

FEBRUARY 2012

# 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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- \* **Monday, February 6<sup>th</sup>:** Jim Brown will host the February board meeting.
- \* **Monday, February 13<sup>th</sup>:** Brian Williams, a naturalist from the Montana Natural History Center, will discuss birds of Texas at our February program meeting.
- \* **Wednesday, February 15<sup>th</sup>:** Submission deadline for the March edition of the *Birding Observer*.
- \* **Saturday, February 18<sup>th</sup>:** Beginning birdwalk at Lee Metcalf NWR from 10am-Noon. Meet the field trip leader 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 all levels are welcome!
- \* **Saturday, February 25, 2012:** All-day field trip to the Mission Valley led by Terry McEnenaney. Meet at 8:00AM in the middle of the UM field House parking lot or 9:00 AM at the Cenex Station in Ronan.



## Legal Migrants: The Birds of South Texas

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South Texas in springtime offers a nearly unparalleled opportunity to observe birds in North America. Brian Williams, who guided birding and nature tours on the 825,000-acre King Ranch of South Texas, will present the program on **Monday, February 13 at 7:30 p.m.** in room L14 of the Gallagher Business Building on the UM campus. During spring months, the tropical residents that barely range into North America — Green Jay, Great Kiskadee, and Tropical Parula, to name a few — are joined by a spectacular array of migrant warblers, vireos, flycatchers, orioles, and more. Many of them are exhausted and feeding at eye level after a long flight over the Gulf of Mexico. In this presentation, we will hear about the diversity of birds and other wildlife; unique habitat management strategies in Texas, a state dominated by private land; and the Montana Audubon trip that Brian will lead down to South Texas and the renowned King Ranch in spring 2011.

Brian Williams earned his M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana in 2005 and promptly moved to South Texas where he spent two years working on the King Ranch. He returned to Montana in 2007, and has since been a naturalist for the Montana Natural History Center, where he created and still instructs the Montana Master Naturalist Class and teaches elementary students science and natural history. Last year, he guided Montana Audubon's first trip to South Texas and will repeat the trip in 2012.

In addition to Brian's presentation, Jay Sumner, Executive Director of the Montana Peregrine Institute, will do a short presentation about Montana's Peregrines, Project Peregrine Watch, and volunteer opportunities. Jay has over 40 years of experience working with Montana's raptor populations.



At the risk of being redundant, I want to talk about the Christmas Bird Count because I believe this is one of the most important activities we do.

Our count took place on December 17<sup>th</sup>. There were 98 participants split into 16 groups including 22 feeder watchers. We tallied a record 85 species on an unseasonably warm sunny day. Nationally this translates to about 60,000 volunteers in over 2,000 “count circles” ranging from Alaska to Texas to parts of South America.

This compilation of data is the largest and longest wildlife data base know to science. It started when there was a public backlash against the slaughter of tens of thousands of birds for hat feathers. In addition a Christmas tradition of a bird hunt, not to bag dinner but for recreational killing was replaced in 1900, when Frank Chapman, of the Audubon Society, proposed the counting of bird species. Thus the annual Christmas Bird Count was born.

Birds are an important indicator of the overall health of our environment. Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine they send an urgent warning about threats to our water, air, natural resources, climate and more. Scientists use this enormous data base as well as other sources such as the U.S. Geological Survey’s Breeding Bird Survey, to identify bird population trends, and to highlight species and habitats at risk.

In 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and North American Bird Conservation Initiative, of which Audubon is a member, began issuing the annual State of the Birds report. This year’s report provides the nation’s first assessment of the distribution of birds on public lands and helps public agencies identify species with significant potential for conservation in each habitat.

The report highlighted the wide variety of bird habitats on public lands. These include:

- **Arid lands:** More than half of U.S. arid lands are publicly owned. Thirty-nine percent of arid land bird species are of conservation concern and more than 75% of species are declining.
- **Oceans and Coasts:** These are homes to 86 ocean bird species and 173 coastal species. At least 39% of bird species restricted to ocean habitats are declining and almost half are of conservation concern, indicating severe stress in these ecosystems.
- **Wetlands:** Wetland protection has provided the “gold standard” for bird conservation. Thirty-nine species of hunted waterfowl have increased by more than 100% during the past forty years as nearly 30 million acres of wetland have been acquired and management practices have restored bird populations.
- **Grasslands:** Grassland birds are among our nation’s fastest declining species, yet only a small amount, 13%, of grasslands are publicly owned and managed primarily for conservation. Forty-eight percent of grassland breeding bird species is of conservation concern, including four with endangered populations.

The bottom line is that there are very significant ecological problems. Two years ago, the Christmas Bird Count data confirmed what observers had long suspected: many bird species are moving their winter range farther north in line with charted temperature increases. In addition to showing why it’s so important to reduce atmosphere-warming carbon emissions, this disturbing finding requires population trend data and sophisticated mapping technology to predict what habitats and species are at greatest risk from climate change. With that knowledge, we can protect remaining habitat and create alternative habitat where that’s the best option.

## Board Update

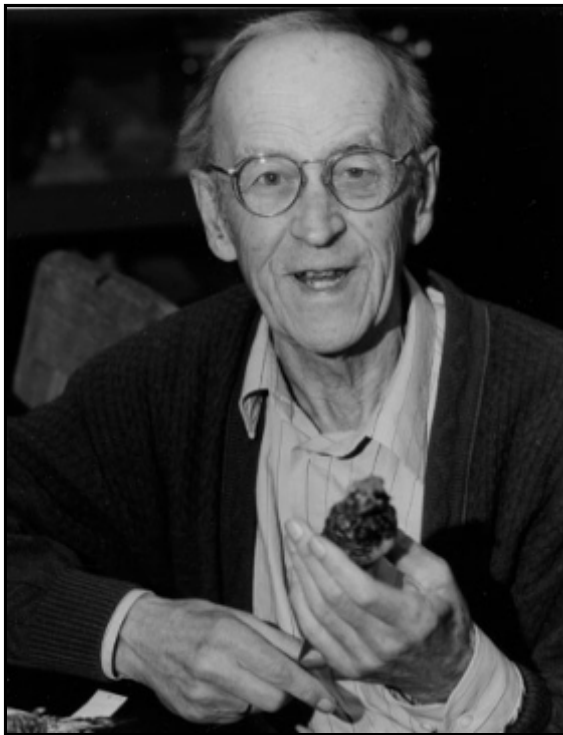
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Five Valleys Audubon Society will hold its Annual Membership Meeting on Monday March 12<sup>th</sup> during the regular monthly meeting.

We will be electing three positions on the Board. Two of our Directors—Bill Boggs and Joyce Nave—are stepping down at the end of their terms, and their positions will be vacant. The Board's Nominating Committee has put forward two candidates for the two vacant Director positions – Clancy Cone and Betsy Griffing.

Also, Alex Taft, our Treasurer, has resigned to allow more time for his new duties on the Missoula City Council. The Board has appointed Kit Stevens to hold the Treasurer position, and she will be up for election for a full 3-year term at the Annual Meeting.

Other nominations from the floor will be welcomed.



Professor Philip L. Wright

## Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Awards

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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 24 years, 56 university and high school students have received a total of \$23,586 from the program. The amount per award has ranged from \$100 to \$1,010, and averaged \$421.

Subjects of the research have been distributed as follows: birds 23, plants and habitats 11, mammals 9, amphibians 7, invertebrates 5, fish 2. While most of these small studies have been carried out within Montana, some have been in Arizona, California, 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 2012 awards will be due on March 29, 2012.

### Hi Friends! Go Green!

Save paper and postage by **viewing your *Birding Observer* newsletter online**. Five Valleys Audubon Society now gives members two different options to view the newsletter electronically. We can email you once a month, letting you know when the latest edition is **available on our web site ([www.fvamisoula.org](http://www.fvamisoula.org))**, or we can **email the newsletter directly to you** – it's your choice. Just send an email request with your name to Vick Applegate at [k7vk@arri.net](mailto:k7vk@arri.net), and let us know you wish to be added to one of the lists. We do not share our email lists with others. Please keep us updated with your email address changes.

## 2011 Field Trip Bird List

by Larry Weeks

During the 2011 calendar year, the Chapter hosted 12 field trips that included Mission Valley (2), Lee Metcalf (2), Warm Springs Ponds, Brown's Lake, Freezout Lake, Mt. Sentinel, Red Rocks Lake, Ninepipes, Flesher Pass, and Maclay Flat. If someone had participated in all 12 field trips, they would have seen, or had the opportunity to see, 174 bird species. This number is down from 2009 (204) and 2010 (195) because we lost Smurfit-Stone and the field trip to Glacier was canceled. The best field trip of the year, and maybe the best trip ever, was the 2-day trip to Freezout Lake and the Rocky Mountain Front led by Joe Elliott. There were 111 bird species documented on that trip which included red knot, Philadelphia vireo, Clark's grebe, American bittern, black-crowned night-heron, ferruginous hawk, and whimbrel. The other field trips added to the bird list but the quality of the bird species did not compare to Freezout.

There were also 11 beginning birders field trips at Lee Metcalf that were cosponsored by Five Valleys Audubon Society and Bitterroot Audubon Society, but the birds seen on these trips were not available for this tabulation.

## Missoula Christmas Bird Count

by Larry Weeks, Compiler



**Saturday, December 17, 2011:** The weather on Count Day was spectacular with sunshine, calm winds for most of the day and the temperature topped out at 44 degrees Fahrenheit. I even had a report that one of the field participants took a nap in the sunshine. We had a total of 85 species for the Count which is a record. The previous high was 79. There were 76 participants in the field and 22 feeder watchers. The most unusual bird was a Lewis's woodpecker and we ended up with two; Fred Rush had one at his sunflower seed feeder which had been a regular all fall and Norm & Cathy Smyers's group had a second one at the Tower St. Open Space parking lot. The western screech owl at Gordon & Sue Skaggs' landscaped yard and the barred owl that Terry Toppins found at Maclay Flat were both

unusual. Sue Reel and Dick Hutto had a yellow-rumped warbler and a ruby-crowned kinglet at Slevens Island. Will McDowell and Rob Holden had five snow buntings on North Hills. Roger Hogan's feeder at his Big Flat home had the only Harris' sparrow. Denver Holt's group had 11 horned larks and a white-crowned sparrow in addition to 36 long-eared owls. Kristi DuBois, who was elk hunting in the mountains above LaValle Creek, had the only golden eagle. Cathy Ream and her group birded LaValle and Butler Creeks and had the only gray jay and Steller's jay. Cathy's group also birded the 160-acre conservation easement owned by the Boehmlers for the first time. Jim Brown, who birded the Mastel Ranch and Trout Meadows, had the only wood ducks, green-winged teal, gadwall, and marsh wrens. Jim Sparks had the only Barrow's goldeneye in the Clark Fork River near the Van Buren walk bridge. Paul Hendricks' group had the only dusky grouse on the hike from Marshall Canyon to Woods Gulch. Cynthia Hudson's group had the only Brewer's blackbird on the Council Grove - Kona Ranch section and Terry Toppins had the only pied-billed grebe in the Bitterroot River. White-throated sparrows were found at two locations; Denver had one West of the airport and Jeane Fevold and Dick Hutto shared another one at their feeders on Creekwood Road. Poody and Joe Regan had three northern saw-whet owls on Kelly Island. Brian Williams and his group had a chestnut-backed chickadee and a northern three-toed woodpecker on the Stewart Peak trail. Other group leaders included Rose Leach (Mullan Road), Robin Anderson (UM & Greenough Park), and Zona Lindemann (Orchard homes & Target Range). Total birds for the Count were 9332 which is well above the 13 year average of 8300. The total for one individual species that stood out from the rest was red-breasted nuthatch at 978. There were 3 birds that were seen during Count Week that were not seen on Count Day; hummingbird species, red-naped sapsucker and Cassin's finch. The feeder watchers had 40 species and 886 total birds. We did miss gray partridge which was the first time in the past 14 years. Overall, it was a super Count and my thanks to all the participants.

### Missoula Christmas Bird Count 2011

Pied-billed grebe (1)	Great horned owl (15)	Marsh wren (2)
Great blue heron (43)	Northern pygmy owl (3)	American dipper (4)
Canada goose (514)	Barred owl (1)	Golden-crowned kinglet (26)
Wood duck (2)	Long-eared owl (43)	Ruby-crowned kinglet (1)
Green-winged teal (57)	Northern saw-whet owl (4)	Townsend's solitaire (23)
Mallard (671)	Hummingbird species (CW)	American robin (35)
Northern pintail (11)	Belted kingfisher (23)	Bohemian waxwing (1069)
Gadwall (9)	Lewis's woodpecker (2)	Cedar waxwing (135)
Common goldeneye (93)	Red-naped sapsucker (CW)	Northern shrike (9)
Barrow's goldeneye (1)	Downy woodpecker (46)	European starling (54)
Common merganser (8)	Hairy woodpecker (13)	Yellow-rumped warbler (1)
Bald eagle (31)	no. 3-toed woodpecker (2)	American tree sparrow (33)
Golden eagle (1)	Northern flicker (157)	Song sparrow (46)
Northern harrier (21)	Pileated woodpecker (18)	White-throated sparrow (2)
Sharp-shinned hawk (6)	Horned lark (11)	White-crowned sparrow (1)
Cooper's hawk (6)	Gray jay (1)	Harris's sparrow (1)
Red-tailed hawk (81)	Steller's jay (2)	Dark-eyed junco (163)
Rough-legged hawk (72)	Clark's nutcracker (22)	Snow bunting (5)
American kestrel (9)	Black-billed magpie (396)	Red-winged blackbird (1087)
Merlin (2)	American crow (399)	Brewer's blackbird (2)
Ring-necked pheasant (26)	Common raven (214)	Pine grosbeak (87)
Dusky grouse (1)	Black-capped chickadee (573)	Cassin's finch (CW)
Ruffed grouse (6)	Mountain chickadee (55)	House finch (327)
Wild turkey (52)	Chestnut-backed chickadee (3)	Red crossbill (225)
Killdeer (47)	Red-breasted nuthatch (978)	Common redpoll (68)
Wilson's snipe (5)	White-breasted nuthatch (67)	Pine siskin (56)
Rock pigeon (255)	Pygmy nuthatch (177)	American goldfinch (85)
Eurasian-collared dove (112)	Brown creeper (7)	Evening grosbeak (25)
Mourning dove (18)	Winter wren (3)	House sparrow (285)
Western screech owl (1)		
		85 species, 9332 total birds



## 2012 Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival

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**The Hilton Garden Inn, Your Lodging Options:** Come join us for Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival, this year co-hosted by the Flathead Audubon Society, June 8–10, 2012, at the Hilton Garden Inn and Conference Center, 1840 US Hwy 93 S in Kalispell. We are very excited about this new facility, which will be center stage for festival activities Friday through Sunday, including registration, birding field trips departure point, guest speaker presentations, meals, banquet festivities, and much more.

The Hilton is centrally located in the heart of the Flathead Valley and provides easy access to all our birding activities, field trips, and workshops, and is within a short drive of abundant recreational destinations, such as Flathead Lake and Glacier National Park. Currently we have 50 rooms blocked out for festival-goers Friday and Saturday nights. (25 King beds and 25 Queen/Queen beds at \$99 per night plus applicable taxes.) This rate will be extended to us for three days prior and post event. 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 1-406-756-4500.

For nearby accommodations within walking distance of the Hilton, here are more options:

- Aero Inn, 1830 US Highway 93 South | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-755-3798
- Motel 6, 1540 US Hwy. 93 South | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-752-6355
- Super 8 Motel, 1341 1st Avenue East | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-755-1888
- The Outlaw Hotel, 1701 Hwy 93 S | Kalispell, MT | 59901. 1-406-755-6100

**2012 Pre-festival Workshops:** Our workshops were so popular at our 2011 Festival in Glasgow that we again are offering two pre-festival Conservation Workshops, plus adding one pre-festival Education Workshop, all scheduled for Friday, June 8. You can sign up for these during registration from March 15 to May 22. The festival brochure will be arriving in your mail box mid-March. So you will want to act fast—space is limited for each workshop! We're excited to offer the following three pre-festival (Friday) workshops this year:

- ***Northwestern Montana Birds and Wildlife in a Warming World.*** We'll tour local forests and, hopefully, Glacier National Park. Participants will get up close and personal with the flora and fauna of the area, discuss the impacts of our changing climate, and delve into how we can lessen the impact by reducing carbon pollution and building resilient ecological systems best able to adapt to a changing climate.
- ***River-to-Lakes Initiative.*** Since 2000, the River-to-Lake Initiative has been providing conservation and restoration expertise to private landowners along the Flathead River and along the North Shore of Flathead Lake. River-to-Lake partners, spearheaded by the Flathead Land Trust, work directly with landowners to craft conservation efforts that meet their needs. We'll meet many of these partners and visit several project sites, including two Important Bird Areas (Owen Sowerwine Natural Area and North Shore Flathead Lake).
- ***Develop a Bird Education Program in your Community.*** This six-hour training is for any Audubon Chapter member looking to begin or improve their bird education programs within their community. Each participant will receive training and curricula-oriented materials from Flying Wild, a Council for Environmental Education program which introduces students to bird conservation through standards-based classroom activities and environmental stewardship projects. In addition, instructors will share their expertise and experiences in developing new environmental education programs for all ages. (For more information on Project Flying Wild go to [www.flyingwild.org](http://www.flyingwild.org).) This workshop will be presented by the Montana Audubon Conservation Education Center: Darcie Vallant, Center Director, and Heather Ristow, Education Director. For questions on this training please contact Darcie at 406-294-5099, ext. 302.

For more information about the festival please contact: Montana Audubon Bird Festival Coordinator, Larissa Berry at [lberry@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lberry@mtaudubon.org)/406-443-3949, or any Flathead Audubon Board Member. For updates, visit <http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival.html> and "like" us at <http://www.facebook.com/MontanaAudubon>.

**Welcome New Members:**

Pamela Frasier Adler  
Peter Graf  
Eric Hutchins  
Alan Pfister Family

Sandra Bay  
Ellis R. Houseman  
Joyce Hyndman  
John Reynolds

Mary Evans  
Debra Howell  
Rory Johnson  
Jeanette C. Vermillion



**Thanks to our Returning Members:**

Carol Addis  
Audrey & Michael Bechard  
Rae Brown  
Jann Clouse  
Mrs. Donovan  
Mark Feasel  
Erin Gilder  
Mrs. Henderson  
Elizabeth Johnston  
Mary Lyndes  
Margaret Petty  
Michele Riordan  
Jane Selvig  
Owen Thilly  
Dr. Gary Webber

Gary Aitken  
Roxy Boettcher  
Melodee Bureson  
Kristina Davis  
David Durnford  
Linda Firebaugh  
Marlene Greil  
Ronda Howlett  
Mrs. Kraut  
Amanda McGill  
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Thomas Roberts  
Mary & Tom Steenberg  
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**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. **C2Z N53 0Z**

**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

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Honorary Member	Elizabeth Johnston	1101 W Greenough, Unit E-8, Missoula, MT 59802	327-1525	birder@bigsky.net

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