

January 2013

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **Monday, January 7th:** Betsy Griffing will host the January board meeting at Axilon Law Group, 257 West Front Street, Suite B, Missoula, MT.
- **Saturday, January 12th:** Half day field trip at Maclay Flat. Meet at the Maclay Flat parking lot at 9am for a 3-hour walk led by Terry Toppins. Dress warm.
- **Monday, January 14th:** Dave Hanna, from the Nature Conservancy, will discuss ecology and conservation on the Rocky Mountain Front at the January program meeting.
- **Tuesday, January 15th:** Submission deadline for the February edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, January 19th:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10AM-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.

Board Update

- Sarah Tarka Baer is our new Newsletter Distribution Chair. Welcome aboard, Sarah!
- The board held a Strategic Thinking Session in November, aimed at clarifying our chapter's purpose and the direction we should be taking. This is the first step in a process, which will help us decide where to put our efforts over the next few years. The outcome from this initial session was that we settled on two main areas of focus: *riparian and grassland habitat*, and *a bird-friendly community*. The next session, to be held sometime in the spring, will help us identify specific goals and activities. We welcome your ideas – please send any suggestions to Pat Little.

Ecology and Conservation of the Rocky Mountain Front

The natural history and land management of the spectacular Rocky Mountain Front and its prairie fens, limber pine savanna, grizzly bears, and grassland birds will be the focus of our January program meeting. This is our annual joint meeting with the Native Plant Society. It will be held on Monday, January 14th, in **room 123** in the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus. (Please note that this is a different room from our usual meeting location.) Dave Hanna of the Nature Conservancy will present the program and will also address the history of conservation efforts on the Front, along with current and future challenges.

Dave has lived and worked on the Rocky Mountain Front for over 20 years. He spent 15 years at The Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Swamp Preserve, and now serves as the Conservancy's Rocky Mountain Front Science and Stewardship Director.

His work has encompassed many fields including rare plant and vegetation monitoring, weeds, fire, livestock grazing, conservation easements, oil and gas, and wildlife and recreation management. He works with a broad spectrum of people from ranchers and landowners to biologists and attorneys.



**Five Valleys Audubon Society wants to save money and trees.
We encourage you to get your newsletter delivered electronically. See page 5 for details.**

Peeps from the Board:

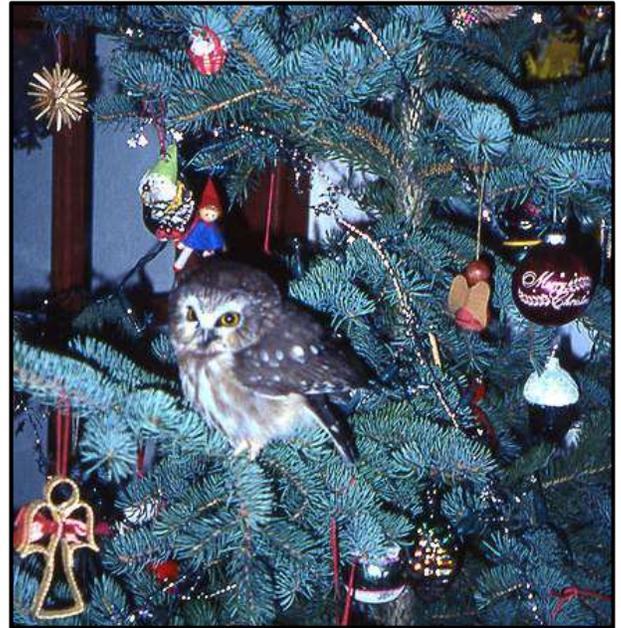
An Unusual Christmas Ornament by Terry McEneaney

In the time period between Christmas and New Year's Day, I am often reminded of the experience I had in Yellowstone National Park regarding an unusual Christmas ornament – one that few people are able to say they had on their personal Christmas tree.

Being the first full-time Yellowstone National Park ornithologist, there were countless field experiences that I was fortunate to experience over the course of my fabulous career. One such experience was on Christmas Eve 1999, when I drove by the recently closed Mammoth store and noticed a raucous group of Black-billed Magpies (*Pica hudsonia*) attacking something on the ground, near the door of the store. I went over to investigate and found several magpies pecking the daylight out of a Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*). Normally I would have let an event like this go, because predation in Yellowstone comes in many forms and is a natural part of the park experience. However, I thought at the time that if I didn't intervene, the owl would have been history.

When I approached the vulnerable owl, the magpies backed off, but they waited, ready for the kill as soon as I left the scene. So I decided to give the saw-whet a fighting chance. I gently picked up the small owl, placed it in a box and brought it home for rehabilitation. At home, I put it in a dark, warm, and quiet room, and checked on it periodically throughout the night. Finally on or after Christmas Day, I wanted to make sure the owl was capable of flight, so I left the box open to see if it could fly on its own. To my surprise it flew without flaw and headed straight to a tree. The only problem was that the tree the small owl landed in was my family's Christmas tree, complete with lights and Christmas ornaments. I left the owl in the Christmas tree for most of a day.

As the sun was setting that evening, I released the owl in a forested area near Mammoth, free from magpies and other predators for a while. As it flew away, it brought back the wonderful personal experience of a Northern Saw-whet Owl during Christmas. And so whenever Christmas comes around, I am reminded of the time an unusual Christmas ornament adorned our Yellowstone Christmas tree.



Whooh likes Christmas? Northern Saw-whet Owl

Fun Fact about the Northern Saw-whet Owl

This owl gets its name “saw-whet” from a phrase American ornithologist William Brewster coined in the early 1900's when he described “the sounds produced by filing a large mill saw”. Years later field ornithologists learned he was talking about the agitation and/or territorial “ksew” call, which resembles a whetstone or grindstone rubbing on metal.

Tips for Feeding Birds In the Winter

- Feeders should be located out of the wind and positioned near cover, but in the open to allow birds to watch for danger.
- Seed in a ground feeder attracts birds such as sparrows, juncos, Mourning Doves, quail, pheasants, towhees and Brown Thrashers.
- Platform and hopper feeders attract birds like wrens, chickadees, jays, and grosbeaks.
- Hanging feeders, because they blow in the wind, are generally used by species that are able to hang on while feeding, such as chickadees, nuthatches and finches.

- Oil sunflower is a great overall seed to offer in the winter. It has a high calorie/ounce ratio due to its high fat and protein content and its relatively thin shell. Oil sunflower has twice the calories per pound than striped sunflower, and its smaller shells make less mess when discarded by the birds.
- Suet is a great food to offer many birds that visit backyards in the winter. Suet is a high energy, pure fat substance which is invaluable in winter when insects are harder to find and birds need many more calories to keep their bodies warm. Suet can be fed in a variety of feeders ranging from a suet cage to a wood and cage feeder, offering protection from the weather elements and designed to require the birds to hang upside down.
- Peanuts are another great food to offer birds in the wintertime. Peanuts have high protein and fat levels and are often an ingredient in suet products.

Elizabeth’s Legacy By Kathy Heffernan



Elizabeth Johnston 2011

In 1998, Elizabeth Johnston, a longtime hiker and birding enthusiast, moved to Montana and started a “bluebird trail” on the slopes of Waterworks Hill. A “bluebird trail” is a series of bird boxes, specially designed for Western and Mountain

Bluebirds, placed in proper habitat, and spaced appropriately for the birds’ territorial needs. For many years, Elizabeth tended the trail herself, often accompanied by her grandsons, Paul and Sam. She lifted the young boys up to peer into the boxes to help her monitor the many clutches that fledged from her boxes. Elizabeth maintained 6 boxes on the hill for many years until her declining health forced her to pass the maintenance of the trail on to her daughter and son-in-law. She continued to hike up Cherry Gulch to observe the boxes and other bird activity until the day she died.

Since 2007, Elizabeth’s trail has been expanded to include 32 bluebird boxes stretched across the North Hills plus several additional boxes designed specifically for Wrens and Tree Swallows. These boxes are maintained and monitored by Elizabeth’s family and interns from Dr. Renee Duckworth’s University of Arizona bluebird research team. This year, two boxes were added to the east side of the Hill. These new boxes are maintained by 9-year-old Krista Loewenwarter and her parents.

In 2007, thirteen bluebirds fledged from the Elizabeth’s boxes. In 2008, with more boxes, the numbers rose to 92. And 2009 was better yet, with 142 fledglings. In 2010 and 2011, the trail also produced strong numbers at 106 and 86. This year, 59 young bluebirds fledged from Elizabeth’s boxes. Unfortunately, seventy-one additional nestlings died and fifty-five eggs did not hatch, due to a combination of cold weather and lack of insects (food). With more favorable weather conditions, the trail could beat its previous record of 142.

Last spring, Elizabeth passed away unexpectedly. The bluebird trail that she started on Waterworks Hill is one part of her legacy to her many friends and fellow birders in Missoula. Her family invites those who hike Waterworks and the North Hills to continue Elizabeth’s guardianship of the bluebird boxes. Elizabeth’s boxes are painted with numbers and posted with small laminated signs. If you hike the hill often, observe the bird activity at the boxes. Gently educate curious hikers who might try to open the boxes. Report any maintenance issues to her family members (John and Kathy Heffernan @ 543-4097). Best of all, enjoy the bluebirds of Waterworks Hill which have flourished over the last 14 years thanks to Elizabeth’s stewardship.



Maria McEvoy and Maya Heffernan maintain bluebird boxes in the North Hills. Maria’s mom has her own “bluebird trail” on Mt. Jumbo.



Trumpeter Swans

On the morning of Sunday, December 2nd, when I drove into the UM Field House parking lot, I wondered whether anyone would show up. It was a rainy, windy day and the forecast was to remain that way all day. To my surprise 15 birders met at the parking lot and after assembling at the Cenex Station in Ronan, our group grew to 23 birders. We pondered how to see birds through the fog that had settled in on us. Bob Rost kindly offered his home and attractive set-up of feeding stations for starters. The birding was exciting. We head a Varied Thrush as soon as we arrived and observed Evening Grosbeak, Chestnut-sided Chickadee, Brown Creeper, Steller's Jay and others. Thank you Bob for sharing your home and bird friendly yard with us.

We then headed to Ninepipe Reservoir, which unlike some years in early December, was wide open. We observed a number of duck species including Mallard, Northern Pintail, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser and Hooded Merganser; and Western Grebe, Great Blue Heron and Bald Eagle. Continuing on we saw a good number of raptors mostly Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks. Several Northern Harriers, more than usual, were seen.

About noon the rain picked up so we headed north to the beautiful home of Dave and Ruth Ann Bunnell. En route we stopped to view a pair of Trumpeter Swans occupying a small pond. Bunnell's home sits on a knoll overlooking the Mission Valley and Mission Mountains. They didn't expect to have their house filled with birders but graciously served hot coffee and fresh banana bread to everyone. Their warm hospitality was a welcome break and added immensely to the enjoyment of our day. The weather improved and we headed north to the Pablo area. We stopped to watch a Merlin harass a flock of Rock Doves and starlings. A flock of Eurasian-collard Doves sat in tree nearby. The Merlin seemed happy to stay in this area with so many groceries on hand. We also observed American Kestrel, American Robin and Townsend's Solitaire. In all we tallied 41 species.

Bird Synonym Quiz Answers - courtesy of Professor Avian Guano

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Conventional maniac | Common Loon |
| 2. Girded angling monarch | Belted Kingfisher |
| 3. Yankee ditch-digger | Northern Shoveler |
| 4. Decoy | Wood Duck |
| 5. Getting venison | Killdeer |
| 6. Larger jaundiced lower limb | Greater Yellowlegs |
| 7. Rosy gathers-no-moss | Ruddy Turnstone |
| 8. Scarlet rope kink | Red Knot |
| 9. Walnut rooster | Woodcock |
| 10. Weeping pacifist | Mourning Dove |
| 11. Saffron-nosed fruitcake | Yellow-billed Loon |
| 12. Generic nocturnal hustler | Common Nighthawk |
| 13. Fast stovepipe | Chimney Swift |
| 14. Flippant demon | Horned Lark |
| 15. Livestock shed eater | Barn Swallow |
| 16. Sunburned acorn brooder | Red-breasted Nuthatch |
| 17. Ashen avian tabby | Gray Catbird |
| 18. Bejeweled little monarch | Ruby-crowned Kinglet |
| 19. Hungarian paraffin airfoil | Bohemian Waxwing |
| 20. Country-western singer | Nashville Warbler |



We spend January 1st walking through our lives, room by room, drawing up a list of work to be done, cracks to be patched. Maybe this year, to balance the list, we ought to walk through the rooms of our lives... not looking for flaws, but for potential.

~Ellen Goodman

Welcome New Members:

Evan Combs
Andrew Kandel
Gerd Pokorra
Ray Willms

Dan Cottrell
Thea Koehler
Robin Reed
Marilyn Wolff

Mitch & Jill A. Dahl
Scott Patterson
Susie Wall
Western Montana Mental Health Clinic



GO GREEN and SAVE !



Do you want to help Five Valleys Audubon Society save money, paper and volunteers' time? Please consider viewing your *Birding Observer* online. In addition your online copy will have 'color' content and you will receive your newsletter much earlier than the mailed hard copy!

If you can **Go Green** and wish to receive your *Birding Observer* only via email, just send us a request with your name to Vick Applegate at k7vk@arrl.net. You can also always find your current newsletter on the Five Valleys Audubon Society's website at: www.fvamisoula.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: _____

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

\$15 is enclosed for 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 the *Birding Observer*, and I may participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

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\$20 for a 1-year individual or family membership

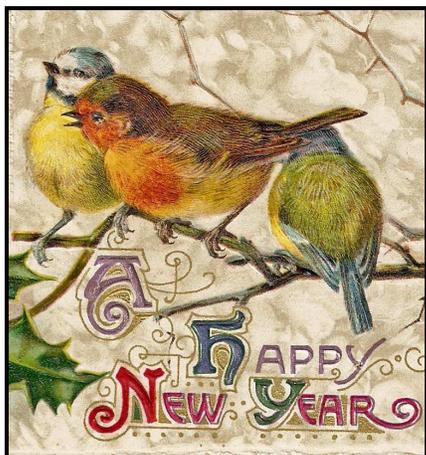
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