

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 42, NUMBER 6/7

JUNE/JULY 2012

New This Issue

- NESTING MATERIALS
- FIELD TRIP NOTES
- GPS EARTH MAPPING CLASS
- ACEC EVENTS
- BIRD MOM AWARDS



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More on citizen science.....



ONE-THIRD OF U.S. BIRD SPECIES ENDANGERED

Habitat destruction, pollution and other problems have left nearly a third of the nation's 800 bird species endangered, threatened, or in serious decline, according to a recent study. Described as the most comprehensive survey of American bird life "The U.S. State of the Birds" analyzed changes in the bird population that have occurred over the last 40 years. It draws on data collected by the federal Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Geological Survey, organizations like the American Bird Conservancy and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and volunteer participants in the Christmas Bird Count of the National Audubon Society. Citing surveys by government agencies, conservation organizations and citizen volunteers, the report said that the population of grassland birds had declined by 40 percent and birds in arid lands by 30 percent. It estimated that 39 percent of bird species that depend on American coastal waters were in decline. Many forest birds are threatened by urban sprawl, logging, wildfires and "a barrage of exotic forest pests and disease," the study said. In Hawaii, the home of more than a third of American bird species, the situation is particularly grim, the report said. Most of that state's bird species are in danger. Climate change will make things worse, and work is urgently needed to prevent "a global tragedy" of bird loss, the report added. But there was also an upbeat side: The study found that herons, egrets, ducks and other birds that benefit from wetlands conservation were rebounding. Data also show that when agencies, organizations and individual citizens work together to

(Continued on page 2)

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, August 13, 6:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting

Monday, September 10, 6:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting

Monday, September 17, 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting



We're on the web! yvaudubon.org

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Beyond taking part in counting efforts, the report urged ordinary citizens to assist conservation by drinking shade-grown coffee (coffee-growing in the shade helps preserve the winter habitat of species like warblers), donating unused binoculars for distribution to biologists in the tropics, reducing pesticide use, landscaping with native plants and keeping pet cats indoors. "Education is urgently needed to make the public aware of the toll of pet cats," Darin Schroeder of the American Bird Conservancy said at the news conference. A version of this article by Cornelia Dean of the New York Times appeared in print on March 19, 2009.



- The Audubon Online Guide to North American Birds is FREE to use on the Audubon.org homepage. The guide covers all of North America's breeding birds--approximately 580 species--as well as an additional 180 non-breeding species that visit the U.S. and Canada. Click on the Audubon Online Bird Guide icon on www.audubon.org. The cost to download the app on the phone is \$7.99. Cheaper and easier to carry than a book, and updates for free.

- Locate birding festivals in any part of the country or design your own bird-identification class to meet your needs by visiting: www.allaboutbirds.org and www.aba.org
- Watch nesting birds on webcams in real time bring their broods to fledge at: <http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/nestcams/camera/index>
- Treat yourself to spectacular moments of an osprey in action fishing http://www.youtube.com/embed/nA3LtXnNIto?feature=player_embedded
- Sharpen your bird photography techniques by studying 'Overcoming Flash Fear, Caves and Ghosts for Better Photos', by Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle, copyright 2011. Find this very helpful article in the January/February 2012 issue of the Los Angeles Chapter Newsletter Western Tanager, p6, at Losangelesaudubon.org.

Billings: 256-1019 Wash. D.C.: 202-225-3211

Website.... Tom Lyman, Tomglyman@gmail.com

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



FIELD TRIP NOTES

5 MAY LAKE BASIN - DAY OF THE WATER FOWL AND RAPTORS

The weather was quite "iffy", and most of us wished we were wearing one more layer of clothing. Nevertheless, it turned out to be a great day for 10 birders under the able leadership of Mike Webber. We scoped out the North and South side of Big Lake. About 50 species were identified and the waterfowl and raptors were abundant.

The highlight of the day was watching a peregrine falcon dive down to chase and harass the waterfowl. We never did not find out what the falcon had for lunch. David Cronenwett states in the April Montana Audubon newsletter, "it should be remembered that earth's fastest animal is a falcon, peregrine, capable of 200 miles per hour dives."

Probably the most exciting "find" of the day was an American Pipit perched on a fence wire. It was spectacular for those who were able to observe a red tailed hawk, swainson hawk, ferruginous hawk, golden eagle, bald eagle, northern harrier, osprey, and peregrine falcon all in one day!!! Lois Gorseth

12 MAY RIVERFRONT PARK

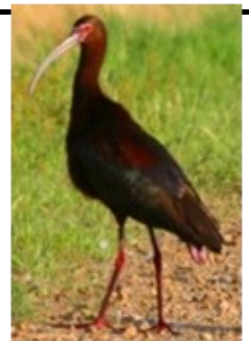
On a sunny Saturday morning in May, George and Bernie Mowat led a band of birders around Lake Josephine in Riverfront Park. We were a varied group, ranging in age from under 8 to over 80, and in experience from novice to expert. It was my first time birding with a group, and I found it fast-paced and fun. Not once did I need to consult my "Sibley's".

Before even leaving the parking lot we had spotted Yellow Warblers, Black-capped Chickadees, a Downy Woodpecker, a Northern Flicker, and glimpsed a Double-crested Cormorant. As we headed into the trees we saw the masked face of the Common Yellowthroat and heard the *chebek chebek* call that led us to the Least Flycatcher. A few were lucky enough to view an elusive Yellow-breasted Chat. Further along the trail we found House Wrens, Gray Catbirds, a Song Sparrow, Barn Swallows, and multiple pairs of Red-winged Blackbirds. Two in our group even reported seeing a Lazuli Bunting! Much less welcome sightings included patches of leafy spurge and poison ivy beside the trail.

Out on the lake Canadian Geese herded yellow goslings, a Coot stood on one leg, and two large turtles sunned beak-to-beak on a log. Buffleheads swam slowly on the surface as an Osprey circled overhead looking for fish. By morning's end we had also identified a Great Blue Heron and, riding high on the thermals, a Red-tailed Hawk. As we gathered back at our cars, a Cooper's Hawk soared above as if waving good-bye. Brenda Dunham

14-15 MAY BIRDING BOWDOIN NWR

Billie Hicks and Will Crain had perfect weather and the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge to themselves from sun up to sun down. It took over 3 hours to get around Lake Bowdoin which was created back in the '30's. The landscape was originally an oxbow of the Missouri River in pre-glacial times and has since moved 70 miles south. Bowdoin was named for a small Railroad town and remnants can be seen to the East of the lake. Now it is fed from the Milk River thru a system of canals. This reserve project was funded mostly thru the Duck Stamp program and which it is today. You can purchase a Duck Stamp on-line at: <http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps>.



White-faced Ibis
Photo by Will Crain

They began sighting the usual Mallards, swallows, then American White Pelicans, gulls and Double-crested Cormorants, Blue-winged Teal and 2 different kinds of Grebes, Black-necked Stilts, Canvas Backs, Northern Pintails and Marbled Godwits. Most awesome was the White-faced Ibis - standing fully erect and quite visible in the cattails with his deep cinnamon iridescent breeding colors and that hardly visible white mask. They encountered Chipping and Song Sparrows along the shore of Nelson Reservoir before returning to Malta and a well deserved nap. By 5pm they were ready to tour Bowdoin NWR again for another 3 hours of glorious birding. They were and at the Auto Tour gates by opening time of 7 AM for a 3rd and final tour, compiling a species list of 48 birds, including Lark Sparrows. Bowdoin NWR ~ 406.654.2863; bowdoin@fws.gov and <http://www.fws.gov/bowdoin> Will Crain

17 MAY RIVERFRONT PARK A large group of about 15 birders joined up at Riverfront Park. The birding was challenging as the evening was cloudy and breezy as the birds were not singing as much and were hunkered down a bit.

We were joined by Q2 Anchor Angela Douglas and Videographer Kyle Benton. There were there to learn about bird watching for a piece on KTVQ called Angela's Adventures.

To start, a flotilla of Ruddy Ducks was observed along with a few American Widgeon. Overhead circled a Red-tailed Hawk. We started off through the woods, hearing the songs of many species but we had to search hard to find them. Eventually we observed the usual suspects such as Yellow Warblers, House Wrens, Least Flycatchers, Common Yellowthroats and Gray Catbirds. We heard a number of Ovenbirds calling from the deep in the shrubs, a few patient birders waited and laid eyes on this very wary warbler. We walked to the bank of the Yellowstone and briefly saw a Spotted Sandpiper tottering along a distant shore and watched a Osprey hunting overhead. Lazuli Buntings, Warbling Vireos, Redstarts, Yellow-breasted Chats and Black-headed Grosbeaks could be heard singing throughout the evening but stayed hidden from view. After a couple hours of birding nearly everyone drifted back to the parking lot. Three of us stayed until nearly dusk and were finally rewarding with observing a beautiful male Black-headed Grosbeak singing it's heart out. This was a life bird for one of my companions! By the end of the trip we saw and heard 37 species.

Thanks to the KTVQ guests for showing so much enthusiasm and genuine interest in bird watching. Mike Weber

MAY 19 STILLWATER-WOODBINE FIELD TRIP

Colorful spring migrants highlighted our trip. A brilliant yellow American Goldfinch started off these birds by landing in front of the cars at the Duck Creek Fishing Access. Less satisfying, but no less colorful, was the Black-headed Grosbeak that constantly moved from branch to branch at the top of the trees. And then a Yellow-breasted Chat, brightly yellow on the front, stayed put for a close-up view through the telescope.



Along the Stillwater River south of Columbus a flock of eight Sandhill Cranes were a highlight. And then we had great views of Mountain Bluebirds and their iridescent shades of blue and watched at least three Red-naped Sapsuckers put on a mating show.

When we reached Woodbine Campground, the singing of Ruby-crowned Kinglets seemed to be all around us. However, it took quite a bit of searching before everyone got to see one of them since they were in constant motion. There were exclamations when the birders spotted the fiery ruby color on the head.

LOOKING FOR DIPPERS

Photo by George Mowat

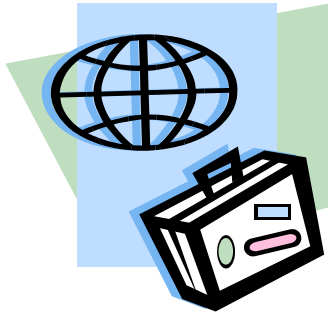
After a short hike that produced a Hairy Woodpecker and a Cassin's Finch, we were treated to views of at least four more Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Unlike the first one, these seemed to be curious and came out in plain view. I had never seen so many in one area all displaying so much red on their crowns. The thought struck me that these might have been a flock of males that had just arrived and were staking out breeding territories.

On the way back we stopped at the Moraine Fishing Access and finished the colorful Spring Migrant tour with a great view through the telescope of a pair of Bullock's Orioles. The male's blazing yellow-orange was a nice finale to the trip.

In all more than 50 species were viewed by the nine participants. George Mowat



Mary Schvets graduated from Rocky Mountain College in 2010 and served as YVAS secretary for a year until fall, 2011. Mary recently got a shorebird nesting internship in New Jersey at the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge where they are monitoring piping plovers, American oystercatchers, least terns, and black skimmers. We are so proud of this YVAS 'graduate' and all that she contributes to the Audubon mission. An article about her work documented with distinctive photographs is posted on the YVAS website at yvaudubon.org.



TRAINING CLASSES TO START

If you are interested in learning how to apply some basic Google Earth mapping and GPS tools to your birding experiences, please contact Steve Regele at 406-962-3116. Professor Luke Ward of Rocky Mountain College, is willing to teach some computer and GPS skills you can use to create and print maps of bird sightings and field trip locations. If there is sufficient interest (5 - 20 people), the short class would likely be scheduled for June or July of 2012.

EVENTS AT THE AUDUBON CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER (ACEC)

7026 South Billings Blvd, Billings, MT, 59101 406-294-5099 www.mtacec.org

Congratulations to Heather Ristow, Education Director at the ACEC, who received the Educator of the Year award from the Montana Environmental Education Association!

June 2 Become a Wildflower Wanderer as you learn how to identify flowers and flowering shrubs in the riparian ecosystem with Carolyn Sevier of Artemesia, LLC. Meet at the Audubon Center at 9 AM ready to hike; program lasts until noon. Cost is \$15/participant or \$10/person for Friends of the Center. Register by calling 294-5099.

June 3 Get Outside Montana Kick Off from 1 – 3 PM. This is a FREE multi-week, back-to-nature event for all ages. Families will engage in a little friendly competition as they explore Billings and surrounding area through activities such as hiking, biking, frisbee golf, scavenger hunts, camping and much more! Join us at the Audubon Center for an afternoon of activities, the perfect way to jump-start your family's competition! No need to register in advance.

June 16 Volunteer restoration party from 10 AM – 2 PM at the Audubon Center. We'll replant and launch the floating islands in our ponds. They help to improve water quality by pulling up excess nutrients from the water. Learn about this innovative technology while you help to plant native grasses and shrubs on the islands. Please register in advance by calling 294 – 5099. Free!

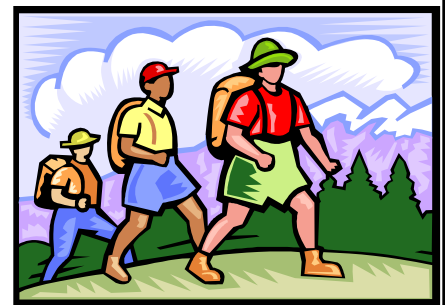
June 21 Solstice Celebration from 6:30 – 8 PM at the Audubon Center. Enjoy the outdoors on this, the longest day of the year, as we learn about planetary movements and practice navigation skills. Free family program for all ages. Call 294 – 5099 to register.

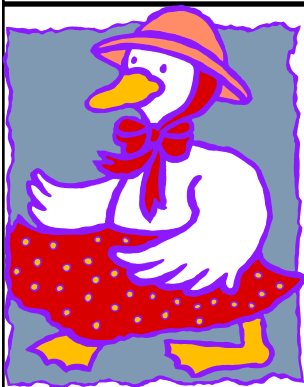
June 24 Weekend Wonders Family Program: Introduction to Archery with the staff from Cabella's at the Audubon Center from 1:30 – 3 PM. Family program (minimum age 5 years old); \$2/person or FREE for friends of the Audubon Center. Call 294 – 5099 to register.

July 21 Volunteer restoration work party from 10 AM – 1 PM. Join us for a weed pull contest as you learn about invasive plants and best management practices to get rid of them. Prizes will be awarded! No need to register in advance. Free and open to all ages!

July 22 Weekend Wonders Family Program: Canoeing! from 1:30 - 3 PM. \$2/person or FREE for friends of the Audubon Center. Call 294 - 5099 to register.

August 28 Free Evening Lecture with author David Salomon on his book Penguin – pedia: A Magical Look Inside the World of Penguins. Mr. Salomon will share photographs and facts from his search for the penguins of the world; 7 – 8 PM. No registration required.





BIRD MOM AWARDS: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE WEIRD

Mother birds employ wildly different reproductive strategies, nearly all of them successful. From a human point of view, however, some moms seem “better” than others. Here are the National Audubon Society's first-ever “Mother Hen Awards” for distinctive parenting styles, just in time for Mother's Day.

1) **Best Bird Mom: Osprey**

Osprey mothers take parenting seriously. They do most of the incubation and care for the hatchlings for weeks after they appear. Ospreys are famous for aggressive defense of their nests. Researchers venturing too close to a nest report harrowing near misses from osprey talons. Mom and the chicks dine mostly on fresh fish, caught daily

and delivered by dad.

Clutch size: 2-4

2) **Coolest Bird Mom: Least Tern**

Least Terns are beach breeders, generally nesting in a scrape of sand or pebbles just above the high tide line. On warm days Tern moms will stand over eggs and hatchlings to shade them from the sun. On hot days, mother terns will soak her belly feathers in the ocean and return to give her brood a cool sponge bath.

Clutch size: 1-3

3) **Martha Stewart Award: Prothonotary Warbler**

Although warbler dads select the nest site—typically a low cavity in trees typical of bottomland or swamp forests—mother warblers assume the heavy-duty homemaking, and they take their responsibility seriously. Warbler moms will spend as many as eight days constructing and outfitting the nest. They build layer upon layer of soft material using a variety of mosses, leaves, and even fishing line when they can find it.

Clutch size: 3-7 eggs

2) **4) Flightiest Mom: Wilson's Phalarope**

These aquatic sandpipers are well known for their avian role reversal: Dads provide all the parental care. After a female lays her first egg in a scrape, the male picks up where she left off, arranging vegetation in and around the scrape. Fathers also incubate and provide for the brood, their (temporary) mates having deserted the family upon finishing their egg-laying.

Clutch size: 3-4

5) **Laziest Mom: Brown-headed Cowbird**

Mother cowbirds outsource the job—by laying their eggs in the nests of other birds. More than 200 species, including red-winged blackbirds, yellow warblers, and red-eyed vireo, are unwitting surrogate moms for these chicks. Some species keen to the cowbird's plan build over her eggs or boot them out of the nest, but most simply don't know what's happened until the cowbirds hatch. Surprise!

Clutch size: For brown-headed cowbirds, the idea of a “clutch size,” doesn't really apply, according to bird expert Kenn Kaufman. A host's nest might have more than one cowbird egg in it—likely from multiple females. During the breeding season, a female brown-headed cowbird may lay up to 40 eggs (not all in one nest).

6) **"Group Effort" Mom: Barn Swallow**

Raising young Barn Swallows sometimes takes a village, with both extra adults and older siblings serving as mother's helpers. Virtual “aunts” and “uncles” assist in nest-building, incubation and brooding—and defend the nest by mobbing predators. Big brothers, sisters, and older “cousins” help out by feeding insects to the baby chicks. Cup-shaped mud structures lined with grass and feathers, Barn Swallow nests are often built on man-made structures like eaves, rafters and cross beams in sheds and stables.

Clutch size: 4-5

See the complete article on-line at www.Audubonmagazine.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 EXPIRES IN JANUARY 2012. IF YOU ARE NOT A 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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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.

- **June 23 (Sat) PRYOR MOUNTAINS. 7 a.m.** at Rocky Mountain College for car-pooling or **Bridger Rest Stop at 8:00 a.m.** Sack lunch.

ATTENTION

THE JUNE 16 RED LODGE TRIP HAS BEEN CHANGED TO:

JUNE 30 (Sat) RED LODGE TRIP. 7 a.m. at Rocky Mountain College for car-pooling or **Visitors Center in Red Lodge at 9 a.m.** Sack lunch. (The group from Billings will be birding on the way to Red Lodge). Jerry Dalton, leader.

- **Aug 4 (Sat) SHOREBIRDS, HAWKS & PRAIRIE BIRDS. 8 a.m.** Sack lunch. Mike Weber, leader.

WATCH FOR THE NEW 2012-2013 FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE WITH THE AUGUST FLYER

FIELD TRIP CHAIRS: George and Bernie Mowat 656-7467

