

*Mission: Building on the tradition of special interest in birds, Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society is organized to promote enjoyment and protection of the natural environment through education, activism, and conservation of bird habitat.*

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2013

### New This Issue

- BLUE NESTING AND FEEDING TIPS
- CONTROL SPARROWS AT YOUR FEEDERS
- YELLOWSTONE RIVERBIRDING AND CONSERVATION PROJECT



MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

Photo by CR Courson

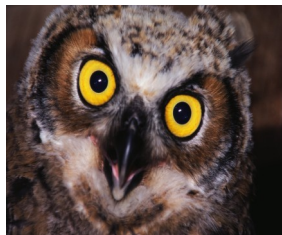
## FOLLOW THE BLUEBIRD TRAIL

**Monday, February 18**

The February 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of YVAS will feature a panel which will speak about bluebird preservation and conservation. Addressing nesting and feeding habits, presenters include Jeanette Tasey, YVAS Board member and member of Bluebird Trails, Peg Shottlaender, local coordinator of Bluebird Trails, and Kathy Haigh, YVAS past president and owner of Wild Birds Unlimited in Billings. In addition, YVAS Fieldtrip Chairman George Mowat will discuss the bluebird trail at local Phipps

Ranch, and Graydon Snapp, local coordinator of Bluebird Trails, will talk about the local club and conservation methods.

The bluebird (Western, Mountain and Eastern) was once very common in North America. It is an ecologically important bird, eating insects that ruin crops and gardens such as cutworms and grasshoppers. In many areas, the number of bluebirds has decreased alarmingly. Two main causes of the decline of population are loss of their habitats and increased competition for nesting sites. The bluebird is a timid cavity-nester that searches for hollows in decaying wood fence posts or dead trees. The loss of trees and recent use of metal fence posts have reduced natural nesting cavities. In addition, other birds like house sparrows and European starlings compete for diminishing nest sites.



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## YVAS MEETINGS

**All YVAS Meetings are at Mayflower Congregational Church, corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive, Billings, MT unless otherwise noted. The public is welcome, there is no admission fee and ample free parking is available.**

**Monday, February 11, 6:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting**

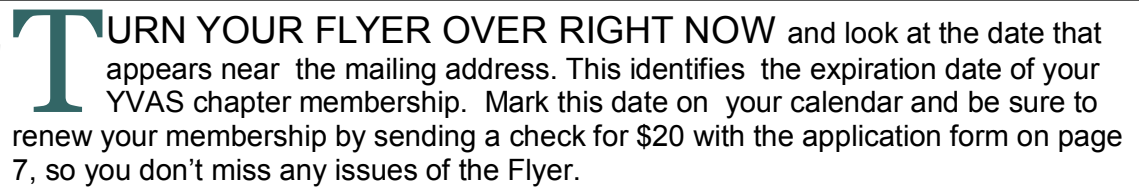
**Monday, February 18, 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting**

**We will hold a YVAS fundraiser dinner at 5:45, before the membership meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. Deb and Steve Regele have generously volunteered to host. Please contact them at 962-3115 or [dregele@juno.com](mailto:dregele@juno.com), before February 15, to make reservations and tell them what you will bring.**



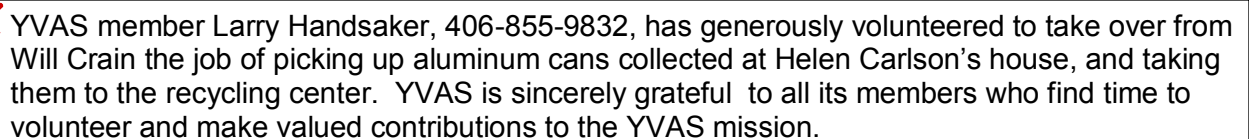
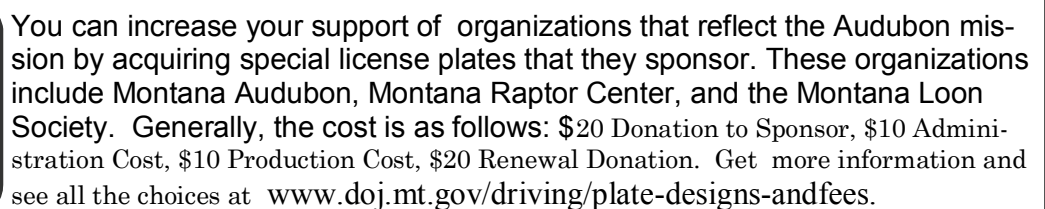
☞ We're on the web! [yvaudubon.org](http://yvaudubon.org)

**THIS FLYER IS PUBLISHED ON SFI CERTIFIED PRODUCT**



Renewal of your membership to National Audubon is totally separate from renewing your chapter membership. If you are getting duplicate magazines or flyers let us know. It probably means that a new membership was created for you instead of renewing your old membership. To avoid missing or receiving duplicate issues of the Magazine from National Audubon, be careful to state the exact information from your magazine

## NESTING MATERIALS



- Board Meetings held second Monday of each month at 6:00pm. Board Meetings are open to the entire membership.
- General Chapter Meetings are held third Monday of each month at 7:00pm. All meetings are open to the public.



## BLUEBIRD NESTING AND FEEDING TIPS

1. Install a nestbox specifically designed for bluebirds. Put up multiple boxes in a variety of styles: Peterson, NABS, Troyer slot-box, Gilwood, Gilbertson, round or square PVC, Carl Little box, et al. The bluebirds will pick their favorite.
2. Select the right habitat for your nest box. Bluebirds like semi-open grassland areas, such as mowed lawns, meadows, orchards and rural roadsides. If you happen to live adjacent to a golf course, church, school, community park or light industrial park, you are very fortunate. Bluebirds also love power lines, fences and small trees to perch on.
3. Leave your nest boxes up year round. Birds checking out future nest sites in the fall might find yours and return to it and nest in the spring. They may roost in it all winter and find shelter during nasty winter storms. Bluebirds may stay the entire winter and not migrate.
4. Clean out your boxes. Bluebirds won't use a box that is filled with sticks or a grass/straw nest filled with feathers. If you have paper wasps in your area, rub a bar of soap on the inside of the roof or paint with liquid soap.
5. Offer meal worms. Bluebirds can't resist them, and they are like a magnet for attracting bluebirds. If bluebirds don't nest in your boxes, at least you might get to watch them feed.
6. Reduce local House Sparrow populations and competition. House Sparrows harass Bluebirds, and can peck eggs and kill nestlings & adults. DO NOT permit a House Sparrow to use your Bluebird nest box! There are passive methods: to discourage House Sparrows include fishing line and sparrow spookers on boxes. Active controls include trapping and "relocation". Sometimes it takes a combination of both.
7. Put out a birdbath. Bluebirds love water and may prefer running or dripping water. A birdbath should be 3" deep with gently sloping sides. Locate it 15 feet away from trees or shrubs where cats may hide. Change the water every few days to keep it fresh. A "heated birdbath" will provide water all winter.
8. Plant native plants that produce berries that bluebirds like. For example, trees: American holly, black cherry, crabapple, mountain ash, kousa dogwood, red mulberry, flowering dogwood, hawthorn, eastern red cedar, sumac. Shrubs: blackberry, blueberry, chokecherry, elderberry, viburnums, bayberry, juniper, highbush cranberry, winterberry, serviceberry, pokeweed, currant, firethorn, hackberry, arrowwood. Vines: poison ivy, grape, Virginia creeper.
9. Bluebirds love to build white pine needle nests. It is nice to have white pine trees near your nest boxes. Place a few pine needles inside the box - and throw a few handfuls on the ground near the box. This might help get them started on a nest.
10. Place an "attraction spot" on the roof or sides of the box. A 1.5" fake entrance hole may attract bluebirds passing by that your box is a suitable nesting box. This spot can be made of plastic, metal or wood — paint it black.

## CONTROL HOUSE SPARROWS AT YOUR FEEDERS



The Montana Outdoor Birding Group [MOB] had a discussion on keeping House Sparrows off hanging feeders. They hung fishing line (the clear kind like nylon leader) from the roof and extended it past the feeding area several inches. Washers were hung on the lines as weights. The spacing between lines was 3 inches or more. The MOB received feedback from people who tried this method and had good luck excluding House Sparrows, but not any other birds.

I tried it on an 18 inch by 12 inch hanging platform feeder with a roof above. I used only four lines: one line on each side and one on each end. Amazingly, the House Sparrows would not go on that feeder. When big birds went on it, the lines might get deranged a bit, but it still worked. Thank you to George Mowat.



## YELLOWSTONE RIVER BIRDING AND CONSERVATION PROJECT



A juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker at the Isaac Homestead WMA complex.

YVAS initiated the Yellowstone River Birding and Conservation Project (YRBCP) in September of 2011. The YRBCP Summary Document is available on the YVAS web site, [www.yvaudubon.org](http://www.yvaudubon.org). The YRBCP is committed to expanding the bird data base for the Yellowstone River and to protecting the Yellowstone River in accordance with YVAS's mission: "to promote enjoyment and protection of the natural environment through education, activism, and conservation of bird habitat."

The 671-mile long Yellowstone River and associated habitat is an extraordinary bird area of historic interest and value to YVAS, to Montana, and to the nation. Within the Yellowstone River corridor, the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) has recorded 243 species of birds, 43 bird species of special concern, and 14 bird species potentially of special concern. For our purposes, the Yellowstone River Corridor includes areas within 1/4 mile each side of the Yellowstone River center line and all of the 100 year floodplain, from Yellowstone River headwaters in Yellowstone National Park to its confluence with the Missouri River.

2012 was the 'pilot' year in which members of the YRBCP Committee and some other birding groups visited a number of locations along the Yellowstone River to structure the Project. We selected sites that had public access and potential for good birding, and the presence of special category bird species based on review of YVAS information, MNHP data, Google Earth coverage's, other web site maps, etc.

The sites most visited during 2012 were Two Moon Park in Billings, Gray Bear Fishing Access site near Big Timber, and the Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area near Hysham. Kayhan Ostovar, Deb and Steve Regele, and Brad Hall coordinated the majority of visits at each of these three locations. In addition, Deb and Steve met Ron Martin, President and Treasurer of the North Dakota Birding Society, on public land in North Dakota along the Yellowstone, at its confluence with the Missouri River. Kayhan supervised a trip with Rocky Mountain College (RMC) students across Yellowstone Lake to where the Yellowstone River enters the Lake. Sacajawea Audubon in Bozeman did some extra birding along the Yellowstone above

Livingston and sent that information in as part of the 2012 YRBCP efforts. The bird observations included sightings of Red-headed Woodpecker, Purple Finch, Warbling Vireo, White-throated Sparrow, Mourning Warbler, (ND site – nearly 80 species over two days); three juvenile Red-headed Woodpeckers, Ovenbird, a variety of raptors, raptor nests, waterfowl and shorebirds (Isaac WMA Complex - commonly 30 species on a good day); Bobolink, various raptors, raptor nests, waterfowl and shorebirds (Gray Bear Site - commonly 30 species on a good day). This past fall, a resting flock of over 400 Sandhill cranes was observed in the field along the Yellowstone near Pray Montana.

The YVAS data from the site visits are shared with RMC and with the MNHP, which makes data available region and world-wide. The MNHP data base is valuable to numerous government agencies, NGO's, and private users to aid in making sound management decisions, to better understand and take steps to protect the extraordinary Yellowstone River, and to give birders more insight about where and when to go birding along the River. MNHP data is also pooled with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology "ebird" program.

We are working with RMC to get YVAS field form data made readily available on the YVAS web site and available through the RMC Yellowstone River Research Center, as well as within the MNHP. That work will be completed shortly, and additional YVAS data input will occur routinely. Keep an eye on the Flyer for news about that and about YVAS sponsored field trips to these and other Yellowstone River Birding and Conservation Project sites in 2013! Thank you to Steve Regele



Deb Regele and Ron Marin at the Yellowstone River/Missouri River confluence area.



## FIELD TRIP NOTES

### DECEMBER 15 113th ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



**J**UST IMAGINE: You were part of the largest, longest-running animal census on the planet: National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC). On December 15, experienced YVAS leaders Monty Sullins and Helen Carlson organized 33 participants into 15 teams that counted 72 species and 31,236 individuals in 15 mile-radius circles. Adding to the count were those who participated as 'feeder watchers'. Begun in 1900 as an alternative to Christmas Day bird hunts, the CBC has become a powerful force for the birds. The longest running Citizen Science survey in the world, it is a census of birds in the Western Hemisphere, performed annually in the early Northern-hemisphere winter by volunteer birdwatchers, which provides population data for use in science, especially conservation biology.

Chuck Carlson and Jim Wiggins scanning at the CBC



GREAT-HORNED OWL  
Photo by George Mowat

### JANUARY 1 YELLOW TAIL DAM AFTERBAY

A cold wind was blowing on the first day of 2013 as the group met at Rocky Mountain College. Undaunted by the wind, we set off for the Yellowtail Dam Afterbay with our leader, Helen Carlson. As in much of life, the journey turned out to be as rewarding as the destination. Highlights of the journey included at least three Golden Eagles, many Bald Eagles, numerous Rough-legged Hawks, a Great Horned Owl, three Great Blue Heron on one tree branch, a roadside bush with nine bright yellow Western Meadowlarks, and some Gray-Crowned Rosy-Finches.

As we reached Yellowtail Afterbay, snow was beginning to fall, as was the temperature. Almost hidden among the hordes of Mallards were a pair of Canvasbacks, Redheads, Buffleheads, Northern Pintails, and Green-winged Teals. As we retreated to our cars for lunch we were rewarded with the sighting of a Prairie Falcon. The trip was a great way to begin the New Year. Our total number of species was over 40 thanks to the veteran spotters in our group. Thank you to Nancy Traeger

The afterbay pool is formed by Yellowtail Afterbay Dam, constructed on the Bighorn River 2.2 miles downstream from Yellowtail Dam at Ft. Smith, MT. The dam is a 72 ft. high concrete gravity structure with embankment wings. The afterbay dam has a crest length of 1,360 ft. and consists of 21,600 cubic yards of concrete and 162,000 cubic yards of earth material and rip rap. Discharges are used to provide a uniform daily flow into Bighorn River, leveling the peaking power discharges from Yellowtail Powerplant.

## SAVE THE DATE

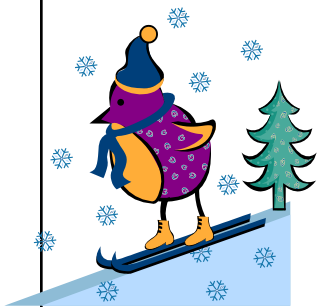
**2013 CONVENTION // JULY 12-15**

SKAMANIA LODGE//STEVENSON, WASHINGTON

**GET YOUR AUDUBON ON!**

After 13 years, the Audubon Convention returns. Join Audubon staff, volunteers, and Chapter leaders to learn about how our work contributes to Flyways conservation.

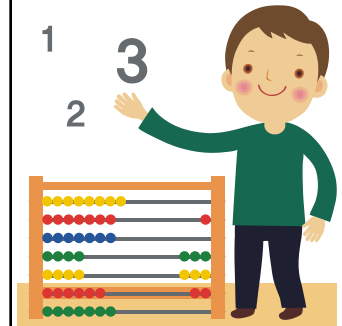
For more information and to receive email updates visit [www.audubon.org/2013convention](http://www.audubon.org/2013convention)



**FEB 9 (SAT) WINTER WANDERERS FIELD TRIP**--9 a.m. Fundraiser--Rare Winter Birds. Progressive birding and eating. A day that provides breakfast and lunch stops as well as bird watching and lots of good conversation and fun. Cost is a donation of \$15.00 or more. Reservations mandatory by Thurs. Feb. 7th. Call Caroline Jones at 652-3041 for reservations and information. Meet at Rocky Mountain College parking lot on Rimrock Road, adjacent to Billings Studio Theater, Limit 15 persons.

## 16th ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is an annual 4-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. The 2013 GBBC will take place Friday, February 15, through Monday, February 18. Everyone is welcome--from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds. Contact the Audubon Conservation Education Center at [www.mtacec.org](http://www.mtacec.org) or visit [www.birdsource.org](http://www.birdsource.org)



## EVENTS AT THE AUDUBON CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER WINTER 2013



7026 South Billings Blvd, Billings, MT, 59101 406-294-5099 [www.mtacec.org](http://www.mtacec.org)

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8:** Nature Night at the Audubon Center! Drop your child off for an evening of outdoor adventures with our Teacher Naturalists. Program is open to K – 6th grade students, and runs from 6 – 8 PM. Fee is \$15 per child or \$10 for Friends of the Center. For more info and a registration form, visit [www.mtacec.org](http://www.mtacec.org) or call 294 – 5099.

**FRIDAY—SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15 – 17:** Great Backyard Bird Count – calling all birders, novice and expert, young and old! Join us for a special weekend of activities in honor of the annual Great Backyard Bird Count. All activities this weekend are free (sponsored by TogetherGreen)! Register in advance by calling 294 – 5099.

- **FRIDAY, 6 – 8 PM:** Owl Prowl, : Learn amazing owl facts, and go on a hike in search of the resident great-horned owls on Norm's Island.
- **SATURDAY, 2 – 3:30 PM:** Bird Feeder Basics with Wild Birds Unlimited. Learn how to attract birds to your yard in the winter. First 30 families to register receive a free starter feeder basket.
- **SUNDAY, 1 – 3:30:PM:** Birding 101, learn about the Beginning Birders' Six S's for identification, and hone your skills during a hike.

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16:** Photography Workshop from 8:30 – 1:30 with David Grubbs, formerly Assistant Photo Editor at the Billings Gazette. Class will cover everything from picking the right camera to photo exposure to how to capture moments. Fee is \$80 per person. Space is limited so register early by calling the Audubon Center at 294 – 5099.

**FEBRUARY 18** School Break Camp for kids in K – 6th grades! Join us for Great Backyard Bird Count camp. We'll learn about flight, feathers, hollow bones, and other fascinating bird features. Campers will each make a bird feeder to take home. Runs from 8:30 – 4:30. Cost per day is \$45 or \$40 for Friends of the Audubon Center. One hour of after-care until 5:30 is available for an extra \$5. Call to register at 294-5099 or print out a registration form from [www.mtacec.org](http://www.mtacec.org)!



National Audubon Society  
Recruitment Code: C0ZN500Z  
Application for New Membership

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society. I understand that I will receive the Audubon Magazine and Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Flyer. Make check payable to **National Audubon Society**.  
\*Renewals will be sent to you through National Audubon.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

One Year Membership

☐ \$20 One year new membership

Send this application and your check made out to **National Audubon Society** to:

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society  
Attention: Membership Secretary  
P.O. Box 1075  
Billings, MT 59103-1075

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society  
Recruitment Code: C0ZN500Z  
Application for New & Renewal Membership

Please enroll me as a supporting member of Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society. I understand I will be supporting local chapter activities and receiving the local newsletter. I will enjoy full Chapter benefits. Make check payable to **Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society** for \$20. If applying for a new or renewing student membership, make check for \$10 and indicate academic affiliation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Do you want to receive the Flyer electronically?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Send this application and your check to:

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society  
Attention: Membership Secretary  
P.O. Box 1075  
Billings, MT 59103-1075



**WHOOPS!!**

**Is it time for you to become a YVAS member or renew your chapter membership?**

PLEASE CHECK THE MAILING LABEL ON YOUR FLYER. IF IT SHOWS "YVAS JAN 12" BELOW YOUR NAME, THEN YOU ARE A SUPPORTING CHAPTER MEMBER WHOSE MEMBERSHIP EXPIRED IN JANUARY 2012. IF YOU ARE NOT A SUPPORTING MEMBER OR YOUR MEMBERSHIP HAS EXPIRED, HELP US OUT BY JOINING OR RENEWING NOW WITH YOUR CHECK FOR \$20, USING THE FORM ON THE RIGHT. YOUR MEMBERSHIP HELPS FUND THE PUBLICATION OF THE FLYER ALONG WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR CHAPTER.

**Membership Information**

Although the National Audubon Society gives complimentary membership in our chapter as a benefit, no dues come to us. We strongly encourage you to join YVAS as a Supporting Chapter Member, which is offered for \$20 a year. Use the application form above to join as a Supporting Chapter Member or to renew your Chapter Membership.

1. **Moving???** Let us know as early as possible when you plan to move. The Post Office does charge us a fee for returned flyers. Include your old address as well as your new address so we can track you. You may write, call, or email the information to the Membership Secretary.
2. Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society offers Supporting Chapter student memberships for a reduced rate of \$10 a year. If you applying for a new student membership or are renewing a student membership, make sure you indicate your academic affiliation in your application. Joel Bowers, Membership Secretary



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## Field Trip Calendar:

All field trips depart from Rocky Mountain College parking lot on Rimrock Road, adjacent to Billings Studio Theater, unless otherwise noted, and will be by car. All field trips are open to the public. Passengers will share gas costs with driver when car- pooling. Do make sure you check all field trips with listing in flyer each month for any changes.

Feb 9	Sat	WINTER WANDERERS FIELD TRIP.	Rare winter birds. <b>Progressive birding and eating. 9 a.m. FUNDRAISER. Reservations Required by Feb. 7th.</b> See FLYER p. 6 for more details.
Apr 13	Sat	EXXON PONDS AND EMERALD HILLS. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Sack lunch. <u>One Mile Walk.</u>
May 4	Sat	LAKE BASIN 8 a.m.	Sack lunch. Mike Weber, leader
May 11	Sat	MEET AT RIVERFRONT PARK at 8:00 a.m. Half day.	George and Bernie Mowat, leaders.
May 16	Thur	MEET AT RIVERFRONT PARK. 5:30 p.m.	Mike Weber, leader.
May 18	Sat	STILLWATER AND WOODBINE AREAS. 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.	Sack lunch. Ruth Vanderhorst, leader.
May 25	Sat	POMPEY'S PILLAR. 7 a.m. to early afternoon.	Sack lunch optional. Ruth Vanderhorst, leader.

FIELD TRIP CHAIRS: George and Bernie Mowat 656-7467

