

# April 2016

## Birding Observer



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

### Calendar of Events

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- **Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup>:** The board meeting will be held in the board room at the Missoula Public Library, from 6:45pm-8:45pm.
- **Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup>:** Five-hour late-day field trip to the Ninepipes area to look for Short-eared Owls. Meet at 4:00 pm in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. The return trip to Missoula will be after it gets dark.
- **Monday, April 11<sup>th</sup>:** Montana Audubon's Steve Hoffman will present on raptors of the Veracruz River in Mexico at the April meeting, at 7:30pm, in room L14 of the Gallagher Business Building at UM.
- **Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the May edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- **Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>:** Bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10:00am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader at the Refuge Visitor's Center.
- **Saturday, April 30<sup>th</sup>:** All-day field trip to Brown's Lake led by Jim Brown. Meet in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot at 8:00 am.



Turkey Vulture photo by Arthur Morris

### Large Raptors in Large Migrations: Veracruz River of Raptors Project

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Our next chapter meeting on Monday, April 11 will be at 7:30 p.m. in UM's Gallagher Business Building room L14 (lower level) and will feature Steve Hoffman of Montana Audubon. He will provide a brief update on recent happenings at Montana Audubon, followed by an overview of an exciting project near the Gulf coast in eastern Mexico. The *Veracruz River of Raptors Project* (VRR) is designed to monitor the largest raptor migration on earth (4-6 million raptors of 20 species observed each autumn). As co-founder of the project, Steve will explain how VRR was launched, as well as key findings resulting from 25 years of raptor population monitoring. Finally, Steve will highlight Montana Audubon's forthcoming 12-day birding tour to Veracruz, which offers outstanding opportunities to enjoy this stunning migration spectacle as well as many other exciting birding experiences throughout central and southern Veracruz (300+ bird species likely on this trip).

Steve Hoffman, *Executive Director of Montana Audubon since 2006*, has devoted his entire 38-year career to wildlife conservation. After nine years of government service (mostly as an Endangered Species Biologist in the American Southwest), Steve founded *HawkWatch International*, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to monitoring and conserving hawks, eagles, and other raptors in the West. Steve moved from Pennsylvania to Bozeman in 2004. He has authored more than 30 scientific papers on raptor biology and conservation, endangered species management, and coyote ecology. Steve has given dozens of presentations on the identification, migration patterns and conservation of raptors to diverse audiences throughout the United States and abroad. He earned his M.S. degree in Wildlife Ecology from Utah State University.

**Peeps From The Board:  
Making a Joyful Noise unto the Earth  
By Poody McLaughlin**

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“The earth has music for those who listen.”  
~ Shakespeare

This year we humans will celebrate the 46th Earth Day on Friday, April 22. All sorts of activities occur on this day as we individually and collectively honor the planet that gives us life and sustenance.



While I applaud these efforts and do plan to plant more trees this year (among other things), I am concerned about our modern disconnect with nature. I fear that too many people regard nature as something to contend with or a burden to overcome. Of course we occasionally DO have a contentious relationship with nature: shoveling snow; slipping on ice; weeding seemingly forever; or bemoaning rain, whether too little or too much. Nature’s extremes have created even more of a distance between humans and our beloved planet — in the forms of tornados, hurricanes, rain, drought, snow, and other phenomena — all exacerbated by climate change.

In addition, certain politicians would have us believe that we must forfeit clean air and water in order to provide jobs and grow the economy. Nature then becomes an obstacle standing in the way of our “progress.” There is a precarious balance between industry and development and our right to and need for clean air and water.

Indeed, the news about climate change is so daunting that I and others I know frequently try to ignore the bad news because it is so terrifying and sad. But we do so at our peril. We would do well to reconnect with nature so that we come to regard the earth as a living organism to cherish and protect. How else can we sustain ourselves?

Nature is a noisy, smelly, busy cacophony right now. Everything outside begs us to sit up, listen, smell, look, and dig our hands into spring. Serviceberries bloom and light up the hillsides. Butterflies, turtles, and bees all emerge into the budding spring. April birds beckon: Osprey, swallows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and pipits

arrive; flickers and woodpeckers hammer pipes and hollow limbs; herons incubate eggs high in cottonwoods; Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, and Nashville warblers all sing and dash about, defending their territories.

I celebrate this cacophony of delicious sound. Bird noises are diverse, whether by song, chirps, or alarm calls. Each spring I need to relearn many songs from last year. Even the Song Sparrows that have been chirping their alarms at me during my walks all winter are now singing from the same spots with songs that make me pause. Yesterday I could have sworn that I heard a Spotted Sandpiper singing from a bush along the river. Yet instead here was a Song Sparrow singing his special song. He may have inherited or learned these unique phrases from his father or a neighbor — or possibly even from a nearby Spotted Sandpiper by the river.

Singing birds are my joyous link to the natural world. I may not understand their songs that well, but they encourage me to listen and to try to understand their songs and their world. Nature gives us many reasons to care for our planet, and I hope that this spring we all renew our personal link to the natural world. In doing so we can harness the energy to tackle the big issues that confront us.

Note: My appreciation goes to an inspiring book, “The Singing Life of Birds: the Art & Science of Listening to Birdsong” by Donald Kroodsma.

**Earth Day Tips from Audubon California**

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- Use less plastic, and take your own bags to the supermarket. Plastic waste causes all kinds of problems for birds, so the less we use, the better for the birds.
- Buy shade grown coffee, and support habitat conservation in Latin America, where many of our migratory birds spend their winters.
- Try to keep your dog out of sensitive habitat areas. A lot of nests fail because of disturbance from people's dogs.
- Help turn a kid into a bird nut -- or even just an outdoor enthusiast. If we want to preserve birds and nature in the future, we have to encourage the next generation to love them as much as we do.



## Spring's Nesting Birds Make Easy Prey for Outdoor Cats By Robert Johns, American Bird Conservancy

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With Spring now here, baby birds and other young wildlife will soon be arriving and later venturing from their nests in a generally defenseless state. American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is reminding cat owners that even the most well-fed domestic cats pose serious threats to vulnerable wildlife.

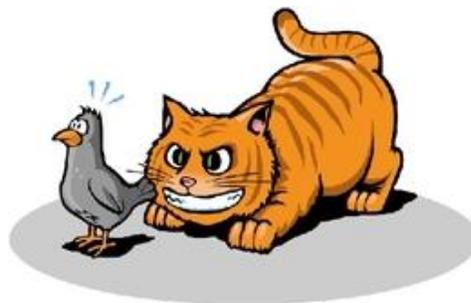
"Spring is an incredibly dangerous time for wildlife because newborn prey don't have the same physical defenses as their parents and have not fully developed the danger awareness regarding predators that comes with time," said ABC Invasive Species Program Director Grant Sizemore. "Spring is perhaps the single most important time of the year for cat owners to protect wildlife by keeping their cats indoors or under their direct control," he said.

For example, Sizemore said a study on the effects of urbanization on wildlife that tracked the early lives of Gray Catbirds in three Washington, D.C. suburbs found that outdoor cats were the number-one source of known predation on young birds. The peer-reviewed study by Anne L. Balogh of Towson University and Drs. Peter Marra and Thomas Ryder of the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute found that almost 80 percent of the catbird mortality in the study was from predation and that cats were the source of almost half of the known predation.

Even brief appearances of cats near avian nest sites lead to an increase in nest failure according to another peer-reviewed study. Those cat appearances can cause behavioral changes in parent birds which can cause an approximately 33 percent reduction in the amount of food brought to nestlings following a predation threat.

Birds whose natural movements include time on or near the ground are most susceptible, especially those that breed or nest on the ground. Typical prey for cats includes a wide variety of birds including songbirds, game birds, and waterbirds.

People often believe that cats won't hunt if they've been well fed. Research shows that cats instinctively hunt, no matter how much they've been fed, because the hunting instinct is independent of the urge to eat.



"People can do something to help native wildlife in their backyard, and it will likely help their pets live longer," concluded Sizemore. "We advise cat owners to spay and neuter their pets, and protect them by keeping them indoors, on leashes, or in outdoor enclosures."



## Field Trip By Larry Weeks

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**Saturday, Feb. 27, 2016:** It was raining in Missoula when we gathered at the UM for the Mission Valley field trip. Although it rained off and on during the drive to Ronan, the rest of the day was relatively dry. The route included Little Martin Rd., Leighton Rd., Pablo Reservoir, Ducharme Fishing Access on Flathead Lake, Polson sewage ponds, Valley View Rd., and Ninepipes Reservoir. We had a leucistic Red-tailed Hawk at the beginning which was nearly all white with some black feathers in the wings and some rufous in the tail. We looked hard for a Ferruginous Hawk that was seen earlier in the week but we were unsuccessful. The raptors that we saw included 41 Red-tailed Hawks, 28 Rough-legged Hawks, 19 Bald Eagles, 7 Northern Harriers, 2 American Kestrels, 5 Great Horned Owls, and we heard a Northern Pygmy Owl. That's an amazing total of 103 raptors. How would you like to be a vole in the Mission Valley? We stopped along highway 35 to look at a flock of Ring-billed Gulls and one 2nd cycle gull that was different. Alex Hughes took photos of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle gull and submitted them to a gull expert who confirmed Alex's ID of a Mew Gull. There were a large number of swans on Flathead Lake but they were too far away to identify. We did have a few Trumpeter Swans that we were able to identify. There were 14 species of ducks which included Canvasback and Greater Scaup. Other birds included Horned Grebe, Virginia Rail (heard), and Common Redpoll. Early returning migrants included a Say's Phoebe and Western Meadowlarks. We had 47 species and there were 13 people on the trip.



June 3-5, 2016 Missoula, Montana

**Calling all Snowbirds, bird guides,  
and talented Chapter supporters**

Please consider donating an experience to this year’s Montana Bird Festival silent auction, to be held in Missoula 3-5 June 2016. Do you have a cabin or 2<sup>nd</sup> home in a birdy area? Could you donate a weekend or several days stay at your site? Could you take someone birding to find a target bird or explore one of your special sites? We all have lots of possessions and many of us are at the stage of trying to pare down. An experience makes a great silent auction item, with no storage needed! Please consider donating something you have to offer this year. You might be surprised at how fun it can be. Just fill out a silent auction description and give it to Jean Duncan (contact info on the back of this newsletter). Thanks!

The annual Bird Festival is fast approaching. You should have received your registration brochure by now, so please register early by mailing the registration page or go online at [www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org). Field trips are already filling up—while still plenty of options available, but you may not get your first choice. If you’re registering online, you only choose one field trip per day as the system will not allow you to register for a trip that is full; if you are registering by mail, be sure to include 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> choices.

Rooms have been blocked at the Holiday Inn Downtown. Call 1-406-721-8550 or 1-800-399-0408 and mention you’re with Montana Audubon (code MAS) to get the discounted rate.

Register soon and join us in Missoula in June. You will be treated to wonderful birding and non-birding tours, Friday evening and Saturday afternoon speakers, Erick Greene, Kate Davis, Jeff Marks, and American Prairie Reserve. Special items this year: purchase your copy of the new *Birds of Montana Book—co-authors will be available for signing*; PLUS be in on the beginning of our celebration of our 40<sup>th</sup> year!

**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 that will be presented at Montana Audubon’s June annual meeting in Missoula. 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 [mtaudubon.org/about/award/](http://mtaudubon.org/about/award/). To be considered for this year’s award, nominations must be submitted no later than May 19, 2016. Nominations can be submitted by email (PREFERRED!) or mailed to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624. Questions? Contact Janet Ellis at 406-443-3949 or [jellis@mtaudubon.org](mailto:jellis@mtaudubon.org).



**Attention**  
We are looking for people who can loan large coolers with ice for the dessert auction on Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup> from 10am until the banquet is over.  
Please call Rose Stoudt at (406) 880-8060, if you have one to loan us.

## Missoula's International Wildlife Film Festival

Mark your calendars for the 39th International Wildlife Film Festival, April 16-23, 2016, with film screenings at Missoula's Roxy Theatre, 718 S. Higgins Ave., Missoula, MT 59801. This includes the WildWalk Parade 2016: Sunday, April 17th, 12:00pm—free and open to the public. To join in the fun, line up at 11:30AM at the BIG RED XXX's (100 Railroad St W), and dance, crawl, swing or slither through downtown Missoula in the annual wildlife parade down Higgins Street, ending at Caras Park for WildFest!



At Caras Park, enjoy WildFest 2016: Sunday, April 17th, 12:30-3pm, also free and open to the public. You will find live entertainment, face painting and concessions with your fellow wild animal revelers – plus a fun FREE concert with The Salamanders.

FVAS is speaking with the IW Film Festival staff, to potentially show some of their award-winning films on Friday afternoon 3 June, before our Montana Bird Festival starts. Let us know what you think of this idea. Contact Rose Leach (info on the back of this newsletter.)

### 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@arrl.net](mailto:k7vk@arrl.net). You can also find your current newsletter on the Five Valleys Audubon Society website at [www.fvaudubon.org](http://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: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

*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. 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.*

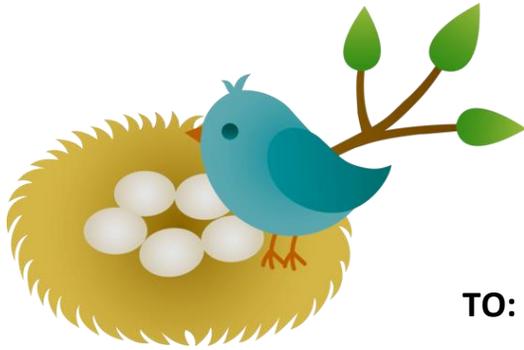
\_\_\_ \$20 for a 1-year membership

Chapter Code: N53

Please make check payable to National Audubon Society:

**National Audubon Society, Inc.**  
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor  
New York, NY 10014  
Attn: Chance Mueleck

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