

February 2017

Birding Observer



Five Valleys Audubon Society, a Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Calendar of Events

- **Monday, February 6th, 6:45-8:45pm:** The February board meeting will be held at the Missoula Public Library.
- **Saturday, February 11th:** Owl trapping field trip in the Missoula Valley with Denver Holt, if the weather cooperates. The group will meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 9:00 am. For more information, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or 540-3064 (cell).
- **Monday, February 13th, 7:30pm:** Our February speaker will be Brooke Tanner, from the Wild Skies Raptor Center. The meeting will be in the UM Gallagher Business Building, Room L14.
- **Wednesday, February 15th:** The deadline for the March edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, February 18th:** Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Saturday, February 25th:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 7:50 am or at the Cenex Station in Ronan at 9:00 am.

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February Program Meeting: Wild Skies Raptor Center

Attendees of the February meeting are in for quite a treat. Our speaker will be Brooke Tanner, Founder and Executive Director of Wild Skies Raptor Center. Wild Skies provides care and rehabilitation to injured birds with a goal of eventual release. The center focuses on raptors but they attempt to help any birds that come through the door. Brooke will take us through the center's rehabilitation process and common causes of injury. She will also be bringing a few live raptors and talk about their stories.

Wild Skies Raptor Center received their non-profit status in March of 2010. They started building a new center in Potomac the summer of 2014. In addition to rehabilitation, Wild Skies provides educational and outreach programs. They currently have five permitted raptors for education. The dedicated individuals at Wild Skies must be prepared to deal with an assortment of injuries from accidents such as collisions with automobiles and power lines to the bitter realities of poison and lead shot.

Brooke's work takes her all over the area from Condon to Sula responding to calls of injured birds and she must be ready at a moment's notice when the call comes. She has been rehabilitating raptors for over ten years and still currently works part-time as a veterinary technician.



Come meet Brooke and the birds in Gallagher Business Building Room L14 at 7:30 PM on February 13th.

Peeps From The Board: Birds that Flock Together Stay Together By Susie Wall, Program Coordinator

Attracting new members and retaining existing members is a vital part of any organization and it is something I believe Five Valleys Audubon does very well through conservation programs, field trips and monthly meetings. As the recently appointed Program Coordinator for Five Valleys Audubon it is my job to schedule speakers for our monthly meetings and I take this responsibility seriously. I see it as an important component to both keeping long-term members active and introducing non-members to our flock.



I have to say this job is also important to me for personal reasons as well because it's what brought me to Five Valleys Audubon. I inherited a volunteer gene from my mother and after moving to Missoula several years ago I was looking for a way to get involved in my new community. I was delighted when I came upon regular listings in the Independent calendar for Five Valley's Monday night meetings that were open to anyone. I found it a wonderful opportunity to hear from experts in their field, feed my voracious curiosity and learn about the natural world in my new home. It would make for a good story if I could remember my first speaker but alas I cannot. Let's just say Larry Weeks' always popular "dead birds on a stick" played an enormous part.

When I first started in this position I was concerned I would have a hard time finding speakers but that has been far from the case. Our own board members are a great resource both in giving a talk on their vast interests and experiences and in recommending someone they know. The university is also a great resource to hear about a graduate student's current research project. Often times I have just learned of someone through the newspaper or Facebook that I think would be of interest to me which I hope in turn means they would be of interest to others.

Reviewing the list of 2016 speakers, I was reminded of an impressive roster put together mainly by my predecessor, Carolyn Goren. Kate Stone gave a fascinating presentation on Common Poorwills at the MPG Ranch. Terry McEneaney kept us entertained, regaling us with his tales of birding and travels through Ireland. Andrea Stierle had us enthralled as

she described her research into the depths of the Berkeley Pit.

I hope 2017 will live up to that high mark. Photographer John Ashley told us about the night sky in Glacier National Park last year and will be returning to talk about Harlequin Ducks. Climate Smart Missoula Director Amy Cilimburg will tell us about her important work on climate change. And as cooler temperatures set in Jill Davies will bring us along on her recent birding adventures in Costa Rica.

An average of forty people regularly attend our monthly meetings. I often sneak a peek at the crowd looking for faces both familiar and new and I speculate what brought each person here. Some I am sure are university students eager to here talks about their field of study. Many are dedicated members that come to catch up with good friends and hear of the latest Audubon happenings. My hope is that at least a few of the new faces came in because they read the description of the talk, and it sparked their interest, as it did mine several years ago. If that is the case for even one person then I consider my job a success.

Request for Proposals for Small Research Grants By Bill Gabriel

A request for proposals (RFP) under the Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Program has been distributed within the University of Montana and to Missoula high schools. Proposals for the 2017 grants will be due on March 23, 2017, and awards will be announced early in April.

Since 1981 Five Valleys Audubon Society awarded small amounts of money to help students fund small research projects that could be completed in a few months. Originally called the Field Biology Research Awards, in 1992 the name of the program was changed to the Philip L. Wright Research Awards in recognition of Dr. Wright's contributions to science, Montana, and Missoula. In these 36 years, 81 university and high school students have received a total of \$38,676.50 from the program. The amount per award has ranged from \$100 to \$1,180, and averaged \$483.

Subjects of the research have been distributed as follows: birds 36, plants and habitats 18, mammals 13, amphibians 7, invertebrates 7, fish 4. While most of these small studies have been carried out within Montana, some have been as far afield as Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Central America, and Southeast Asia.

Winter Advocacy By Amy Cilimburg



The Montana Legislature's in full swing and your voice matters.

As the days get longer and the chickadees start singing, it's hard not to be hopeful, right? Of course! Yet it's also impossible to ignore the tumultuous times we live in. Many of us are thinking where and how to make a difference. From our birds to our voices, keeping it local makes sense. However, every other year for 4 months or so, we recognize that "local" means the entire state because that's when our state legislature meets.

This is the first year in a decade I'm not travelling back and forth to Helena to support birds, wildlife, climate, and clean energy at the Montana Legislature. Of course Montana Audubon is there, as they've been for many decades. Although no longer Audubon staff, I know the importance of a strong conservation voice in Helena, and I'm working with my colleague Amy Seaman—the other Amy! While no longer Team Amy, together we hope FVAS folks will engage. Two easy ways:

* Be sure you receive Montana Audubon's Action Alerts. Head to mtaudubon.org and scroll down to "Join Our Online Network" and you'll get timely alerts to help with key bills and key legislators.

* Stay connected via Facebook—both our FVAS page and MT Audubon's.

At the session, we're already seeing a plethora of bills—The Good, The Bad and The Ugly. In need of support are bills to continue to protect (and fund) Greater Sage-Grouse and to make Habitat Montana work again. Habitat Montana is MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks' primary habitat enhancement program and during last session, legislators put challenging restrictions on it, largely preventing FWP from purchasing new parcels. Audubon aims to help remove this restriction. They're also working on bills to directly protect wetlands and clean water.

Not surprisingly, public lands—where so many of our birds and wildlife thrive—remain under threat. More about when to add your voice to "keeping it public" forthcoming, and if you get this newsletter on the early end, there is a Public Lands Rally in Helena January 30! There are also myriad bills to support or oppose related to solar power, clean energy,

dirty energy, and climate change. My role at Montana Audubon was to work on these issues, and I hope to be a resource locally. I know some of you have considered or have installed new residential solar systems. There are bills that will affect "net metering" and other options to bring more solar to Missoula, and we'd love your voice of support, especially if you have your own solar story to tell.

This session, Missoula-area legislators need to hear from wildlife and clean energy advocates. We have local legislators who we know are our conservation champions, and they appreciate a positive email or phone call. We also have new legislators with no track record, and these folks will need to hear from their constituents to move them in the right direction. So if you don't know already, find out who represents you.

Finally, as many know, I left Montana Audubon to work locally on climate issues, helping to create a new program, Climate Smart Missoula. It's an exciting endeavor, and I plan to connect some of Climate Smart's efforts to those of FVAS. In addition to solar and other "energy wise" efforts, there are overlaps, especially as we consider things like growing more shade with urban trees and riparian shrubs (think - bird habitat). Check out our website (www.missoulaclimate.org) and be in touch to get involved or connect.

Thanks everyone for your help to protect birds, wildlife, and our community!

Amy Cilimburg
amy@climatesmartmissoula.org

You can help Montana Audubon: Lend your voice or go to the Capitol!

Mark your calendars and take action at the Capitol.

- January 30th Public Lands Rally – come show your support for public lands – MT Audubon packed the Capitol last year, and they want nothing less this year!
- February 23rd Solar Rally and Lobby Day
- March 17th Lobby Day

MT Audubon will provide more information on these events in the coming weeks, and be sure to check out their Facebook page for regular updates.

It's easy to sign up for MT Audubon action alerts – just visit their homepage (<http://mtaudubon.org/>) and scroll to the bottom and share your email address!





June 9-11, 2017
Great Falls, Montana

During the winter months, many birders find themselves dreaming of long summer days chasing diverse species of our feathered friends across beautiful Montana landscapes. Remember, it's not too early to begin planning your summer birding adventures! Come join us in Great Falls for Montana Audubon's 17th Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon, June 9 - 11 at the Best Western Heritage Inn.

We have over 20 field trips planned for each day! — guided by knowledgeable birders and naturalists familiar with the species and their habitats in the Great Falls area. Here is just a brief sampling of some of those trips to contemplate as you anticipate the upcoming Bird Festival.

FIRST PEOPLES BUFFALO JUMP. First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park and National Historic Landmark is an archaeological site with possibly the largest bison cliff jump in North America. Native peoples used this site for at least a thousand years before Lewis and Clark traveled through what became Montana. The bison jump site consists of a mile-long sandstone cliff. There are remnants of drive lanes on top of the cliff and up to 18 feet of compacted buffalo remains below. Expect to see Rock Wren, Say's Phoebe, Long-billed Curlew, Upland Sandpiper, Black-headed Grosbeak, warblers and flycatchers among the rock slopes, mixed grass prairie, and nearby riparian areas.

SULPHUR SPRINGS. Leaders from Audubon and the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center will highlight birds, plants, and Lewis and Clark history on this easy 3.6 mile round trip walk through yucca, grasslands and coulees. The hiking trail is along a relatively remote stretch of Missouri River to the

cold springs. Water from Sulphur Springs proved vital in treating Sacagawea's illness during the 1805 portage at Great Falls. The interpretive signs along the trail offer information regarding Lewis and Clark expedition. Expect to see Lark Sparrow, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Bullock's Oriole, American White Pelican, possibly Yellow-breasted Chat and Yellow Warblers.

SALISBURY FARM. Visit an 8,000 acre organic farm along the Missouri River near Floweree, 30 miles north of Great Falls. Learn about the small grain and cattle ranch run by Elsie and Russ Salisbury, while observing a variety of birds, a bald eagle nest and tipi rings. They recently finished a new home insulated with hay bales!

THAIN CREEK TRAIL. In the Highwood Mountains east of Great Falls, we will bird along the road through grassland and riparian habitat, then take a moderate two-mile round trip hike through conifers. Expect to see Lazuli Bunting, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Chickadee, Warbling Vireo, Red Crossbill, various warblers, kinglets and Spotted Towhee.

GIANT SPRINGS STATE PARK. Giant Springs was documented by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805 and is one of the largest freshwater springs in the country. The springs are the site of the Roe River, once listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's shortest river. Large trees and Missouri River riparian habitat make this a dependable place to see birds near Great Falls. Bullock's Oriole, House Wren, swallows, kingbirds, Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, and American White Pelican are the usual species seen, and perhaps a Great Horned Owl. Great for beginners and families.

Keep watch in early March: Festival Registration Brochures with all field trip information, speakers and schedules will be in the mail, and the online system for registration will be active.

If you would like more information, please contact Montana Audubon's Bird Festival Coordinator, Cathie Erickson, at cerickson@mtaudubon.org, or call (406) 443-3949.

"I think the most important quality in a birdwatcher is a willingness to stand quietly and see what comes. Our everyday lives obscure a truth about existence - that at the heart of everything there lies a stillness and a light."

"The sharp thrill of seeing them [killdeer birds] reminded me of childhood happiness, gifts under the Christmas tree, perhaps, a kind of euphoria we adults manage to shut out most of the time. This is why I bird-watch, to recapture what it's like to live in this moment, right now."

~ Lynn Thomson, *Birding with Yeats: A Memoir*

Missoula Christmas Bird Count

By Larry Weeks



The Missoula Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 17, 2016. This Count will be remembered for the low temperature of -16 degrees F and the high of -1 degrees F. In spite of the extreme cold, there were 79 participants in the field and we identified 83 species. This is the 6th consecutive year that we have been in the eighties. Jim Brown's group, who birded Grass Valley and Trout Meadows on Mallard Way, had the only Short-eared Owls and White-throated Sparrow. Cole Wolf and Nicholas Sly birded Crazy Canyon, Farviews and South Hills and had the only Golden Eagle, Gray Jay and Western Bluebird. Poody and Joe's group birded Kelly Island and had the only Snow Goose and Bufflehead. Rose Leach's group, who birded Mullan Road, had the only swans and Harris' Sparrow. Denver Holt's group had 2 Barn Owls and a Barred Owl west of the airport. Robin Anderson's group had the only Varied Thrush along the Rattlesnake Creek. Robin was also watching a Wood Duck on a small patch of open water near the Orange St. Bridge, but it froze over on Count Day and the Wood Duck became a Count Week (CW) bird. Vick Applegate's group birded the State Nursery and the Tower St. Open Space and found the only Ring-billed Gull. The feeder watchers also contributed to the species count. Kay Lambert had the only Spotted Towhees and Cassin's Finches, and Gene Miller had the only White-crowned Sparrows. Other group leaders included Brian Williams who hiked the Stewart Peak Trail, Thomas Kallmeyer who birded Butler Creek, Paul Hendricks who birded Marshall Canyon and Woods Gulch, Jim Sparks who birded the Kim Williams Trail and the upper Clark Fork River, Terry Toppins who birded Maclay and Big Flats, Debbie Leick who birded LaValle Creek, Cynthia Hudson who birded Council Grove and the Kona Ranch, Dick Hutto and Sue Reel who birded Slevan's Island, Cindy Swidler who birded the Clark Fork River near Riverwalk Estates, Will McDowell who birded McCauley Butte, Blue Mt. Road and O'Brien Creek, Joy Earls who birded along Snowdrift Lane, Caroline Stephens who birded the Moon-Randolph Ranch, and the author who birded Grant Creek. The Count ended with a potluck at the author's home. Many thanks to all of the participants who made this a very successful Count in spite of the cold weather.

Missoula Christmas Bird Count 2016		
Great Blue Heron (44)	American Coot (2)	White-breasted Nuthatch (43)
Tundra/Trumpeter Swan (2)	Killdeer (20)	Pygmy Nuthatch (17)
Canada Goose (1225)	Wilson's Snipe (14)	Brown Creeper (13)
Snow Goose (1)	Ring-billed Gull (1)	Pacific Wren (2)
Wood Duck CW	Rock Pigeon (579)	American Dipper (5)
Green-winged Teal (22)	Eurasian-collared Dove (304)	Golden-crowned Kinglet (22)
Mallard (1204)	Mourning Dove (49)	Western Bluebird (1)
Northern Pintail (5)	Barn Owl (2)	Townsend's Solitaire (34)
American Wigeon (6)	Great Horned Owl (12)	American Robin (315)
Common Goldeneye (105)	Northern Pygmy-Owl (4)	Varied Thrush (1)
Barrow's Goldeneye (5)	Barred Owl (1)	Bohemian Waxwing (2020)
Bufflehead (10)	Long-eared Owl (13)	Cedar Waxwing (857)
Hooded Merganser (8)	Short-eared Owl (2)	Northern Shrike (6)
Common Merganser (51)	Belted Kingfisher (22)	European Starling (128)
Bald Eagle (49)	Downy Woodpecker (51)	Spotted Towhee (2)
Golden Eagle (1)	Hairy Woodpecker (26)	American Tree Sparrow (15)
Northern Harrier (15)	Northern Flicker (188)	Song Sparrow (78)
Sharp-shinned Hawk (8)	Pileated Woodpecker (14)	White-throated Sparrow (1)
Cooper's Hawk (3)	Horned Lark (25)	White-crowned Sparrow (4)
Red-tailed Hawk (118)	Gray Jay (2)	Harris' Sparrow (1)
Rough-legged Hawk (19)	Steller's Jay (2)	Dark-eyed Junco (215)
American Kestrel (5)	Clark's Nutcracker (2)	Red-winged Blackbird (263)
Merlin (5)	Black-billed Magpie (374)	Cassin's Finch (3)
Prairie Falcon CW	American Crow (162)	House Finch (307)
Large Falcon Species (1)	Common Raven (142)	Red Crossbill (343)
Gray Partridge (30)	Black-capped Chickadee (379)	Pine Siskin (283)
Ring-necked Pheasant (27)	Mountain Chickadee (55)	American Goldfinch (177)
Ruffed Grouse (4)	Red-breasted Nuthatch (164)	House Sparrow (550)
Wild Turkey (121)		
	83 species	11,992 total birds

Winter Bird Feeding: Good or Bad for Birds?

By Joe Smith, 1.5.15

Reprinted from nature.org

Winter bird feeding is one of the most popular ways for people to interact with nature, and most do it to help birds get through these tough months. But what does this really mean for conservation? Does feeding help or hurt birds?

More than 40 percent of U.S. households feed their backyard birds, and in the United Kingdom, the rate is as high as 75 percent. Despite the widespread popularity of bird feeding, scientists are still building a basic understanding of its impacts.

As we might guess, a number of studies show generally positive impacts of bird feeding. For example, the overwinter survival of birds is enhanced by bird feeding. This is especially true during the coldest times, when some hungry birds might otherwise lose the battle with the elements.

A study conducted during winter in Wisconsin showed that black-capped chickadees with access to bird seed had a much higher overwinter survival rate (69%) as compared to those without access to seed (37% survival). Furthermore, some studies have shown that birds making it through the winter in better physical condition see those benefits carry over into the nesting season.



Downy Woodpecker & Black-capped Chickadee

Bird feeding produces significantly earlier egg laying dates, larger clutches of eggs, higher chick weights and higher overall breeding success across a wide range of bird species.

The greatest impact of feeding is seen when birds are most challenged, such as after particularly harsh winters, or when birds are young and inexperienced, or when they are living in low-quality habitats. Feeding can promote the survival and reproduction of the not-quite-fittest.

But in contrast to these straightforward results – showing that bird feeding makes for better-off birds – a few studies

indicate that, at least in some situations, there may be unintended consequences of bird feeding.

A European relative of the black-capped chickadee, the blue tit, was studied in the United Kingdom to examine the impact of bird feeding on nesting success. One research group found that birds fed during winter subsequently laid a smaller number of eggs that had lower hatching success and ultimately fledged fewer young than birds that weren't fed at all. The offspring that did fledge weighed less and had a lower survival rate than the young of unfed birds. An additional U.K. study of the blue tit and another chickadee-like species, the great tit, had similar findings.

Both species, when they had access to bird food, laid fewer eggs, had lower hatching success, and ultimately had fewer chicks fledged. Note, however, that these are just two studies demonstrating a negative effect of bird feeding – among a majority that show positive effects.

Nonetheless, the striking findings of lower reproductive success in supplementally fed birds need some explanation. Unfortunately, it was beyond the scope of these U.K. studies to definitively explain how bird feeding resulted in lower reproductive success, but the authors offer several possible hypotheses.

One possibility the authors suggest is that the bird feeding provided an irresistible diet that was unbalanced – too high in fat to produce high-quality eggs. More protein, micronutrients, and antioxidants than are provided by bird seed may be needed to produce high-quality eggs.

Another possibility is that bird feeding allowed individuals with a lower reproductive capacity which ordinarily would not survive the winter the chance to nest.

A final possibility is that the feeders were placed in poor quality nesting habitat – leading the birds to choose these suboptimal sites as nesting areas in the spring.

More research needs to be done across a wider geographic area and on more species to understand not only the impacts of bird feeding on reproductive success, but also on other factors such as disease transmission, species range expansion, and population trajectories.

Citizen scientists can help by participating in initiatives like Project FeederWatch that ask people with bird feeders to share their observations. What you see in your own backyard can contribute to the efforts to answer these questions.

Welcome New Members

Jon Avent	William D. Bain	Roger Bergmeier
John Waldmann Bohn	Bruce R. Bowen	Donald W. Ehrlich
Richard & Suzanne Fahey	Jean Griffith	Rhonda Hasselfeldt
Rory Johnson	Kristina Johnson	Orrin Johnson
Jan Kubasko	Claudia Larance	Mary E. Manning
Melvin Maron	Pat McKay	Missoula Physical Therapy
Suzanne Schwartz	William Sebern	Catriona Simms
Mr. & Mrs. Greg Toomire	Sally Wright	Beth Youngblood



Go Green and Save!

Do you want to help Five Valleys Audubon Society save money, paper and volunteer time? Please consider reading your *Birding Observer* online. Your online copy will contain content in color, and you will receive your newsletter much earlier than the mailed hard copy! If you wish to receive your *Birding Observer* via email, just send us a request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arri.net. You can also find your current newsletter on the Five Valleys Audubon Society website at www.fvaudubon.org. Thanks!

Join Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a Chapter member of the Five Valleys Audubon Society. I will receive the *Birding Observer* and may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues remain entirely with the Chapter.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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Please note: The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

\$15 for a 1-year, Chapter-only membership

An additional sum of \$_____ is also included to support Chapter activities.

Please make check payable to the Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to:

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425
Missoula, MT 59807

Join National Audubon Society & Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local Chapter. I will receive the *Audubon* magazine and *Birding Observer*, and I may participate in all local Chapter activities.

Name: _____

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The newsletter will be delivered electronically unless requested otherwise.

\$20 for a 1-year membership (Chapter Code: N53)

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www.fvaudubon.org

OFFICERS:

President	Rose Leach	721-0779	rleach-2@bresnan.net
Vice President	Thomas Kallmeyer		thomaskallmeyer@yahoo.com
Secretary	Andrea Stierle	782-6419	andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu
Treasurer	Jean Duncan	396-1171	jeanclaire@montana.com

DIRECTORS:

2016-2019	Rose Stoudt	880-8060	ras120656@yahoo.com
2016-2019	Susie Wall	274-0548	susiewall2@gmail.com
2015-2018	Paul Loehnen	721-7517	ploehnen@gmail.com
2015-2018	Catherine Goodman	549-5404	catherine.goodman08@gmail.com
2014-2017	Gerhard Knudsen		
2013-2016	Ed Monnig	549-0580	emonnig01@gmail.com

COMMITTEES:

Archivist	Shirley Holden		
Audubon Adventures	Vacant		
Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Conservation	Amy Cilimburg		amycili@gmail.com
Education	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Field Activities	Larry Weeks	549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Habitat Protection	Jim Brown	549-8052	browns2@bresnan.net
Member Records	Vick Applegate	549-0027	k7vk@arrl.net
Membership Promotion	Jerry Dirnberger	360-5133	dirnberger@aol.com
Newsletter Circulation	Hedwig Vogel-Wright	549-7251	
Newsletter Editor	Bev Orth Geoghegan	406-750-0149	orthbev@hotmail.com
PL Wright Endowment	Bill Gabriel	273-6880	biograf@earthlink.net
Program	Susie Wall	274-0548	susiewall2@gmail.com
Publicity	Poody McLaughlin	543-4860	pmcregan@bresnan.net
University Liaison	Chad Bishop	243-4374	
Web Site	Pat Little	493-7115	roughleg@gmail.com
Past President	Pat Little	493-7115	roughleg@gmail.com

Montana Audubon
PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
(406) 443-3949
www.mtaudubon.org

Steve Hoffman, Executive Director
shoffman@mtaudubon.org

Janet Ellis, Senior Director of Policy
jellis@mtaudubon.org

Norane Freistadt, Director of Operations
norane@mtaudubon.org

David Cronenwett, Development Specialist
david@mtaudubon.org

Sara Lipscomb, Office Manager
mtaudubon@mtaudubon.org

Cathie Erickson, Accounting Specialist
cerickson@mtaudubon.org

Amy Seaman, Bird Conservation Associate
aseaman@mtaudubon.org

Trinity Pierce, Land Stewardship Coordinator
restoration@mtaudubon.org

Jonathan Lutz, Director, MT Audubon Center
jlutz@mtaudubon.org

Fred Weisbecker, Board President