



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 47, NUMBER 5

MAY 2017

May 15, 7PM Chapter Meeting Program

Denizens of Darkness—Owls of Yellowstone

Katy Duffy, retired Yellowstone National Park Education Ranger



Discover which owl species live in Yellowstone National Park and the habitats they occupy. Find out if all owls hoot and if all owls are nocturnal. What do their vocalizations and behavior tell us about their breeding cycle and other aspects of their ecology? Learn about scientific studies of owls on the Park's Northern Range and what you can do to promote owl conservation.

Katy Duffy is a retired Yellowstone National Park supervisory education ranger who has studied owls in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem since 1987. She has conducted owl surveys in Yellowstone each winter and spring since 2013. Katy has a M.S. from Rutgers University in ecology and has been a licensed bird bander specializing in owls, diurnal raptors and songbirds since 1979. **Northern Saw-whet Owl** photo by Michael O'Brien.

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.

Tuesday, May 9, 6:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting

Monday, May 15, 7:00pm: Chapter Meeting



We will hold a YVAS fundraiser dinner at 5:30, before the Chapter meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. Sheila McKay has generously volunteered to coordinate. Please contact her at 652-7175 [before, Friday, May 12](#) to make reservations and your dish contribution.

THIS FLYER IS PUBLISHED ON Sustainable Forestry Initiative SFI.org CERTIFIED PRODUCT

☞We're on the web! yvaudubon.org

And Facebook! <https://www.facebook.com/Yellowstone-Valley-Audubon-Society-504343829741848/>

YVAS Board of Directors Report: April 11, 2017

- The Osprey Nest Monitoring Project is off to a good start this year, with all nests assigned, including several new nests. Dr. Marco Restani conducted two well-attended briefings, one in Livingston and the other in Miles City.
- Donn Bartlett, Chair of the Field Trip Committee, reported that the birding field trips are becoming very popular. If the size of the group poses a safety hazard, particularly with a large car caravan, the group may need to be split.
- Check out (soon) the “Volunteer Corner,” a new addition to future Flyers that will list opportunities for members to contribute their time and talents to YVAS.
- What’s flying over Billings??? The Board voted unanimously to fund Mike Weber’s proposal for a fun and educational project to record night bird calls, which can be shared with YVAS and the community.
- A record 150 people attended Duck Day at WJH Birds. Sheila McKay thanked the many YVAS members who assisted with the bird walks, logistics, and games and activities for both children and adults.

Submitted by Sue Weinreis

Who do you call when you find an INJURED bird?

Injured Birds: Details at yvaudubon.org (select the “Projects” tab and then “Injured Birds”) or call MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks, (M-F) 406-247-2940.

Injured Raptors: Montana Raptor Conservation Center, Becky Kean, 406-585-1211.

Injured Waterfowl: WJH Bird Resources, Sheila McKay, 406-652-7175.

Twine Entangled Osprey in Nest: Dr. Marco Restani, 406-425-2608 or Deb Regele, 406-962-3115

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:**AREA CODE 406**

President: Steve Regele, 962-3115, smregele@gmail.com

Vice-President: Steve Linder, 380-0073, becon1@bresnan.net

Secretary: Doreen Hartman, 697-0277, rdzlhman@bresnan.net

Treasurer: Pam Pipal, 245-4517, ppipal@charter.net

Board of Directors:

Donn Bartlett: 252-0757, donnbartlett@msn.com

Dorothy Bartlett, 252-0757, dpadanyi@live.com

Sheila McKay: 652-7175, cell 694-7918, wjhbird@yahoo.com

Marco Restani: 425-2608, restani@stcloudstate.edu

Deb Regele: 962-3115, debregele@gmail.com

Sue Weinreis: 855-4181, granpeak47@gmail.com

Nancy Wiggins: 839-4461, nwiggins83@gmail.com

Montana’s Congressional Delegation:

Sen. Steve Daines: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510

email Sen. Daines via his website: daines.senate.gov

Billings: 406-245-6822 Wash. D.C. 202-224-2651

Sen. Jon Tester: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510

website: tester.senate.gov

email: senator@tester.senate.gov

Billings: 406-252-0550 Wash. D.C.: 202-224-2644

Rep. Ryan Zinke:

website: zinke.house.gov

email representative@zinke.house.gov

Billings: 406-702-1182 Wash, D.C: 202-225-3211

Committees and Special Assignments: AREA CODE 406

Audubon Adventures: Jerry Dalton, daltonlj@centurylink.net

Baling Twine Project: Deb Regele, debregele@gmail.com

Bird Questions: George Mowat, 656-7467 gbmowat@gmail.com
or Helen Carlson Cummins, 248-8684

Birdathon: Ruth Vanderhorst, 245-5118, erv132@charter.net

Christmas Bird Count: Jim Court, 259-5099, C: 860-0450,
custertours@gmail.com

Conservation Advisor: Steve Regele, 962-3115,
smregele@gmail.com

Data Base Administrator: Joan Bunke and Peter Cummins, membership.data@yvaudubon.org

Facebook: Nancy Wiggins, 839-4461, nwiggins83@gmail.com

Flyer Editor: Trenay Hart, 860-1175, yvasflyer@gmail.com

Field Trip Chair: Donn Bartlett, 252-0757, donnbartlett@msn.com

Hospitality: Audrey Jurovich, 656-2748

Membership Committee Chair: Dorothy Bartlett, 252-0757,
dpadanyi@live.com

Osprey Project: Deb Regele, 962-3115, debregele@gmail.com

Publicity: Barbara Garrett 652-

3180, garrettimprisonart@gmail.com

Program Committee: Steve Regele, 962-3115, sregele@juno.com,

Nancy Wiggins, 839-4461, nwiggins83@gmail.com,

Sheila McKay, 652-7175, wjhbird@yahoo.com

Recycling (aluminum): Larry Handsaker, 855-9832,
918 AVE C, Billings

Website: Deb Regele, 962-3115, debregele@gmail.com

Meetings are held September through May at Mayflower Congregational Church, corner of Poly and Rehberg, Billings, MT:

• Board Meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00pm. Board Meetings are open to all members.

• General Chapter Meetings are held the third Monday of each month at 7:00pm. All meetings are open to the public.

Saturday, April 8, 2017 Exxon Ponds*Submitted by Robin Manfredi*

At least 15 YVAS members met at the gate to the Exxon Ponds for a morning of walking and birding in the fields, around the ponds and near the Yellowstone River. We had a beautiful day for it and the birds didn't disappoint.

Right off the bat many members of the group saw Wood Ducks, six drakes and a hen, in the water not far from the parking area. Further on we got a good look at two immature Bald Eagles perched in the branches of bare trees across the field.

The search for the Virginia Rails we heard and/or saw last year was without success.

One of the highlights of the day were Sandhill Cranes, which we quietly sneaked up on and observed through the brush as they strutted around and called in their noisy way. A few times, we also saw them flying around the ponds.

Some of the water birds observed on and around the ponds included Gadwall, Cormorants, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, American Coot, Green-winged Teal and lots of Canada Geese. Great Blue Herons were observed both flying and sitting on nests in a distant rookery.

We saw both Osprey and Red-tailed Hawks flying overhead. But we found the Osprey platform near the river empty again this year. A Bald Eagle was also seen perched in a tree across the river near a nest.

In addition to the above, we also observed male Red-winged Blackbirds staking out their territories, Northern Flickers, American Robins, Black-capped Chickadees, Song Sparrows and a Downy Woodpecker busily getting after a dead tree.

It was a lovely morning and we owe a debt of thanks to Ron Kuhler for leading the trek, and to Exxon for allowing us to use the area for our field trip. (Ron will be moving to Houston, TX very soon. We truly thank him for the years of allowing us to bird at Exxon Ponds.)

Lek Trip Photos below, at left, Greater Sage-Grouse lek submitted by Lynda Zirpoli.

At right, Sagebrush Sparrow submitted by Carole Boerner.

**Saturday, April 15, 2017 Greater Sage-Grouse Lek Trip***Submitted by Carolyn Jones*

Our group of about 17 left Billings at 4 AM to meet up with Stan Heath from Red Lodge to find a Greater Sage-Grouse lek in the Pryors. With Stan's expert guidance we found the lek on Railbed Road out of Warren and spent about an hour watching around 30 males and one female a considerable distance across the valley. But since most cars had window scopes we were able to get a pretty good view of the dancing.

Driving back towards Warren we spotted a Say's Phoebe, 2 Wilson's Snipes, Mallards, Green-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, and Ring-necked Ducks, among others.

After the dance show Stan led us to another place further south to search for the elusive Sagebrush Sparrow which we located by following a very clear call. The bird posed for us to get good front and back views and a couple of people even got good pictures. As we drove the road through sage brush flats we also were able to spot a Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, and the ubiquitous, Western Meadowlark.

To finish the day, 3 of us had a wonderful breakfast at the Blue Rooster in Belfry. Thank you, Stan for a great morning!

BIRDATHON 2017*Submitted by Ruth Vanderhorst*

June 3, 2017 at 5 pm the fun and hard work begins for the teams competing to identify the most bird species during the next 24 hours. This annual fund raising activity occurs during the height of the Spring migration to enable teams to achieve the greatest number of species identified. This activity developed by the National Audubon Society many years ago enables chapters such as YVAS to raise monies that support many projects. Over the recent years funds have been used to develop the Osprey Project, especially with nest building, and educational projects such as making and placing signs in public areas that provide information about birds in the area. This year the funds are dedicated to developing signs for the new Dover Park.

A Donation & Pledge Form accompanies this article and also may be found on the YVAS website, yvaudubon.org. Please make a donation this year and help our organization continue its important role in our community. It would be really great to increase the numbers of donors this year to 25 % of our membership. This is our major fundraising activity!

For birders who participate, the weekend is challenging and fun. Teams drive, at their own expense, as many as 350 miles seeking species that inhabit the several different eco-zones where unique species may be found. Last year, grasslands, alpine, wetland, urban and rural areas attracted the teams. The teams meet to share their species lists and pizza and a soda at the end of the weekend at 5 pm. The final count is done at that time. Hopefully, many teams will compete and funds raised will be plentiful.

YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY 2017 BIRDATHON June 3, 5 pm – June 4, 5 pm REGISTRATION FORM

Please complete the Registration Form and send it along with a \$5.00 per team member fee to:

Treasurer, YVAS, PO Box 1075, Billings, MT 59103 (checks payable to YVAS) by May 25, 2017.

Team Name _____

Team Leader: _____ email: _____

Address: _____ PH: _____

Team Members:

1) _____ email _____ PH _____

2) _____ email _____ PH _____

3) _____ email _____ PH _____

4) _____ email _____ PH _____

YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY BIRDATHON 2017DONATION & PLEDGE FORM

You can support by contributing either a fixed amount or by pledging a set amount per species identified. Pledges per species are on the basis of the total number of species seen by all teams.

I wish to support the YVAS 2017 Birdathon with a pledge in the name of the _____ team to the YVAS 2017 Birdathon.

Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____, payable to the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society.

OR

I pledge \$.25 _____ \$.50 _____ \$1.00 _____ \$5.00 _____ Other _____ for each species seen during the YVAS 2017 Birdathon. Note there can be up to 150 species identified.

You will be sent the exciting results of the Birdathon and a statement to let you know the total amount of your pledge.

Donations are tax-deductible. Questions: Ruth Vanderhorst, 245-5118 or erv132@charter.net

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Email (for receipt) _____ TELEPHONE _____

Please give this form to the team you support or send it to: **Birdathon 2017 YVAS, PO BOX 1075, Billings, MT 59103**

THANK YOU!

From: Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) NEWS REGION 5 2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings MT 59105

April 20, 2017 **More Swift Foxes observed in Billings area; reporting urged**



The Swift Fox is an elusive animal, but in recent years more sightings of these small, gray-red foxes with black-tipped tails have been reported in southcentral Montana. In Montana, the Swift Fox is a species of concern.

In 1969, Montana declared Swift Fox basically extinct locally. But due in part to transplant programs, sightings of Swift foxes have increased in eastern and central Montana since the 1980s. FWP encourages people to report any live or road-killed sightings of Swift foxes to the local biologist. A few reported sightings have happened near Shepherd.

To report sightings, however, people need to be able to tell the difference between Swift foxes, Red foxes and Coyotes. Swift foxes are about the size of a house cat, smaller than Red foxes and only about a fifth the size of Coyotes. Red foxes are red, with some variations, and have white-tipped tails. Swift foxes have grayish-red fur and a black-tipped tail. Coyotes can have similar coloring and tail markings, but again are much larger.

Please see the complete MFWP News Release at <http://www.yvvaudubon.org/> Contact Megan O'Reilly, MFWP Wildlife Biologist if you observe a Swift Fox (406-247-2966; email: moreilly@mt.gov).
Summary submitted by Steve Regele

Chimney Swifts

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) is soliciting volunteers to conduct Chimney Swift surveys in June and July 2017. Surveys may require up to 3 visits to a chimney and will require the observer to be present at least 30 minutes before sunset and 30 minutes after sunset. Please contact Megan O'Reilly for more details if you are interested in participating.

Black Rosy-Finch

FWP will be again be conducting Black Rosy-Finch surveys in summer 2017 and we need your help. We are currently working with a graduate student from the University of Wyoming to refine our survey protocol and will have more details to come. Surveys will require basic use of a GPS to record a track log and bird observations. Both GPS units and training will be provided by FWP if needed. If you are interested in participating please contact Megan O'Reilly for more details.

Bird Trunks

FWP is happy to announce that the bird educational trunks, partially funded by YVAS, are now available to be checked out. All borrowers will be required to visit in person with an FWP employee to go over trunk content and curriculum before borrowing the trunk. For more details or to book a trunk please contact Megan O'Reilly.

Grant Marsh Addition

FWP is happy to announce that the Grant Marsh Addition south of Hardin has been approved by both the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the MT Board of Land Commissioners. A BIG thank you to those of you who provided supportive comments for the project. We look forward to future birding trips on the additional 425 acres.

Megan O'Reilly contact info: moreilly@mt.gov or (office) 406-247-2966 or (cell) 406-794-6154.

Submitted by Megan O'Reilly

Sandhill Cranes (Consider this the Bird of the Month)

Submitted by Jim Hansen, Photo of Jim at Exxon ponds by Barbra Garrett



For most who were on the Exxon Ponds field trip on April 8, I suspect that the pair of Sandhill Cranes heard and finally seen up close was a highlight. They were loud, with the calls echoing through the trees, and because we were patient, we got to see them walking across a small clearing about 50 yards away. They didn't want to leave the area, and we suspected that they had a nest nearby.

The loud, rattling calls of Sandhill Cranes are distinctive and are made when they are on the ground or in the air. What's really neat about the calls is that the two-part calls that we heard were actually made by both birds of the pair. It's called "duetting," which is a good description. One bird of the pair starts the call, and the other finishes it, although sometimes they call in unison. They have an elaborate courtship display, with dancing, wing-flapping, and loud calls.

Our local cranes return in the spring in early to mid-March, and first hearing them is, to me, a sign of spring. Sandhill Cranes nest in or near wet areas, often in shallow water where they pull down and pull together emergent vegetation for a platform where they lay their two eggs. The incubation period is about 30 days, and it takes about two months for the young to fledge. The young are called "colts." I don't know where the "colts" originated; maybe it's because they have long legs and are able to run. Saving or restoring wetland areas is one way to help the cranes.

The cranes that nest around here are Greater Sandhill Cranes of the Rocky Mountain Population. They weigh about 10 to 14 pounds. This population numbers about 21,000, and they nest in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, wintering mostly at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. The benchmark survey to keep track of population numbers is done around the middle of September each year, when most of the cranes are on several staging areas where they gather prior to migration. In Montana, these surveys are done by staff from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Especially around the staging areas the cranes sometimes cause significant damage to crops. The Greater Sandhill Cranes have been expanding in Montana, in both numbers and in breeding range.

The cranes that migrate through eastern Montana are Lesser Sandhill Cranes of the Mid-continent Population, and they weigh about half of what the Greater weigh. These cranes nest in northern Canada, Alaska, and even Siberia, wintering mostly in Texas. Since Montana is on the western edge of their range, many of our Lessers come from Siberia, as was determined by satellite tracking of radioed birds. The tracking also indicated that the cranes spend very little time in Montana, which is why you don't hear of large concentrations of cranes in eastern Montana. This population numbers about 450,000, and they are surveyed mainly in March when most of the cranes are concentrated along the Platte River in Nebraska. Some of you have probably gone to see them there.

One thing I would highly recommend is that if you do things with a computer, Google "Sandhill Crane duetting" and enjoy seeing and hearing them. Once you learn their calls, you won't forget it!

Photo of two Sandhill Cranes this season at Tom Miner Basin by Peter Murray.



March for Science Submitted with photo at YNP Earth Day by Steve Regele

The March for Science stepped out April 22, 2017 and will march on. CBS News reported that *"It's been 47 years since the first "Earth Day" and today (4/22/17) it was observed around the world with a focus on science"*.

We are all essentially dependent on and supporters of good science and the scientific method. We are all invested in improving and sustaining health, safety, life as we know it, and the things that support life and earth. We need the discipline of science and truth.

Please see the full YVAS article about this important subject at yvaudubon.org PUBLICATIONS, EDITORIALS AND OPINIONS.

**International Migratory Bird Day at the Montana Audubon Center**

For the 2nd year in a row, the MAC is excited to present a celebration about birds in the middle of spring migration. Join us on May 13th from Noon - 4pm for bird-themed crafts, activities, and guided bird walks. There will also be a Natural History Garage Sale, new this year! A free family event. For more info: www.mtaudubon.org/center

RENEWALS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

The YVAS Board of Directors is trying to find a better way to alert supporting Chapter Members of their renewal dates. The list below consists of those members up for renewal in MAY 2017. Please use the application form below (include your email address) and submit it, along with a check, to any Board Member or mail it to the address on the application when it is time to renew. Contact Data Base Administrators: Joan Bunke or Peter Cummins or membership.data@yvaudubon.org, with any questions.

MAY Renewals: Linda Lee Carlson, Frank W. Cookson, Cathleen Kuras & Sue Cozzens, Dan Crabtree, Donna Dunton, Steve Paulson & Candace Forrette, Margaret F. McCarty, Megan O'Reilly, Marco Restani, Cheryl Tatum, Bev Weber, and Janet Weisz.



Larry Handsaker says participation in aluminum can recycling has not increased despite the notifications that he is available to pick up cans from your home or you can drop them off at his home: 918 Ave C, Billings. He is also willing to meet you at a chapter meeting to retrieve the cans, just give him a call: 855-9832. Helen Carlson accepts cans dropped at her home: 519 Highland Park Dr., Billings.

Larry relayed an exciting pair of visitors to his backyard on Easter Sunday. He had two beautiful Cooper's Hawks perch high in a tree looking for their breakfast for 10 minutes. He says it is unusual to see these hawks in the area he lives in in Billings. He is close to Lion's Park. He does note he's seen a Kestrel zooming over his feeders but not the Cooper's.

CORRECTION: Dr. Marco Restani submitted a correction to Peter Murray's ID on the Golden Eagle photograph on pg. 4 of the April Flyer. It is in fact an immature Bald Eagle not a Golden Eagle. Thank you for your expertise identifying these challenging young raptors!

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society
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 family 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
P.O. Box 1075
Billings, MT 59103-1075





YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON FLYER

P.O. Box 1075
Billings, MT 59103-1075

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization
PRST STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BILLINGS, MT
PERMIT NO. 27



Burrowing Owl photo by Jim Sells. Taken this spring sitting amidst the ice plants on the San Diego River Estuary at a spot the locals call the "Birder's Mile." Jim, can we all come along?!

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. **PLEASE DO NOT BRING PETS.** 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. Binoculars and birding books are available on loan at the field trips
FIELD TRIP CHAIR: Donn Bartlett 252-0757, donnbartlett@msn.com

May 6	Sat	Meet at Riverfront Park, S Billings Blvd, 1 st parking area on the right. 8 am to noon.	Family Oriented Outing. Leader Lois and Jerry Dalton, leaders
May 11	Thurs	Meet at Riverfront Park, S Billings Blvd. 1 st parking lot on the right. 5:30 pm.	Mike Weber, leader
May 13	Sat	Lake Basin. 8:00 am.	Sack lunch. Mike Weber, leader
May 14	Sun.	Pryor Mountains, Bear Canyon Birding/Hiking	Meet at Rocky Mountain College at 6:00 am or at the Bridger Rest Area at 7:30 am, to hike into Bear Canyon at 8:30 am. Sack lunch. Trenay Hart, leader.
May 16	Tues	Stillwater River and Woodbine Area 7:00 am to 5:00 pm.	Sack lunch. Ruth Vanderhorst, leader
May 20	Sat	Pompey's Pillar and Captain Clark's FAS. 7:00 am.	Sack lunch. Robert Hill, leader
May 21	Sun	Bear Gulch near Grass Range 5:30 am, all day	WALKING TRIP, bring a picnic lunch, \$20/per person, Group of 20 or more \$15/ person. Carolyn Jones, leader.
May 27-29	Sat-M	Memorial Day Weekend	Will alert Field Trip Birders of any impromptu trips.

