

NOVEMBER 2011

# 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, November 5<sup>th</sup>:** Half-day field trip at Maclay Flat. Meet at the Maclay Flat parking lot at 10:00 AM.
- \* **Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup>:** Gerhard Knudsen will host the November board meeting.
- \* **Monday, November 14<sup>th</sup>:** Flammulated owls will be the subject of our November program meeting.
- \* **Tuesday, November 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the November edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- \* **Saturday, November 19<sup>th</sup>:** Monthly beginning bird walk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet field trip leader, Sherry Ritter, at the Refuge Visitor's Center. Learn basic skills for bird identification, including use of binoculars and field guides, key field marks, and much more. Families with children and birders of any level are welcome!
- \* **Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley led by Jim Brown. Meet in the middle of the field house parking lot at 8:00 AM or at the Cenex Gas Station in Ronan at 9:00 AM.



## Flammulated Owls in the Missoula Valley

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Flammulated Owls are a small, migratory owl species. These owls visit Montana in the summer months to feed on abundant nocturnal insects (mainly moths) and, with a little luck, breed! This talk will highlight some of the basic natural history of Flammulated Owls and present results from an ongoing study on the breeding biology of these unique owls in the Missoula Valley. They will be the topic of the meeting on **Monday, November 14** at 7:30 p.m. in room L14 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus. Mat Seidensticker will discuss his work with the Flammulated Owl. This species has been designated as a Montana Species of Concern and a U.S. Forest Service Sensitive Species. The distribution of these owls in Montana was unknown prior to 2005. Systematic surveys have been completed to determine the species' distribution in Montana and northern Idaho. Mat will describe the results of his work and provide information about the natural history and habitat requirements of these birds.

Mat Seidensticker received his B.S. in Wildlife Biology from UM in 2000. Since that time he has conducted owl research with the Montana-based Owl Research Institute. His research has encompassed several species of owls including, Snowy, Long-eared, Flammulated, and Northern Hawk-Owls. From 2007-2011, Mat conducted graduate research on Flammulated Owls in the Missoula Valley, receiving his M.S. last May. Apparently a glutton for punishment, Mat is now enrolled as a first year law student at UM. He is keeping an open mind about his legal education and often daydreams in class about chasing owls!

## Peeps from the Board: Birding Southeast Texas

by Bill DeCou



Montana State Audubon sponsored a birding trip to Southeast Texas from April 25 to May 2, 2011 led by former King Ranch resident ornithologist Brian Williams. Spring migration peaks about then. Bill and Nancy DeCou, Carolyn Goren, Cynthia Hudson, and Larry Weeks from the Missoula area plus Rose Leach, James Oates and Raylene Wall from the Mission Valley went on the trip and were joined in Texas by Larry's son, Ron Weeks, expert birder and author of a Southeast Texas bird book. It was over 100 degrees when we arrived in Harlingen and remained very hot for the whole trip.

We spent the next several days on the 825,000 plus acre King Ranch. The King Ranch is mostly flat, arid to semiarid, with a mixture of open grasslands and mixed brush and grassland. This mixed brush and grassland is good habitat for whitetail deer, and birds, including a wide variety of raptors. The ranch's three main sources of revenue are crops, cattle and sale of hunting rights. On the ranch we were accompanied much of the time by Tom, the ranch's ornithologist. In the morning, we saw a variety of sparrows, doves and flycatchers plus the colorful painted bunting, green jays, vermilion flycatchers and the Audubon oriole. After lunch we headed for a reservoir, where we saw herons, grebes and ducks as well as white and white faced ibis. Then Tom spotted a groove-billed ani and we all got a good look at this uncommon visitor. The day's total was 101 species, with the last being a hooded oriole in a tree outside the motel.

Almost as soon as we arrived on the King Ranch the next day we both heard and saw the elusive flammulated pygmy owl. The other unusual bird for the day was the tropical parula. As we traveled from the King Ranch we found a pair of tropical kingbirds with a nest in a supermarket parking lot tree. We headed north, stopping at Paradise Pond, a tiny urban park, where we saw an incredible 23 species of warblers. The total for the day was 148 species.

The Rio Grande Valley was next. At the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge we finally saw the elusive, plain looking northern beardless tyrannulet, not seen at the King Ranch, as well as a kettle of Mississippi kites, and chacacholas, raucous brown crow sized birds. After that, at Bentson State Park we found the Altamira oriole and the lesser nighthawk. But not the clay colored thrush. The better part of an hour later of searching later at Estora Llano Grande, we finally located the clay colored thrush. After dark we went back to Benson State park to find the elf owl. We heard an eastern screech owl and nearly stepped on a large red legged tarantula. Not finding the elf owl, we headed for the van only to hear the elf owl on the way.

The next day, along the Rio Grande, we saw the redeyed pigeon, green kingfisher and gray hawk. After dinner we went walking in the part of McAllen, Texas where green parrots were rumored to have been seen. We spotted several flying north. We walked north and found hundreds of brightly colored green parrots next to an apartment building.

The last day we headed back to Harlingen, Texas and were lucky enough to see the black vented oriole, only recorded in the U.S. a handful of times. Driving north on South Padre Island, we stopped at a clump (less than an acre) of mesquite where 11 species of warblers were found, as well as shorebirds nearby.

Alas, the trip was over with a group list of 226 species. I had 192. We were all glad to be headed back to where it was cooler.

### Nominating Committee

The board has formed a Nominating Committee to put forward candidates for two expiring Director positions, with a view to holding elections at a Chapter membership meeting in early 2012.

The Nominating Committee solicits suggestions from members for candidates for either of these positions. The committee is Pat Little, Lynn Tennefoss, Paul Loehnen, and Carolyn Goren – our contact information is on the back page.

## Field Trips: Flesher Pass Field Trip

by Cynthia Hudson

**Saturday, October 1, 2010:** Rob Domenech met us at 8:15 at the parking area of his raptor banding site near Lincoln. There were 7 people on the field trip – 2 from Helena and 5 from Missoula. Using ATVs, Rob and his crew began ferrying people up the rather steep trail to the banding station. Instead of standing and waiting for our turn on the ATVs, the remaining group chose to shake off the morning chill by hiking up the trail. After arriving up top, we split into 3 groups as there were 2 blinds for bow net traps and a new photo blind. The morning started slow, but around noon the wind picked up as did the thermals. The total number of raptors counted that day was 79, including 29 Golden Eagles, 3 Ferruginous Hawks, 9 Northern Harriers, 1 Osprey, 2 Bald Eagles, 3 Red-tailed Hawks and 7 falcons that encompassed all 4 species. The accipiters were nicely represented with 14 Sharp-shinned and 6 Cooper's Hawks. It was impressive how Rob and his crew (including spotters on a nearby mountain top) were able to find and identify the birds that appeared as specks to us. The birds caught and banded were: 1 adult Female Harrier, 3 adult female Sharp-shinned Hawks, and 1 hatch year female Sharp-shinned Hawk. Although no Golden Eagles were caught, there were 2 near misses that afforded everyone very good looks at them, flying and perched. One of the golden eagles was able to escape with one of the rock pigeons, leather vest included. The other near miss involved a golden eagle that over-shot the lure bird and sat on the ground between the blind and the capture net. The rock pigeon froze but the operator couldn't stir up the pigeon because the eagle was standing on the control lines. It flew after about 30 seconds. Other birds seen throughout the day were: Clark's Nutcrackers, Common Ravens, Mountain Bluebirds, Dark-eyed Juncos (Oregon), Mountain Chickadees and Steller's Jays. Everyone was having such a great time that we stayed late until some nasty thunderstorms with lightning chased us off the mountain around 4:30. Not only did we have the wit and wisdom of Rob and his talented crew, but also benefited from the presence of Bryan Bedrosian, an excellent avian biologist based in Jackson Hole. Thanks to everyone who made it a wonderful, memorable day.

## Missoula Christmas Bird Count

By Larry Weeks

The Missoula Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 17, 2011. The count area is a circle with a 7.5 mile radius which is centered at the intersection of Reserve St. and I-90. The circle will be divided up and covered by individuals and small groups. You can participate by being a feeder watcher or joining a group in the field. If you want to take part in the field count, contact Larry Weeks at 549-5632 or [bwsgenea@onlinemt.com](mailto:bwsgenea@onlinemt.com). If you are interested in being a feeder watcher, contact Elizabeth Johnston at 327-1525 or [birder@bigsky.net](mailto:birder@bigsky.net). We also tally unusual birds not reported on count day that are seen during the week. This year, count week runs from Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> through Tuesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. If you see an unusual bird species during count week, be sure to report it to Larry.



The count day will end with a potluck dinner that will be held at the home of Ruth & Russ Royter, 520 Highland Park Dr. (telephone # 728-7984) which is up Farviews on the East side of the golf course. Potluck guests are welcome to arrive at the Royters starting at 6:00 PM. Dinner will commence at 6:30 PM. Please bring your favorite potluck dish, or A-L, bring a salad or dessert, and M-Z, a hot dish. After the potluck, we will tabulate the count results. Besides being a fun day, the results are published in the American Birds magazine, and along with other counts throughout the hemisphere, contribute base information for a variety of studies. The CBC is an expensive production and participants are encouraged to contribute \$5.00.

### Hi Friends! Go Green!

View your *Birding Observer* newsletter **on-line**.

Send 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 our website:

<http://www.fvamisoula.org/>

## Wal-Mart Supports AA & CNP

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For the seventh consecutive year, The Wal-Mart Foundation has supported the Chapter's education programs called Audubon Adventures and the Community Naturalist Program. The application process changed in 2011. Larry Weeks filled out a lengthy on-line application that required specific information about the targeted programs. Since we had involved an intern to contact the teachers receiving Audubon Adventures, which resulted in 23 classroom presentations, there was considerable information to draw from. The fact that we had reached many Native Americans undoubtedly enhanced our application. This application, together with Rocky Healey's participation as a representative on The Wal-Mart Foundation, resulted in a grant of \$1,000 to our Chapter. Rocky and his wife Suzi both work for Wal-Mart's Supercenter on Mullan Road. Thanks again to Rocky and The Wal-Mart Foundation.

## Slot Boxes by Kathy Heffernan

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Last year, Violet Green Swallows (VSGs) were very interested in this box as it hung under the eaves of our shed. I was very disappointed when English Sparrows (aka House Sparrows) moved in and drove them away. The English Sparrows eluded our elimination efforts and nested in the box, but we eliminated the eggs. This year, I retrofitted the box with a new front. The VGSs returned and successfully raised at least two fledglings in the slot box.

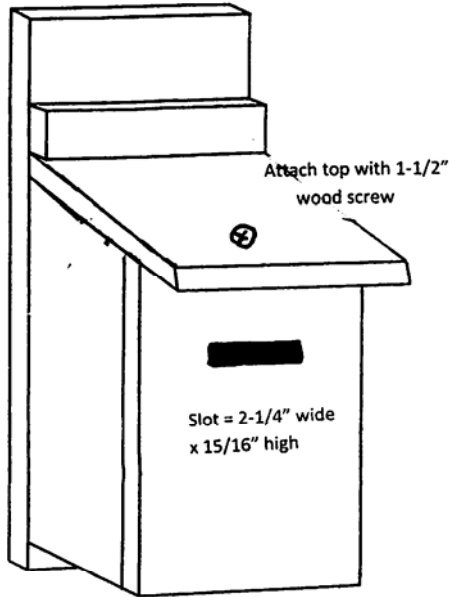
The slot box design is a good alternative to round holes for people who would like to place bird boxes near houses for two reasons. First, it does not attract bluebirds which are extremely susceptible to cat predation around houses. Secondly, it discourages use by the non-native and extremely aggressive English Sparrow.

Only swallows can comfortably use properly sized slots. VSGs and other swallows are not as susceptible to predation from cats as bluebirds; they eat insects in the air whereas bluebirds frequently catch insects on the ground. (Of course, the best protection for birds is to keep cats indoors, especially during the day when birds are active).

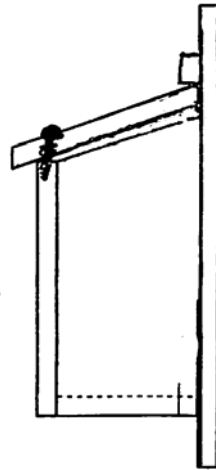


English Sparrows will have difficulty squeezing their round bodies into a properly sized slot. However, I have read that even this design is not fool-proof against the wily English Sparrow. Always monitor any box you put up. English Sparrows are NOT a protected species; they are classified as non-native pests by USDA and are legal to trap or shoot. English Sparrows will kill native birds, such as bluebirds and swallows. This European species will outcompete native birds for nesting spaces and will kill any bird that dares nest in a hole it claims or covets.

# Tree Swallow Slot Box

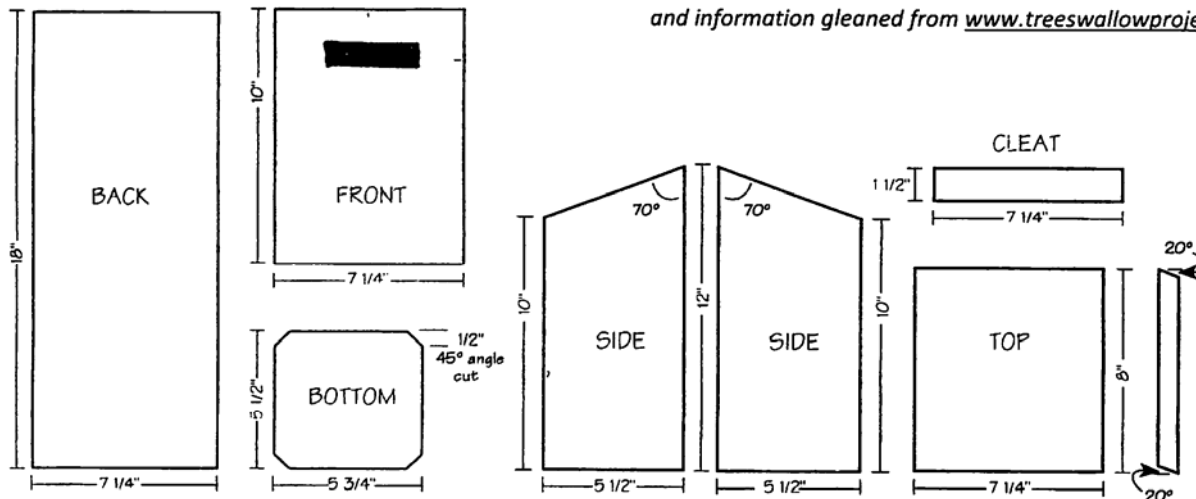


SIDE VIEW



Materials List	
(cut from 3/4" thick wood)	
Top (w x h).....	7-1/4" x 8"
Front.....	7-1/4" x 10"
Back.....	7-1/4" x 18"
Sides (2).....	5-1/2" x 12"
Bottom.....	5-3/4" x 5-1/2"
Cleat.....	7-1/4" x 1-1/2"
Slot = 2-1/4" w x 15/16" h	
Hardware = 1-1/2" wood screws	

Adapted from Mountain Bluebird Trails bluebird house design and information gleaned from [www.treeswallowprojects.com](http://www.treeswallowprojects.com)



15/16" x 2-1/4" appears to be the essential slot size. 7/8" is too short for Tree Swallows and 1" is large enough for House Sparrows to get their fat bodies through.

This design will discourage House Sparrows, but you will still need to check boxes. It is legal to trap, shoot, and otherwise dispose of House Sparrows.

Tree Swallows will nest in smaller boxes but smaller boxes are not really adequate for their larger broods. Smaller boxes are detrimental to their fledging success.

Tree Swallows do not like to go up under an overhang so don't put your slot up under an overhanging roof.

Tree Swallows have difficulty clinging to smooth or painted surfaces. If you paint the exterior, roughen up the front below the slot by scoring it with a nail. (Never use a perch with any bird box as this just invites avian predators). Don't paint the interior, but roughen up the inside area below the hole.

Never use preservatives with any bird box. That green stuff that treats posts will kill birds.

# Autumn Words

M	A	P	L	E	T	R	E	E	Z	B	J
L	W	G	P	A	V	Y	E	L	L	O	W
O	B	J	U	P	E	Y	F	H	G	S	Z
R	X	K	M	P	G	O	D	A	E	J	P
A	E	C	P	L	E	C	L	R	E	B	E
N	C	H	K	E	T	T	E	V	S	R	A
G	O	I	I	S	A	O	A	E	E	O	R
E	L	L	N	E	B	B	V	S	X	W	X
K	O	L	H	R	L	E	E	T	N	N	M
V	R	Y	A	E	E	R	S	R	I	C	E
X	S	X	Y	D	S	S	C	H	O	O	L
C	S	W	E	A	T	E	R	F	A	L	L

apple  
brown  
chilly  
colors  
fall

geese  
harvest  
hay  
leaves  
maple tree

October  
orange  
pear  
pumpkin  
red

rice  
school  
sweater  
vegetables  
yellow



**Welcome New Members:**

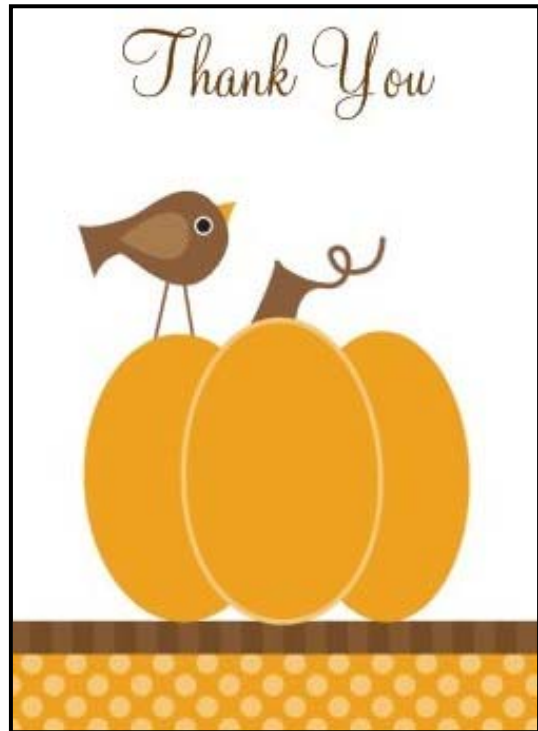
Alison Bjerneby  
Ed Courtney  
Bob Frazier  
Zia Maumenee  
Lin Smith  
Linda Torma

Nick F. Checota  
Sandy Davies  
Helen Keremedjiev  
John Sommers  
Linda S. Swanberg

**Thanks to our Returning Members:**

Rosanna Akland  
Victoria Balfour  
Liz Bradley  
Gail Clarke  
P. J. Delhomme  
Stephen & Bev Glueckert  
Sara Jones  
Christian F. Miller  
Kathleen Schaeffer  
Judy Smith  
Mary Thomas

C. R. Auge  
Sharee Ballinger  
Jim & Sue Brown  
Elaine M. Corrigan  
Joy S. Earls  
Dan & Darlene Hjelmseth  
Martha Lauterbach  
Joseph A. Moran  
Sue Silverberg  
Katie Deuel Thomas



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

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

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

\$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. **C1Z N53 OZ**

**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 (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

\$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.

# Five Valleys Audubon Society

PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

<http://www.fvamisoula.org>

NON-PROFIT ORG.

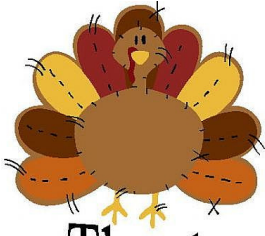
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## Happy Thanksgiving

**TO:**

### FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### OFFICERS:

President	Paul Loehnen	11556 Bench Road, Missoula, MT 59808	721 – 7517	loehnen@gmail.com
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. 1st St. W., apt. A, Missoula, MT 59801	218 – 8438	alextaft9@msn.com

#### DIRECTORS:

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
2011-2013	Carolyn Goren	PO Box 7189, Missoula, MT 59807	544 – 1060	carolyngoren@gmail.com
2011-2013	Gerhard Knudsen	4400 Scott Allen Dr, Missoula, 59803	251 – 2765	gmk@bresnan.net
2011-2013	Bill DeCou	PO Box 8674, Missoula, MT 59807	728 – 5376	billdecou@bigsky.net
2011-2013	Lynn Tennefoss	8850 O'Brien Creek Rd, Missoula, MT 59804	544 – 6323	ltennefoss@audubon.org

#### 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	Terry McEneaney	1215 Lolo Rd, Missoula, MT 59802	493-1438	ravenology@bresnan.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	jouisns@gmail.com
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
Honorary Member	Elizabeth Johnston	1101 W Greenough, Unit E-8, Missoula, MT 59802	327-1525	birder@bigsky.net

MONTANA AUDUBON – PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

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

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

Larissa Berry, Office Manager: [lberry@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lberry@mtaudubon.org)

Dan Sullivan, Board President

(406) 443-3949

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

Norane Freistadt, Development Director: [norane@mtaudubon.org](mailto:norane@mtaudubon.org)

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

Darcie Vallant, Center Dir., Audubon Conservation Education Center: [dvallant@mtaudubon.org](mailto:dvallant@mtaudubon.org)

Heather Ristow, Education Dir., Audubon Conservation Education Center: [hristow@mtaudubon.org](mailto:hristow@mtaudubon.org)