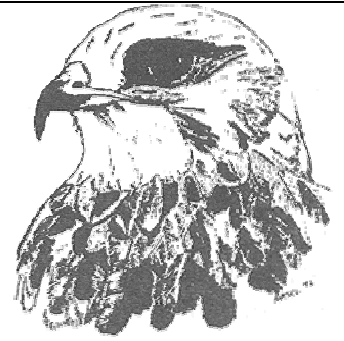


October 2010

# Birding Observer



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Five Valleys Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

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## Calendar

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- \* **Saturday, October 2nd:** Full-day field trip to Flesher Pass to visit Rob Domenech's raptor banding site. Meet at 6am in the middle of the UM field house parking lot. A strenuous 2-mile hike will be required to reach the banding site, but Rob may transport people on ATVs. Good hiking shoes are a must; and please dress appropriately for the weather conditions. The trip will be limited to 10 people. To sign up, call Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or email him at bwsgenea@onlinemt.com.
- \* **Monday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 7pm:** Alex Taft will host the board meeting.
- \* **Saturday, October 9<sup>th</sup>:** All-day trip to Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet at 8am in the UM field house parking lot.
- \* **Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, 7:30pm:** Northern Hawk Owls are the subject of the October program meeting.
- \* **Wednesday, October 13<sup>th</sup>:** Pint Night at the Kettlehouse. Please see page 4 for details.
- \* **Friday, October 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the November edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- \* **Saturday, November 6<sup>th</sup>:** Half-day field trip at Maclay Flat. Meet in the Maclay Flat parking lot at 10am.

## Northern Hawk Owls in Montana

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Insights into the status, conservation, and ecology of the Northern Hawk Owl in Montana will be the topic of the chapter's next program on Monday, October 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m. in the Gallagher Business Building, room L14 (lower level) on the University of Montana campus. Denver Holt of the Owl Research Institute will present the results of the Institute's research on this species, which began in Glacier Park in 2006.

Once considered a rare visitor to Montana, the Northern Hawk Owl has now nested annually since about 2005. Most nests have been found in Glacier National Park. However, nesting has occurred near Libby in northwestern Montana and extended east of the Continental Divide to St.

Mary's. Recently fledged young were even observed south to Choteau in 2010.

Are Northern Hawk Owls increasing in response to forest fires? Or have they simply been overlooked? Historical data indicate they have nested in the past. What have recent winter and spring surveys revealed about this uncommon Montana owl? What are they eating? Where are they nesting? What is their status in Montana and north in Canada? Are there conservation concerns?

Owl Research Institute researchers, along with citizen scientists, volunteers, and contributors from other research projects, now have evidence of about 30 breeding records in Montana. Additionally, over 40 Northern Hawk Owls have been banded in Glacier National Park and Flathead National Forest.

## Peeps from the Board by Bill DeCou

Through The Glass Darkly –  
A South African Birding and  
Wildlife Viewing Trip

In October 2009, my wife  
and I traveled to South  
Africa on a guided two-week birding  
trip of a lifetime. We joined other trip  
participants at the beginning of the  
second week of a three-week tour.

There were seven other participants,  
who were all expert birders. We are not. Patience  
sometimes wore thin. The guide was a 34-year-old  
white South African training for a marathon. Trip  
participants ranged in age from mid 50's to 76 and  
were not marathoners. The entire trip was  
conducted at a frenzied pace, starting well before  
dawn and continuing until after dark. The 12  
passenger van had tinted windows, precluding  
quality photography from the vehicle.

The morning after our arrival in Durban, on the  
southeast coast, we birded an estuary at the edge  
of the city and quickly saw herons, ducks, shore  
birds and relatively rare helmeted guinea fowl. At  
one point, vervet monkeys (perhaps 20 lbs.)  
blocked the trail. Juveniles were feeding and the  
dominant male was protecting them. Slipping past  
the monkeys, we left the estuary and drove along  
the river. We saw geese, herons, egrets, vultures,  
ducks and shore birds on our way to the airport to  
join the rest of the trip participants, who were  
flying in from Capetown. (Relatively few ducks  
were seen in rivers and ponds, as a "sitting duck"  
makes a meal for a crocodile.) Accommodations  
were mostly English style B&Bs.

Early next morning, we headed up 9,400 feet four-  
wheel drive Sani Pass, the "back door" to the very  
poor mountain Kingdom of Lesotho. Mostly we saw  
small birds such as the brilliant green malachite  
sunbird, Drakenburg Rock Jumper and the Sickle  
wing chat. Lesotho, in the vicinity of Sani Pass, is  
dry, windy and cool. We did see the now rare  
Bearded vulture (also known as a lammergeier or  
bone breaker), which feeds on marrow from bones  
broken by flying high and dropping them. Drugs  
used by the cattle industry are slowly poisoning this



magnificent bird. The next morning we headed for  
lower elevation through jungle and rich farmland. I  
was amazed at the number of eagles, hawks,  
vultures and other birds of prey. At Eshowe B&B,  
we visited with Hugh Chittendon who is in the  
process of editing THE definitive bird book for  
Kruger National Park. He had the hand-painted  
illustration galley proofs, hundreds of them, spread  
out so we could look at them.

Very, very early the next morning the tour went  
to Dlinza Forest Park, where we saw exotic  
European plants taking over the jungle. Park  
workers were in the lengthy process of fencing  
(over 50 miles of fence) and ridding the park of  
exotics. Later we took the elevated boardwalk  
(tree top level) and saw the first of the large  
hornbills.

From Dlinza forest we headed for the coast and St.  
Lucia Bay where we saw the first redwing starlings  
and long tailed starlings, both beautiful birds  
putting European starlings to shame. Near dusk we  
briefly visited a campground where we saw hippos  
and crocodiles in the river - mostly visible as sets of  
eyes and nostrils peeking above the water. We also  
saw a mongoose troop, as well as a bushbaby - an  
animal which looked a bit like a raccoon with a very  
long tail, but is actually a primate!

It was a long drive to Kruger National Park. Kruger  
was the first and perhaps best known of all African  
parks. Visitors are allowed out of their vehicles only  
in fenced camps. This is where the van with tinted  
windows was at a real disadvantage. Through  
tinted windows, the magnificent Lilac Sunbird  
looked gray. The southern end of Kruger Park has  
medium to thick brush that obstructed our view of  
animals. We often saw only parts of the animals -  
the giraffe's head above the bushes or the head of  
an elephant poking through the brush.



Almost right away we began seeing birds and animals in small numbers - a water buck here, a wildebeest there. Wildebeest are also known as gnu. Soon we saw a warthog - and a warthog has a face only a mother could love! We saw giraffes, baboons, graceful impala with long curvy horns, and sable antelope which are nearly the size of elk. Nygala which I had never heard of, have long spiral horns. The big cats are elusive. We did finally spot two lionesses lounging on a rock.

That evening it rained hard. Knowing that the big cats don't like wet brush, the guide had us out at dawn to catch the lions in the road. And sure enough, we saw two males, two females and four cubs. We watched them for about thirty minutes. As far as they were concerned we were just a moveable rock that didn't bother them at all. A herd of perhaps thirty Cape buffalo appeared across the road from the lions, facing them. As soon as the buffalo realized there was also a lioness behind them they quietly crept away.

Sometime later we came to Panic lake, which had a viewing blind. (This was the Panic Blind, not to be confused with a blind panic.) Through the blind we could see the quintessential African bush scene. Three large crocodiles, at least twenty feet long, looking incredibly evil with their toothy grins, lay near the bank. Impala and dik-diks came down to the edge to drink, followed by a waterhog with two babies. A goliath heron, easily twice the size of a great blue heron, stood in the shallows. A green heron stood on a branch nearby. And a jacana, a bright dark brown and white stilt-like bird with blue feet daintily stepped from one lily pad to the next.

Needing to catch the plane back, we headed back towards Johannesburg the next morning and stopped that evening in a refurbished Victorian hotel in a small town. We headed for the airport the next morning through a semiarid area not unlike eastern Montana in the flush a spring growth. In an incredible three hours we saw 103 species, 98 of which I was able to identify. Not long afterward we passed out on the plane, making up for some of our sleep deprivation.

It was an incredible trip! Nancy saw 330 species, I saw 280. The tour company never did provide a trip list. In all good conscience, we could not recommend the tour company.

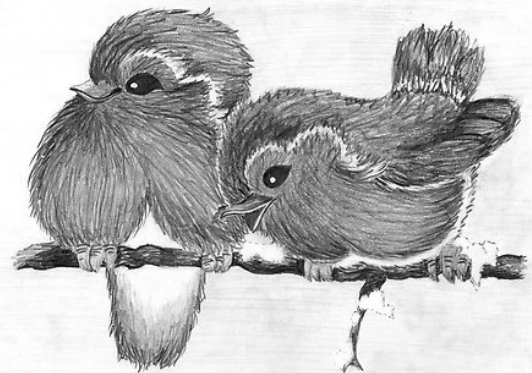
## **Byron L. Weber (1945-2010)**

Submitted by Bill Gabriel

Birds, birders, children and butterflies all lost a friend on August 27 when Byron Weber died from lymphoma. He was only 65 years old, and just a youngster to some old-timers who remember Byron as the president of Five Valleys Audubon Society in the early 1980's. At the time, Byron noticed that many members on the FVAS rolls lived in Ravalli County, so he helped them organize the Bitterroot Audubon Society, and it was chartered in 1985.

Byron was also a founding member and vice-president of the Missoula Butterfly House, and he was well-known to listeners of KUFM's "Pea Green Boat" as the "Bug Guy" who talked about butterflies, beetles, and bugs on the last Friday of each month for nearly 20 years.

Byron taught primary classes at the Florence-Carlton school from 1984 until his retirement this year, and generations of children followed him in exploring the wonders of nature, including a hike to the top of St. Mary's Peak for sixth-graders each year. For the others, he established an "outdoor classroom" on the school grounds, and the site was dedicated to him on Earth Day in 2010. Several hundred people gathered there on September 3 to celebrate the life of the man they had known as a Marine Corps veteran of the war in Vietnam, radio personality, schoolteacher, birder, and friend. Each added a stone to the rock pile memorial for Byron Weber, and Sam Manno released 3,000 ladybugs in commemoration of Byron's dedication to the natural world.



## Nature is On the Move

Submitted by Beverly Orth Geoghegan



Migration is the regular seasonal journey undertaken by many species of birds and other wildlife. It is most often prompted by response to changes in food availability, habitat or weather. The Nature Conservancy put together a list of ten 'Must-See Migration Spots' in the U.S.

1. Gray Whales: See them along the Pacific Coast, from Baja California, Mexico to Alaska's Bering Sea.
2. Coho and Chinook Salmon: See them in the Pacific Northwest, including Northern California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska.
3. Snow Goose: See them along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front (Freezout Lake, Russell County, MT).
4. Monarch Butterfly: See them in Central Mexico or Southern California (Natural Bridges State Park).
5. Horseshoe Crab: Mexico's Yucatan peninsula and Maine (Delaware Bay).
6. Bristle-Thighed Curlew: See them in Alaska and in the South Pacific (Hawaii).
7. Leatherback Turtle: See them in the Virgin Islands (Buck Island National Park and Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge).
8. Rufous Hummingbird: Throughout the U.S.
9. American Bison: The Great Plains (Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, KS; Yellowstone National Park; and Potter Ranch, CO).
10. American Eel: Rivers and streams throughout Eastern North America.

The Nature Conservancy also has a list of **Montana's migration hot spots**. These include Freezout Lake, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, and the Swan Valley (esp. Swan River Oxbow Preserve) for birds; and the northern prairies (esp. Matador Ranch) for birds and pronghorn.

For more information, go to: [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)

## Pint Night at the Kettlehouse

Enjoy good beer? Want to raise money for Five Valleys Audubon? Then mark your calendars and plan to come to our Pint Night at the Kettlehouse North\* on Wednesday October 13<sup>th</sup>.

For every pint of beer served that night between 5pm and 8pm The Kettlehouse will donate 50¢ to Five Valleys Audubon. So, you might want to invite some friends along!



Image courtesy of John Martz

\* Please join us at The Kettlehouse North:  
313 North 1st Street West, Missoula.

## Writers Wanted

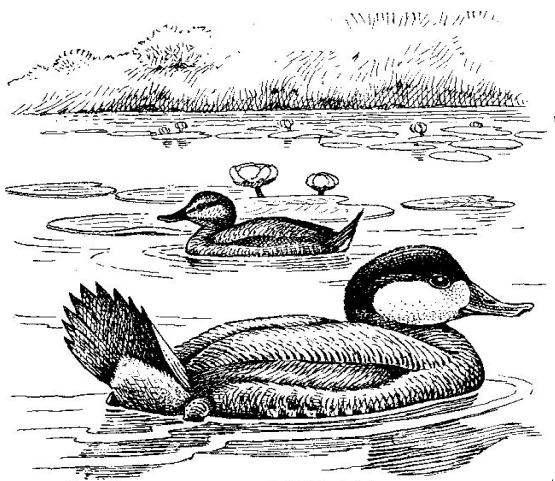
The Five Valleys Audubon Society encourages everyone to submit articles to our newsletter.

In addition to articles about birds and other wildlife, we would greatly appreciate articles of environmental conservation and scientific interest. You may submit articles up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page in length, in the form of paragraphs or a bulleted list of points. If you would like to submit a longer article, please contact the editor for approval. You may also submit photos and clipart; however, they must be sent electronically.

Please submit articles via email to our editor, Beverly Orth Geoghegan at [orthbev@hotmail.com](mailto:orthbev@hotmail.com). And of course, please let the editor know if you any questions. We look forward to hearing from you.

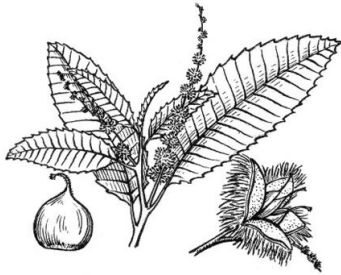
Please note that Friday October 15<sup>th</sup>, is the deadline for submissions to the November edition of the *Birding Observer*.

**Saturday, August 7, 2010:** The August field trip was originally scheduled for Glenn Lake. However, on a scouting trip to the lake on August 1<sup>st</sup>, I only saw or heard 5 species of birds. Nearly 100% of the forests along the trail have been burned. Therefore, I decided to change the trip to Smurfit-Stone. On the drive to the mill along Mullan Road, we stopped to look at a dark-phased Swainson's hawk near the Kona Bridge turnoff. Our first stop at the mill was to investigate the barn near the old log yard and found the 2 great horned owls that have been staying there for the past 3 months. Other than mallards, the ducks were hard to find. However, we did find a wood duck, a ruddy duck, 2 hooded mergansers, and 2 cinnamon teal. The ruddy duck was a challenging identification because it was a male in winter plumage and it was half-submerged when it was on the surface. Migrating shorebirds included greater yellowlegs and 3 solitary sandpipers that were together. So much for the solitary part. Other interesting sightings included 3 Lewis's woodpeckers in a dead cottonwood, 3 immature bald eagles in another dead cottonwood and a juvenile yellow warbler that was shadowing an adult yellow warbler. Although the birding at the mill is not as good as it was when it was operating, we still managed to find a good mix of birds. Six people participated on the field trip and we had 47 species.



**Saturday, September 11, 2010:** It was a beautiful day in the Mission Valley for the field trip to Ninepipes and Kicking Horse. The Mission Mountains were spectacular with some fresh snow cover on the highest peaks. The Missoula participants met 5 birders at the pond on Logan Road. This shallow pond is a recently completed restoration project by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribe and the shorebirds have responded big time. We spent 2 hours at the Logan Pond viewing the large diversity of birds. The primary focus was the shorebirds which included lesser yellowlegs, pectoral, Baird's and least sandpipers, sanderling, killdeer, red-necked phalaropes, and at least 50 long-billed dowitchers. Other birds at the site included American pipits, Savannah sparrows, ring-billed gulls, western meadowlarks, and a northern harrier. After a stop in Charlo, we stopped along Ninepipes Road by some flooded fields to look at a greater yellowlegs. That stop also included a Vaux swift and several species of swallows. Denver Holt and Ron Grant stopped and visited with us while we were at that stop. We then went to Ninepipes and looked at the birds near the dam which included a pair of sandhill cranes, American pelicans, trumpeter swans, western and pied-billed grebes, and yellow-rumped warblers. The drive along the dike road on the West side of the reservoir wasn't very productive until we approached Olson Road. On the South shore, there were 3 great egrets and several trumpeter swans. We then drove to Kicking Horse but there were very few birds on the water. However, when we drove to the upper end by the Kicking Horse Job Corps, we found a great horned owl in a pine tree. When we got out to view the owl, we heard red crossbills, red-breasted nuthatches and black-capped chickadees. In the duck weed covered sewage ponds, there were approximately 40 wood ducks. Sixteen people attended the field trip and we had 55 species.

Reports of the BP oil well blowout in the Gulf of Mexico repeatedly described the event as the worst environmental disaster in the history of North America, but that is hyperbole and indicates a lack of historical perspective.



In fact, the greatest ecological disaster to befall North America since the Pleistocene extinction of large mammals 10,000 years ago (by some accounts caused by the introduction of an alien species—man) was probably the destruction of the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*). Up until about 100 years ago, the American chestnut was one of the largest and most important trees in forests from New England to Alabama and westward to Ohio and Tennessee, growing 8 to 10 feet in diameter and over 100 feet tall with a straight trunk nearly clear of limbs. Only the tuliptree and white pine reached greater size in eastern North America. Partly because of its tannin content, chestnut wood was highly resistant to decay and lasted for decades in contact with the ground, making it valuable for poles, posts, pilings, railroad ties, and construction timbers. Nuts of the American chestnut tree were an important source of food for animals, and a source of both food and income for people. Chestnut bark, with its high tannin content, was a major source of tannin for leather manufacture.

All that changed rapidly after a destructive fungus arrived in North America on Asiatic chestnuts imported into New York in about 1904. Within thirty years spores of the chestnut blight fungus had ridden the wind through the forests and killed virtually all American chestnut trees.

Across much of its range the American chestnut had been the dominant or codominant tree in a forest, and its demise left whole mountainsides in Appalachia devastated as if by extensive and cataclysmic fires or hurricanes. What had been described before the blight as chestnut-oak forests and oak-chestnut forests eventually became less valuable oak-hickory forests.

The only chestnut trees I saw as a child in Virginia in the 1930s and 40s were standing dead snags, mere ghosts of the once great trees. Even those snags were so durable, and so valuable, that they were felled and sawn into decorative trim and paneling for offices and homes. In fact, there was a hardwood lumber-grade known in the trade as “sound wormy” to describe wood from dead chestnut trees which frequently contained small round holes left by the larvae of wood-boring beetles. Most beetles, when they enter the bark or wood, introduce one or another species of fungi which then either kill the tree or cause it to rot and deteriorate from inside out. The heartwood of American chestnut, however, was so rot-resistant that those decorative trims and panels of beautiful “wormy chestnut” wood sawn from logs of long-dead American Chestnut trees remain to remind us of what once was.



**On Autumn**

Every leaf speaks bliss to me, fluttering  
from the autumn tree. ~ Emily Bronte

Climb the mountains and get their good  
tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as  
sunshine flows into trees. The winds will  
blow their own freshness into you, and the  
storms their energy, while care will drop off  
like autumn leaves. ~ John Muir



**Welcome New Members:**

Sharon Fite	Nila Gibbs	Mary L. Newman
John Newton	Bill Thomas	Shawn Whitworth

**Thanks to our Returning Members:**

Dorothy A. Durdon	Kathy A. Frantzreb	Carolyn Goren
Gail Gutsche	Dolores Hallman	Mary B. Hamilton
Warren Healey	Donna Hendricks	Jane Wells, MD
Peggy Knight	Gary R. Lancaster	Zona Lindemann
Debra Mathson	Joseph A. Moran	Christine T. Reck
Rebecca Sharp	Judy Smith	John Swanson
Dana Warren	Meredith Webster	Bonnie A. Zeien

**Hi Friends! Go Green!**

View your **Birding Observer** newsletter even sooner, only **on-line**. Just send us an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at [k7vk@arrl.net](mailto:k7vk@arrl.net). We will alert you each month when the newsletter becomes available on-line. You can find the Five Valleys Audubon web site at: <http://www.fvamisoula.org/>

**Note To Members: Please Check The Mailing Label For Expiration Of Your Membership.**

**Join The National 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*, as well as participate in all local Chapter activities. I understand that my dues are shared between NAS and my local Chapter.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

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\$20 for a one-year membership for an individual or family

Please make the check payable to National Audubon Society and mail to: National Audubon Society, Membership Data Center, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. **COZ N53 OZ**

**Join The 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 (optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

\$15 is enclosed for Chapter 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.

# Five Valleys Audubon Society

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

<http://www.fvamisoula.org>



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## FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### OFFICERS:

President	Paul Loehnen	11556 Bench Road, Missoula, MT 59808	721 – 7517	loehnen@bigsky.net
Vice President	Pat Little	1710 34th St., Missoula, 59801	493 – 1745	roughleg@gmail.com
Secretary	Char Murray	50 Brookside Way, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5223	murray555@bresnan.net
Treasurer	Alex Taft	332 S. 1 <sup>st</sup> St. W., apt. A, Missoula, MT 59801	218 – 8438	alextaft9@msn.com

### DIRECTORS:

2007-2010	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807	544 – 1060	carolyngoren@gmail.com
2008-2011	Bill Boggs	PO Box 7881, Missoula, MT 59807	728 – 3088	boggsandfoleylaw@gmail.com
2009-2012	Joyce Nave	4605 Rattlesnake Dr., Missoula, 59802	721 – 2981	nave@bresnan.net
2010-2113	Gerhard Knudsen	4400 Scott Allen Dr, Missoula, 59803	251 – 2765	gmk@bresnan.net
2010-2013	Bill DeCou	PO Box 8674, Missoula, MT 59807	728 – 5376	billdecou@bigsky.net

### COMMITTEES:

Member Records	Vick Applegate	303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803	549 – 0027	k7vk@arrl.net
Membership Promotion	Bill DeCou	PO Box 8674, Missoula, MT 59807	728 – 5376	billdecou@bigsky.net
Program	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807	544 – 1060	carolyngoren@gmail.com
Conservation Advocacy	Vick Applegate	303 Rimrock Way, Missoula, MT 59803	549 – 0027	k7vk@arrl.net
Habitat Protection & Restore	Jim Brown	1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
Field Activities	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
Publicity	Poody McLaughlin	1629 Douglas Dr., Missoula, MT 59808	543 – 4860	pmcregan@bresnan.net
Education	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
PL Wright Endowment	Bill Gabriel	PO Box 520, Florence, MT 59833	273 – 6880	
University Liaison	Erick Greene	University of MT, Missoula, MT 59812	243 – 2179	erick.greene@mso.umt.edu
Newsletter Editor	Bev Orth Geoghegan	310 W. 73 <sup>rd</sup> St., apt. 1A, New York, NY 10023	406-750-0149	orthbev@hotmail.com
Newsletter Circulation	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5706	
Web Site	Clare Kelly	2909 Highwood Dr, Missoula, MT 59803	251 – 7207	
Archivist	Shirley Holden	2319 Valley Dr, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 5706	
Audubon Adventures	Jackie Alford	215 Brooks St, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 0917	jalford@bresnan.net
Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	2428 W Kent Ave, Missoula, MT 59801	549 – 5632	bwsgenea@onlinemt.com
Past President	Jim Brown	1504 Woods Gulch Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	549 – 8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net

MONTANA AUDUBON – PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

(406) 443-3949

[www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org)

Executive Director: Steve Hoffman [shoffman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:shoffman@mtaudubon.org)

Board President: Dan Sullivan

Program Director: Janet Ellis [jellis@mtaudubon.org](mailto:jellis@mtaudubon.org)

Director of Bird Conservation: Amy Cilimborg [amy@mtaudubon.org](mailto:amy@mtaudubon.org)

Administrative Officer: Larissa Berry [lberry@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lberry@mtaudubon.org)