-whet Owl Migratory Movements and Activity Patterns.

Northern Saw-whet Owls are the most-banded owl species in North America, particularly during migration. Yet, we know relatively little about their movement paths and travel rates. Their small size has limited the application of precise tracking methods used for larger raptors. Kate will share the results of a study completed over two autumns when she used aerial and ground-based telemetry to track the movements of 65 owls as they traveled through the Bitterroot Valley. How far did owls travel in one night? How many stopped over between migratory movements? What kind of roosts did they use?

Kate will share preliminary results using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System and "nanotags" to evaluate both the larger migratory movements Saw-whet Owls make, and small-scale patterns of activity during migration and over winter. Scientists at MPG Ranch have deployed over 200 nanotags on Saw-whet Owls and are currently analyzing data related to foraging time, stopover behavior, and travel rates.

Kate Stone directs the bird research program for MPG Ranch, a private conservation property in the Bitterroot Valley. She works with several small owls, Lewis's Woodpeckers, and nightjars. She also serves on the Ravalli County Open Lands Board. Most of her professional and personal work centers on studying the importance of private lands to wildlife conservation.

Following Kate's presentation, PL Wright Award recipients Bella Adams and Lauren Hatch will give presentations about their research. Lauren's presentation is entitled: Bad brome-ance: Understanding Associations Between Planted Grasslands and Grasslands Birds to Inform Conservation in the Northern Great Plains. Bella's presentation is entitled: Reproductive Tradeoffs in Black Brant Geese: Clutch Size vs Egg Volume as a Function of Female Age and Environmental Condition

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/96634757552

Peep from Your President: 2025 Chapter Activities and 2026 Opportunities
By Rose Leach

The Chapter had a successful 2025, powered by 179 volunteers with 2,935 hours of service to our wide variety of projects. Our main focus was co-hosting the statewide Wings over the Big Sky bird festival, with close to 190 participants here in Missoula. We organized and offered 20 field trips each on Saturday and Sunday, a migration panel discussing research methods and recently gathered data, an overnight field trip to the Bannock area of southwestern Montana, and a keynote speaker who described several decades worth of local Osprey research to us.

Other Chapter activities in 2025 included local field trips, bird surveys, Chapter membership meetings with outside speakers, Christmas Bird Count (we again had over 100 participants!), county and city planning and proposal reviews, a 7-week series of advanced birding workshops during the spring, a 3-day MOLLI birding class in early June, bird presentations at local schools, and presence at local gatherings—Phlox Fest, Missoula Streets, a local book launch, and a Pint Nite evening.

Our 3-year shorebird surveys, which were organized through the Intermountain Bird Observatory and Boise State University, were so successful that we decided to continue running the fall routes into the future. The survey areas were located at Ninepipe Reservoir and several other wetland sites in the Mission Valley.

This spring and summer, we will revisit several Festival field trip sites. One includes the Upper Miller Creek area searching for Black-backed Woodpeckers and other birds associated with a recent burn in the area. We will also be visiting the Lee Creek area, searching for some higher elevation species that are relatively accessible in that area. Keep an eye out for details in the newsletter and the website for details. In addition, one of our local banders has invited us to watch their banding operations again this year, so we hope to arrange that as well.

Bird banding and Five Valleys Audubon Society in the news

"Bird banding project gathers scientific data in Bitterroot Valley"

The 7-week birding workshop was quite popular, and we plan to offer it again next year. This year we are currently offering a shorter set of workshops designed for beginning birders.

If you would like to become more involved with our Chapter's activities or direction, we do have a board member opening at this time. To participate, our Board meets every first Monday from Sept through May, for 1.5 hours or so each evening. All are welcome! You just need to bring ideas and a willingness to pitch in!

Photos from Our 2025 Festival

Long-time Board member and Past President Jim Brown leading a festival field trip to the Carl Hayden property.

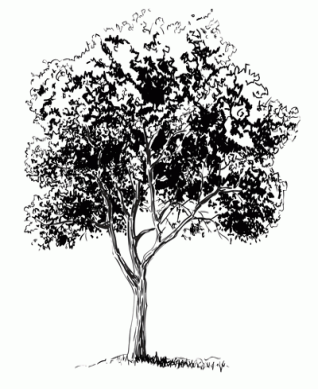
Habitat overview. The hillsides support species that like mixed shrub-grass habitats such as Clay-colored Sparrow and Vesper Sparrow.

Upcoming Multi-day Field Trip
By Larry Weeks

The 2-day field trip to Freezoout Lake and Benton Lake has been scheduled for May 23rd and 24th. The plan is to meet in the Missoula College parking lot and leave Missoula at 7AM on May 23rd and drive to Freezout Lake. The group will bird Freezout Lake on Saturday and Benton Lake on Sunday.

We will spend the night in Choteau. The motel options are the Stage Stop Inn (406-466-5900) and the Gunther Motel (406-466-5444). The single room rates vary from $161.65 at the Stage Stop Inn to $78.55 at the Gunther Motel. Other Gunther options are $89.34 for two people and $100.14 for 3 people. **Scholarships are available for students to assist with overnight expenses. Please email info@fvaudubon.org to inquire or check our website for details.

Participants are asked to make reservations in advance. If you plan to attend, please contact Larry Weeks at birderweeks@gmail.com or 406-241-6477, and he will coordinate carpooling. Plan to take lunch for two days. We will eat dinner together in a local restaurant. Breakfast is provided if you are staying at the Stage Stop Inn. There is a $10 charge for multi-day field trips.



"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."

~ Rachel Carson

Extreme Heat Is Rising, but Research Efforts Face Setbacks

> *"Located just a few hours' drive from the Canadian border, Missoula, Montana. is not known for sweltering temperatures. And yet heat waves are becoming more common in the mountainous region due to climate change, and researchers are concerned that a catastrophic heat event could soon shock the 120,000 or so people who call Missoula County home."*

ScienceNews recently highlighted a troubling contradiction in the U.S. response to climate change: as extreme heat becomes more frequent and more dangerous, federal support for heat research is being cut. The article, "Life-saving research on extreme heat comes under fire," published in November 2025, points to Missoula County, Montana, where local leaders had planned to work with the federally funded Center for Collaborative Heat Monitoring to identify neighborhood-level hot spots and better protect residents during dangerous heat events. But that funding was terminated before the work could move forward.

The story underscores why this matters. Heat is the deadliest weather-related hazard in the country, and officials quoted in the article describe better local heat data as potentially life-saving. Researchers say many heat-related deaths could be prevented with stronger planning, better public health tools, and more precise information about which communities are most at risk.

ScienceNews notes that extreme heat waves are becoming more common and more intense as the climate warms. The article also reports that while the CDC estimates more than 700 people die from heat each year in the United States, some researchers believe the true annual toll may be far higher because heat deaths are often undercounted.

The central takeaway is clear. Extreme heat is a public health challenge, and communities need better tools, stronger coordination, and sustained investment to respond effectively.

To read the full article, visit:
https://www.sciencenews.org/article/extreme-heat-climate-change-research

Source: Nikk Ogasa, "Life-saving research on extreme heat comes under fire," ScienceNews, November 2025.

News From Montana Audubon

Registration for the 25th Annual Wings Across the Big Sky Festival is open

Registration is open! This year, scholarships are available from both Flathead Audubon and Five Valleys Audubon. More information on how to apply can be found on the festival website.

We hope you join us this year in Kalispell, June 12th- 14th. There will be 30+ field trips to choose from, including two pre-festival field trips on Friday. There's something for everyone: hike through Glacier National Park; visit conservation easements that provide habitat for migrating waterfowl and wildlife; visit a raptor rehabilitation center and see raptors up close; or improve your skills as a photographer. Field trip descriptions and other information will be shared via a printed brochure and are posted on the festival website.

Visit the website here:
https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings-across-the-big-sky/

Or scan the QR code:

Birding Can Improve Cognition
By Jennifer Mattson
Reprinted from FAST COMPANY

Neuroscientists have found birding is actually a brain hack. A new study published in *JNeurosci, the Journal of Neuroscience* found birdwatching may actually alter the structure and function of your brain—what is known as neuroplasticity—effectively helping to boost cognitive abilities, especially in more seasoned bird watchers.

"Our brains are very malleable," lead researcher Erik Wing, a research associate at York University in Toronto, explained.

Wait, what exactly is neuroplasticity?
Neuroplasticity is basically the way your brain learns, creates memory, and adapts to experiences and trauma, according to *Psychology Today*.

Research shows that while the brain changes and develops the most in childhood, it continues to do so throughout your life.

Today, neuroscientists see the brain as a dynamic and flexible organ, one that can "reorganize connections" through "wiring" and "rewiring."

How bird watching helps your brain
The new study of 58 adults compared the brains of 29 expert birders (ages 24 to 75), and 29 beginners around the same age. It found something interesting: The MRIs of the expert birders' brains had more density when it came to areas governing perception and attention, than those of the novices.

Again, they didn't divide the two groups based on a person's age—but based on their birding knowledge and expertise.

Birding, which involves deep concentration and the ability to identify different birds, alters brain activity and structure in the same way becoming an expert musician or athlete does. That's because they all require extensive brain training.

So, what did the study conclude? In short, it found the process of becoming an expert birder boosted brain cognition. And while it doesn't stop brain aging, it does suggest that it could help minimize age-related declines in the future.

Welcome New Members

Terri Blattspieler	Curtis Carter	Dick Hoskins
Doug Kikkert	Norman Lavery	Candace Lewis
Sandy Martin	Karin Marvel	Daniel Misciagna
Aspen Powers	Nate Johnson	Kathie Kadri
Arysa Puckett	Vicki Correia	Clint Romney

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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