

# YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

- FROM THE PRAIRIES TO THE PEAKS.

*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 48, NUMBER 5

MAY 2018

**May 21, 2018 Chapter Meeting 7PM**

## **The North American Breeding Bird Survey**

**Beth Madden, Montana BBS Coordinator**

The North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is a long-term, international avian monitoring program initiated in 1966 to track the status and trends of North American bird populations.

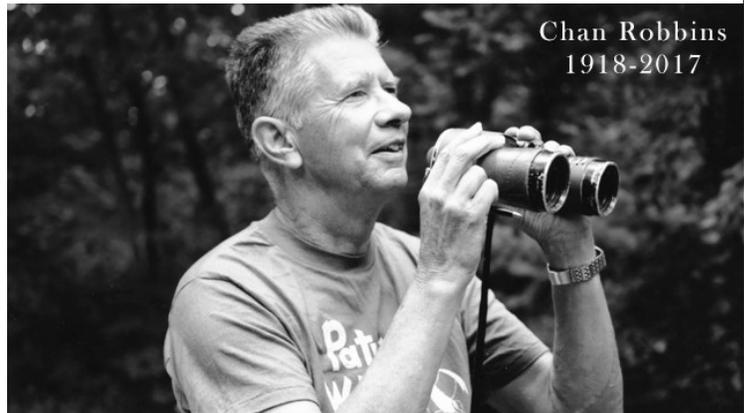
Following a rigorous protocol, breeding bird surveys are conducted annually by thousands of dedicated participants (mostly volunteers), along thousands of randomly established roadside routes throughout the continent. The USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and the Canadian Wildlife Service National Wildlife Research Center jointly coordinate the BBS program.

The resulting database provides the most reliable regional and continental population trends we have for >500 bird species, facilitating science-based conservation and management of birds throughout North America.

Learn more about the North American BBS and the role Montana plays in it from biologist Beth Madden. Beth is the BBS Coordinator for Montana and recruits participants to survey routes across the state. Beth has worked throughout Montana as a wildlife biologist for more than 30 years, for both federal agencies and universities, and now as a biological consultant. Her main research interest is prairie birds and prairie conservation.

Might you be a good candidate to take on a BBS route? Find out what its all about at Beth's talk on May 21.

*Submitted by Dr. Marco Restani, photo courtesy of Beth Madden.*



Chan Robbins  
1918-2017

## **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.**

**Friday, May 11, 4:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting**

**Monday, May 21, 7:00pm: Chapter Meeting**



**We will hold a YVAS fundraiser dinner at 5:30, before the Chapter meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. Judy Weddell has generously volunteered to coordinate. Please contact her at 839-8987 or 248-8927 before Friday, May 18 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](http://yvaudubon.org)**

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

**YVAS Board of Directors Doings****April 13, 2018***Submitted by Sue Weinreis*

Nic Vermullen, a junior at Central High School in Billings, gave a presentation to the Board about an experimental enzyme that adheres to and breaks down chemicals in commonly used plastics that do not recycle easily in other ways.

Ruth Vanderhorst, chair of the 2018 Birdathon, was a visitor to the Board. The history, purpose, and challenges presented by this annual spring event were discussed at length. The Birdathon this year will focus being fun, encouraging participation, and will include a post-Birdathon celebration barbecue.

After a year of seeking a replacement for our former publicist, Barb Garrett, the board discussed options, including no publicity for our activities, or paying a professional publicist. A decision has been postponed to the next board meeting. Please consider taking on this volunteer opportunity for YVAS!

The Board heard reports on Osprey Nest Monitoring, Signage for Dover Park, Osprey Baling Twine, Spring Birding Trips, and the Bluebird Nest Boxes at Phipps Park. These projects are the heart blood of our association. If you are interested in volunteering to help with any of them, please contact a member of the YVAS Board. Contact information can be found in the YVAS Flyer.

The Board will hold a special meeting in May to discuss the purpose, mission, and objectives of YVAS. Declining participation in the monthly membership meetings, potlucks, and club activities have prompted the need for a close look at how well we are fulfilling our stated mission. Members are encouraged to contact a board member with comments and suggestions.

### 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 Pival, 245-4517, ppival@charter.net

##### Board of Directors:

Donn Bartlett: 628-5058, donnbartlett@msn.com  
 Dorothy Bartlett: 628-5058, dpadanyi@live.com  
 Carolyn Jones: 670-4449, carolyn684@gmail.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, nwiggin83@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](http://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](http://tester.senate.gov)  
 email: [senator@tester.senate.gov](mailto:senator@tester.senate.gov)  
 Billings: 406-252-0550 Wash. D.C.: 202-224-2644  
Rep. Greg Gianforte:  
 email Rep. Gianforte via his website:  
<https://gianforte.house.gov/contact/email>  
 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: Peter Cummins,  
 membership.data@yvaudubon.org  
 Facebook: Nancy Wiggins, 839-4461, nwiggin83@gmail.com  
 Flyer Editor: Trenay Hart, 860-1175, yvasflyer@gmail.com  
 Field Trip Chair: Donn Bartlett, 628-5058, donnbartlett@msn.com  
 Membership Committee Chair: Dorothy Bartlett, 628-5058,  
 dpadanyi@live.com  
 Osprey Project: Deb Regele, 962-3115, debregele@gmail.com  
 Program Committee: Steve Regele, 962-3115, smregele@gmail.com  
 Nancy Wiggins, 839-4461, nwiggin83@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 Friday of each month at 4:00pm. 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 14 Pryor Mountains LEK viewing***Submitted by Donn and Dorothy Bartlett*

Five sleepy but hearty souls met at Jim Bridger Lion's Park in Bridger, MT for the lek viewing trip. Leader Stan Heath gathered his troops and proceeded south to Warren and headed approximately 4 miles back north on Railbed Road to the lek site. As the sun's rays aided in our viewing and warmth, we counted 29 male and 4 female Greater Sage-Grouse. The males were "stomping" while the females feigned disinterest. While there, we heard and then sighted a Sage Thrasher.

We then proceeded further south to Bear Canyon Road in search of the Sagebrush Sparrow. Not lucky enough to see the sparrows but we did watch 5 Sage Thrashers displaying to attract nearby females-a first for several of us. We thank our leader Stan Heath for a wonderful outing!

**Saturday, April 21 Exxon Ponds***Submitted by Robin Manfredi*

On Saturday, April 21, Brian Henderson led a group of sixteen birders on the annual trek to Exxon Ponds. We were met and accompanied by a representative from Exxon. It was a beautiful day for a walk, and there were plenty of birds out and about including a couple of Sandhill Cranes and several Ring-necked Pheasants. We also had fly-bys from Great Blue Herons throughout the day, and we saw two American White Pelicans that looked to be riding the thermals quite high in the sky.

Canada Geese were in abundance, as were ducks. Species of duck observed included Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Common Goldeneye, Mallard, Ruddy Duck, and one Wood Duck. At one point we came across a female nesting Canada Goose, who flew away and left her very warm egg for us to pass around while Jim Hansen, biologist for MFWP told us about how the goose lays one egg a day until she has a full clutch. During this time, her body produces a hormone that causes her downy feathers to fall out, giving the nest a soft lining. The goslings are ready to leave the nest as soon as their own downy feathers are dry and fluffed up.

Out on the big pond we also saw American Coots, an Eared Grebe and (the highlight of the day) an immature Double-crested Cormorant perched and posing for the scopes and photographers. Nearby were a half-dozen adult Cormorants socializing on the shore.

Male Red-winged Blackbirds were calling, singing and showing off their colorful epaulets. They have arrived ahead of the females to stake out their territories in the reeds around the ponds and irrigation ditches. Other birds we saw or heard were Mourning Doves, Northern Flickers, one Red-shafted Northern Flicker, Black-billed Magpies, Black-capped Chickadees, European Starlings, many, many Song Sparrows, Common Grackles, one lonely American Robin and one swallow we did not positively identify. Raptors were also around in the form of one Bald Eagle, one Red-tailed Hawk and an Osprey, which could often be heard but not seen. At the end of the morning, as we walked back to the gate, we saw a herd of at least fifty White-tailed Deer and around ten Painted Turtles sunning themselves on logs in the water.

Most of the group headed to Lockwood for a lunch break and a look around. We were rewarded with great views of a pair of Mountain Bluebirds and a few House Finches. Thank you to Ruth Vanderhorst for leading us there. We would like to extend many thanks to Exxon for allowing us to bird on their grounds, to Brian Henderson for leading the outing, and to Jim Hansen for sharing his insight about bird biology and behavior.

**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 628-5058, donnbartlett@msn.com

5/5/2018	Sat	Riverfront Park. S Billings Blvd, 1st parking area on the right.	Sue Weinreis, leader. Meet at Riverfront Park. 8:00 a.m. to noon. FAMILY ORIENTED OUTING.
5/10/2018	Thur	Riverfront Park. S Billings Blvd, 1st parking area on the right.	Mike Weber, leader. Meet at Riverfront Park. 5:30 p.m.
5/12/2018	Sat	Lake Basin	Mike Weber, leader. 8:00 a.m. Sack Lunch.
5/15/2018	Tues	Stillwater River and Woodbine Area	Ruth Vanderhorst, leader. 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sack Lunch.
*5/13/2018* Note date has changed	Sun	Pryor Mountains, Bear Canyon Birding/Hiking	Trenay Hart, leader. Meet at Rocky at 6:00 a.m. or at the Bridger Rest Area at 7:30 a.m. to hike into Bear Canyon. Sack Lunch.
5/20/2018	Sun	Bear Gulch near Grass Range.	Carolyn Jones, leader.
5/22/2018	Tues	Pompey's Pillar and Captain Clark's FAS	Robert Hill, leader. 7:00 a.m. Sack Lunch.
5/26/2018	Sat	Bridger Creek	Stan Heath, leader. Sack Lunch.



## BIRDATHON 2018 CHANGES FOCUS

“ RAISING FUN” June 2—3, 2018

Birdathon, the 24- hour competitive birding event that occurs each spring, will be held from 5 pm on Saturday, June 2 till 5pm on Sunday, June 3. This year the event will focus on 'Raising Fun' and not on fund raising. As always, teams of birders will register to participate and pay a \$5.00 fee per participant. Registration forms are available on the YVAS website, [yvaudubon.org](http://yvaudubon.org)

### TEAM MEMBERS!

This year Birdathon teams have been invited by Sue Weinreis and her husband John Enright to their home at 3052 Lloyd Mangrum Lane for a picnic potluck at 6pm. Sue and John will have burgers and brats and all the fixing's. Persons should bring something to share for the meal...salad, side, dessert, something that can be prepared ahead of time, or appetizers, chips, deviled eggs, fruit salad, watermelon, fresh veggies and dip, cake, ice cream, whatever. In addition, bring what you want to drink, e.g. beer, soda (Sue and John will have ice water, coffee or tea), and a lawn chair or blanket to sit on. You might want a light jacket or sweater as it cools off in the evening. **IF YOU DO NOT PLAN TO ATTEND THE PICNIC PLEASE LET ME KNOW ASAP AT 245-5118.**

Teams should arrive at 3052 Lloyd Mangrum Lane no later than 5:15pm with bird lists on Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Bird Checklists to turn in. We will collate the lists at that time and determine the winning team and the total number of species for Birdathon 2018. Let's participate in the fun of birding and the fun of celebrating together. Last year broke all records with 151 species. How many more this year? The record number of teams is 7. Let's break that record, too.

Please get team registration forms in as early as possible. Try to incorporate some younger persons on teams. Only by making fun opportunities for learning available will we attract more active young birders and members. Thanks for your hard work and for having lots of fun.

**Questions or concerns may be addressed to Ruth Vanderhorst, [erv132@charter.net](mailto:erv132@charter.net) or 245-5118**

### Helen Carlson Cummins Bird Garden

*Submitted by Deb Regele*

You are invited to join Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society, the Montana Audubon Center, and Wild Birds Unlimited to celebrate the opening of the Helen Carlson Cummins Bird Garden at the Montana Audubon Center. The Bird Garden is being named in honor of Helen for her contributions to birding and bird habitat in Billings. The Center's Garden also features a Thoughtful Bird Feeding Station. The celebration starts at 2:00 pm on Sunday, May 20, and is followed at 3:00 pm by a family program to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day which you are invited to attend.

### CONSERVATION NEWS

**The Night Flight Calls project** has been operating for a year thanks to YVAS, under the auspices of MPG Ranch (Missoula). Manager Mike Weber and I, are the only avian migration research satellite outside of 30 recording stations in the Bitterroot Mountains; a prestigious satellite to be sure. The object is to collect bird migration calls, and establish the species and quantity, in a given time and place. Then this information is feed to a growing flock of open resource entities; our programs are created at Cornell University and implemented at MPG Ranch Night Flight Call Center and Billings.

Through a receiver the night calls are monitored then Spectro graphed, manually, deleting all sounds not pertinent. Application and diligence have brought us to 'Its Recording Time' Spring 2018; we're hoping to illuminate the vibrancy of seasonal night migration and it's correlation to other scientific markers in the avian world that will be cognitive to the average birder.

The importance of this research will be presented this Fall to YVAS. Currently, the tab for live assistance at this outpost is expiring and initial equipment costs are eclipsing the grant; We hope you'll benefit knowing and wondering who else besides Northern Waterthrush, Upland Sandpiper and Lapland Longspur are singing overhead on their way to breeding grounds.

*Submitted by Will Crain*

### RENEWALS

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. 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 the Data Base Administrator: Peter Cummins at [membership.data@yvaudubon.org](mailto:membership.data@yvaudubon.org) with any questions.

**MAY Renewals:** Mike Griffin, Marco Restani, Janet Weisz, and Kathy Snell.



**YVAS BLUEBIRD HABITAT PROJECT**

When Curtis Phipps donated the 350 acre Diamond X Ranch, located on Molt Road, to the City of Billings, it had in place a number of established Mountain Bluebird nesting boxes. In 1993 YVAS member George Mowat took over maintenance and monitoring of the bluebird boxes. While there was never a formal agreement with the City of Billings, YVAS has undertaken activities to expand the Bluebird nesting habitat in Phipps Park for more than 20 years. Recently YVAS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Billings Parks and Recreation pertaining to our activities in the park.

Construction and placement of the nesting boxes have been carried out in accordance with the guidelines published by Mountain Bluebird Trails and the North American Bluebird Society. Over the years boxes have been destroyed by vandals, weather and fire, and rebuilt and replaced by YVAS volunteers. In 2017 I took over management of this project. At that time there were 10 established boxes a fourth of which had successful fledging in recent years. The boxes are cleaned and then monitored according to recognized guidelines, starting in early March when the bluebirds typically first appear. Each box is monitored approximately every 5 days from early March until July 15 for success and loss of fledglings. In 2017, seven of the boxes were used with 17 successful fledglings. Part of the monitoring involves photographs with iPhone pictures of the nest, eggs and chicks, which is done with no disturbance to the occupants. There was significant predation, likely from Bull snakes that are common in the area, resulting in a loss of 2/3 of potential fledglings. One box had fallen off a tree that had had 4 eggs in it. Three boxes had loss of the chicks, likely removed/eaten by predator(s). There was no apparent human vandalism of the boxes. This data is submitted both to Mountain Bluebird Trails and to the City of Billings.

Because of the terrain, it is difficult to organize field trips for the public to this site. I have offered to take interested groups to tour the project, and I plan to continue the maintenance and monitoring of these boxes through the upcoming nesting seasons. Between myself and another volunteer, 140 hours of monitoring and maintenance and were performed. In addition to that I spent at least 40 hours rebuilding and replacing many of the boxes, removing them from all trees and placing them on predator guard designed posts, in compliance with national guidelines. The YVAS website is identified on each box in the event that someone would need to contact us.

As a result of increased activity in the park and the presence of disc golf activity it is unlikely that we could expand the number of boxes in Phipps Park in the near future. However YVAS is working with other volunteer groups in the city (Montana Audubon Center, Yellowstone Parks Association in addition to the City of Billings) to expand Bluebird nesting habitat where feasible. Cost of construction materials to replace boxes, posts and place predator guards which were donated (materials cost approximately \$200).  
*Submitted with photos by Jim Wiggins*



**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**



**Greater Prairie-Chicken** lek near Burwell, Nebraska.  
*Photo by Jim Sells.*

**YVAS Birds of the Month**

**American Robin**



This partial leucistic American Robin was photographed by Jim Sells at Fort Kearney State Park in Nebraska. This is the first one he had ever seen. Leucism describes defects in pigment cells that are caused during development, not a genetic mutation. Because eyes develop separately they will be normal in color, not affected in leucistic animals.

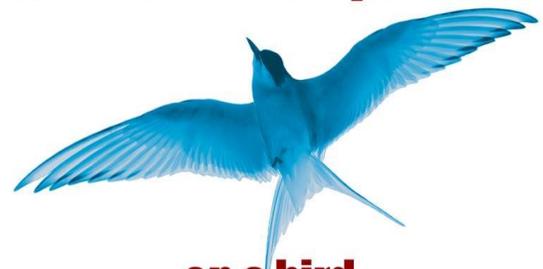
These “head-cocking” birds entertain urbanites with their feeding behavior where studies have shown that they use visual or auditory cues alone to find worms but probably use both.

<https://indianapublicmedia.org/amomentofscience/robins-find-worms/>

Check out this 2 min audio for more details on their feeding behavior.

*Submitted by Trenay Hart and adapted from All About Birds and Indiana public media*

**Why BIRDING is better  
than American politics:**



**on a bird,  
the right wing and left wing  
work together  
to lift up the center**

- Kenn Kaufman