

March 2014

Birding Observer



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

Calendar

- **Monday, March 3rd, 7pm:** The board meeting will be held at the Naturalist's Mercantile, located at 131 East Main Street.
- **Monday, March 10th, 7:30pm:** Please join us at our program meeting to hear Montana Audubon staff discuss birding and conservation along the Clark Fork River and in the Mission Valley.
- **Saturday, March 15th:** Submission deadline for the April edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, March 15th:** Beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Friday, March 21st, 6:30-8:30pm:** FVAS birders are invited to celebrate the Spring Solstice at McEaney's Pub (aka Tossie's West) at 1215 Lolo St in Missoula - celebrating the coming of spring, talking birds, singing Irish songs, identifying birds in the Pub. BYOD, RSVP Terry at 493-1438.
- **Sunday, March 23rd:** All day trip to Freezout Wildlife Mgmt. Area near Choteau, led by Terry McEaney for the Snow Goose and Swan Migration. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot for carpooling. The group will depart at 6am, and may not return until dark. Bring lunches and dress appropriately. For more info, call Terry Toppins at 214-1194.
- **Saturday, March 29th:** Bicycle Birding with Terry McEaney in the Missoula area, including Kim Williams Trail, Canyon River Golf Course, and the Rattlesnake area. The group will cover 10-20 miles, in 3-4 hours. Meet in the **northwest corner** of the Adams Center parking lot to depart at 7:30am. For more info, call Terry Toppins at 214-1194.
- **Tuesday, April 1st:** Terry Toppins will lead a half day April Fools' Day field trip. Meet in the Northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at the UM at 9:00AM for carpooling - destination is a surprise returning at 1pm. You can try and get more information from Terry at 214-1194.

The River Runs Through More Than You Think!

Join Montana Audubon's new Bird Conservation Associate, Amy Seaman, at our March 10th program meeting. Our meeting is again in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level) on the UM campus at 7:30pm.

Amy Seaman will highlight the Clark Fork River, from its headwaters on down, detailing its birds, its issues, and its successes. She will also discuss how *your* Important Bird Area (IBA) efforts are inspiring conservation across Montana and beyond.

Many Montanans may be unfamiliar with the fact that the Clark Fork River is Montana's biggest river by volume, traveling 310 miles as it drains a large portion of the Rocky Mountains and northern Idaho. Crossing habitats such as cottonwood gallery forests and riparian willows provide nesting habitat for over half of Montana's 250 breeding bird species. Many are species of concern, such as Lewis's Woodpecker, Red-naped Sapsucker, Willow Flycatcher, and Red-eyed Vireo. Some are colonial nesters, such as the Great Blue Heron. However, as many of us well know, riparian areas are limited in size, and are often unduly affected by human actions.

Amy Seaman earned her M.S in Biology in 2012, during a teaching assistantship at the University of Nevada, Reno, studying the ecology of olfaction and foraging rodents in the Eastern Sierras. Her teaching experiences are varied, but include several semesters assisting field ornithology.

Montana Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation and Climate Policy Amy Cilimburg, will also be there to discuss new conservation initiatives happening in the Mission Valley and sagebrush ecosystems across the state. Opportunities to help us understand and conserve our birds abound.

Peeps From The Board: Becoming a Birder

By Terry Toppins



I'm a birder, I can't help it. It all started innocently enough. One day in the early 70's, Carole (my wife) and I were in Butte and went to a sporting goods store and bought new fishing poles and saw some binoculars - they had an insta-focus lever - WOW - what technology!!! We had to have them. We then went to Glacier Park, looking at birds we couldn't identify (we did know

some birds), scanning the mountains looking for wildlife and had a great time. On the way home we both got incredible headaches - the whole time nothing was ever in focus. But still, we continued looking at birds. (To this day we have only used the fishing poles twice.) We started feeding birds and all the excitement that would bring. Then in 1984 the railroad transferred us to Billings.

In Billings, there was a story in the Billings Gazette about a birding class being offered at Rocky Mountain College by Helen Carlson and Bebe Fitzgerald (both important women in Montana birding) - we both signed up and took the class (more than once). They taught us how to identify birds, where to look, and how much FUN it was to do it with a group, the absolute THRILL of identifying birds you had never seen before. They taught us the importance of keeping records and a list. There is something about looking at old lists from years ago that evoke the air, the sunlight, the smells, how a particular bird looked. (Now birders are listing on eBird and compiling a national database.) We went with the Billings chapter to a National Audubon Convention, we started participating in Christmas Bird Counts and joining every field trip we could. Every vacation we would head out looking for birds. We took a vacation to North Dakota to see birds and had a fabulous time. And we, gradually, every 3 or 4 years, upgraded our optics so we could see better.

In 1988, we were able to move back to Missoula where we found new opportunities. We started doing Breeding Bird Surveys, and occasionally we

guide visiting birders. In 1996 I took over the Montana Birding Hot Line and had 12 great years running that until the internet became the way to track rare, unusual, or out of season birds. We started leading field trips and discovering the fun of helping a new birder find a bird they had not seen before. I think it is important to recognize that it is ok to mis-identify a bird on occasion, it is how you learn.

All this time, it was the birds, always the joy of birds. After hearing and seeing thousands of, say a Yellow Warbler, it's easy to be blasé and pass them off as 'just another warbler'. I give thanks for friends who make me sit and actually look at the bird to marvel again on how beautiful a Yellow Warbler is. It's a joy to revisit those familiar birds and re-appreciate how wonderful they are. Every season brings different birds, every migration is exciting. And then there are the surprises: walking down a trail and finding something unexpected - a Barred Owl sitting on a branch over a trail. Now it is a way of life.

The biggest bonus of birding is the friendships that develop, how birding brings people together from all walks of life spending time together. Birding has always cut across all social lines and it has brought us friends from all over the world that we would never have known. We learned that it didn't matter where you were, in the bleakest of landscapes, birds were making a living there, and if we looked enough we could find them. If you have your binoculars with you, there is something to see and enjoy.

Annual Membership Meeting

During the March 10th program meeting, Five Valleys Audubon Society will hold its Annual Membership Meeting. This is where we elect new board members. There are currently six positions open: Vice President, four Directors (at large), and Membership Promotion Chair. The nominating committee is recommending Rose Leach for Vice President and Scott Hampton, Carolyn Goren, and Gerhard Knudsen for Director. These candidates, plus any nominations from the floor, will be voted on by the membership at the meeting.

Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

By Bill Gabriel

In 1987 Five Valleys Audubon Society began a program of awarding small amounts of money to help students fund small research projects. 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 27 years, 62 university and high school students have received a total of \$28,293 from the program. The amount per award has ranged from \$100 to \$1,180, and averaged \$456.

Subjects of the research have been distributed as follows: birds 26, plants and habitats 12, mammals 10, amphibians 7, invertebrates 6, fish 2. 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.

Requests for proposals for research to be funded this year have been distributed within UM and to local high schools. Proposals for the 2014 awards will be due on March 27, 2014.



Philip L. Wright

The Cold Makes Blackbirds Gather in Large Flocks

Reprinted from eNature.com

The old saying, "Birds of a feather flock together," is particularly true among blackbirds in winter.



Red-winged Blackbird

Though many birds band together during winter, none are as notorious for their flocking behavior as blackbirds, including red-winged blackbirds, European starlings, common grackles and brown-headed cowbirds.

This group of a feather often flock together in the many thousands, sometimes the millions. One winter roost in the Great Dismal Swamp on the Virginia-North Carolina border held an estimated 15 million birds. Flocks in the thousands often roost in urban and suburban areas, where their numbers and their noise make them unpopular among the people living nearby.

Attempts by state and federal wildlife officials to discourage or destroy such flocks of wintering blackbirds have usually failed. One experiment, using a wetting agent sprayed on a huge flock of birds from an aircraft, left a much greater mess in the form of rotting carcasses.

Many wonder why birds in general and blackbirds in particular gather in flocks in winter. Though studies have been inconclusive, it's generally believed that there is safety in numbers. With many more eyes and ears to search for food and watch for predators, the chance of an individual bird surviving winter is increased.

There are reports of hawks attacking flocks of flying birds time and again, but failing to capture even one when the prey closed ranks to form a mass that the hawk was unwilling or unable to penetrate without being injured.

Wings Across the Big Sky
June 6-8, 2014, Bozeman, Montana

Come join us for Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by the Sacajawea Audubon Society, June 6-8, 2014, at the Best Western GranTree Inn, 1325 N 7th Avenue, Bozeman, MT. We are very excited about this facility, which will be the center for all festival activities Friday through Sunday, including registration, birding field trip departures, guest speaker presentations, meals, banquet festivities, and much more.

The GranTree is located right off the interstate in the heart of the Gallatin Valley and provides easy access to all our birding activities and field trips.

Currently we have 80 rooms blocked out for festival-goers Friday and Saturday nights. Be sure to tell them you're with the Bird Festival group to get the special rate! We suggest you make your reservations soon at the hotel directly at 1-406-587-5261.

Our Festival Registration Brochure is scheduled to be mailed by March 3rd, with our online registration system going active on March 5th. Use either the registration form with the brochure or the online system to make your registration for this annual event. The brochure is full of information on the festival events and all the field trips that will be available.

A Sneak Peak at Some of our Scheduled Events for the Festival includes our lineup of Saturday Presenters - We are excited to once again feature a diverse array of Saturday afternoon speakers to educate and inspire us. We will host break-out sections from highly regarded researchers, conservationists, and bird aficionados. The hardest part will be choosing which talk to see! Topics include:

- Montana's nesting Ospreys and toxins;
- Sage-Grouse conservation;
- Bird migration in the Middle East;
- A new "Field Guide to Birds in a Changing Climate";
- Bridger Raptor Migration Project; and
- Birds, Beetles, and Burns.

Plan now to attend this event and learn about the amazing world of crows from our keynote speaker, and then hear from our break-out speakers regarding birding in far-flung places, as well as our Montana concerns and interests including the osprey, sage-grouse, raptors, forest birds in burned forests, and how birds will fare in Montana with our rapidly changing climate.

Call for Montana Audubon Award Nominations!

Please nominate a deserving person for their work for conservation and/or Audubon! We are now seeking nominations for awards to be presented at Montana Audubon's June annual meeting in Bozeman. The awards acknowledge individuals who exemplify a commitment to birds, other wildlife, and habitat conservation. This year awards will be given for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, Special Achievement, Citizen Scientist of the Year, and Lifetime Achievement Award.

To nominate your candidate, please visit our website at <http://mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html>. To be considered for this year's award, nominations must be submitted no later than May 23, 2014. Nominations can be submitted by email or mailed to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624, or by fax: (406) 443-7144. Questions? Contact Janet Ellis at 406-443-3949 or jellis@mtaudubon.org.

Western Meadowlark



Go Green and Save !

Do you want to help Five Valleys Audubon Society save money, paper and volunteers' time? Please consider reading 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.fvaudubon.org. Thanks!

Welcome to Our New Members

- Dick Auerbach
- Andrea Davis
- Leanne C. Gibson
- Jim Long
- Joel Mobley
- Ian Sutherland
- Donna Williamson



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: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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

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

C3Z N53 0Z

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to:

National Audubon Society
PO Box 422250
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807



TO:

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
MISSOULA, MT
59807
PERMIT NO. 490

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807
www.fvaudubon.org

OFFICERS:

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|------------|--|
| President | Pat Little | 493 – 7115 | roughleg@gmail.com |
| Vice President | Vacant | | |
| Secretary | Andrea Stierle | 782 – 6419 | andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu |
| Treasurer | Kit Stevens | 721 - 3530 | dogmakit@yahoo.com |

DIRECTORS:

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|----------------|--|
| 2011-2014 | Carolyn Goren | | carolyngoren@gmail.com |
| 2011-2014 | Gerhard Knudsen | | gmk@bresnan.net |
| 2014 | Rose Leach | 721-0779 | rleach-2@bresnan.net |
| 2014 | Scott Hampton | (417) 343-3499 | wscotthampton@gmail.com |
| 2012-2015 | Clancy Cone | | |
| 2012-2015 | Betsy Griffing | | |
| 2013-2016 | Ed Monnig | 549 – 0580 | emonnig01@gmail.com |

COMMITTEES:

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--|
| Member Records | Vick Applegate | 549 – 0027 | k7vk@arri.net |
| Membership Promotion Program | Vacant | | |
| Conservation Advocacy | Carolyn Goren | | carolyngoren@gmail.com |
| Habitat Protection & Restore | Terry McEaney | 493 – 1438 | ravenology@bresnan.net |
| Field Activities | Jim Brown | 549 – 8052 | brownjs2@bresnan.net |
| Publicity | Terry Toppins | 214 – 1194 | tertop@aol.com |
| Education | Poody McLaughlin | 543 – 4860 | pmcregan@bresnan.net |
| PL Wright Endowment | Larry Weeks | 549 – 5632 | bwsgenea@centric.net |
| University Liaison | Bill Gabriel | 273-6880 | |
| Newsletter Editor | Winsor Lowe | 243 - 6364 | |
| Newsletter Circulation | Bev Orth Geoghegan | (406) 750-0149 | orthbev@hotmail.com |
| Web Site | Sarah Tarka Baer | (717) 422-3453 | sarah.tarka@gmail.com |
| Archivist | Pat Little | 493 – 7115 | roughleg@gmail.com |
| Audubon Adventures | Shirley Holden | | |
| Christmas Bird Count | Barbara Ross | 552 – 0500 | bjmross@gmail.com |
| Past President | Larry Weeks | 549 – 5632 | bwsgenea@centric.net |
| | Paul Loehnen | 721 – 7517 | ploehnen@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, Program Director
jellis@mtaudubon.org

Norane Freistadt, Development Director
norane@mtaudubon.org

Amy Cilimburg, Director of Conservation & Climate Policy
amy@mtaudubon.org

Darcie Vallant, Center Director
darcie@mtaudubon.org

Heather Bilden, Education Director
heather@mtaudubon.org

Amy Seaman, Bird Conservation Associate
aseaman@mtaudubon.org

Fred Weisbecker, Board President