

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 3

March 2012

New This Issue

- Cedar Wax-wings of Yesterday
- Snowy Owl Sightings
- "Birds of America" sells
- MA 'Wings Across the Big Sky' festival



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MEMBERSHIP MEETING MARCH 19

THE POLAR BEARS OF CHURCHILL



CHURCHILL POLAR BEARS

Photo: churchillpolarbears.org

Last semester Professor Kayhan Ostovar taught a course on Arctic Ecology at Rocky Mountain College (RMC). As part of his teaching philosophy he engages students in hands-on learning experiences and field research. Over fall break the group of seven students and one adult, who audited the course, took a weeklong trip to Churchill in Manitoba, Canada to get a firsthand look at a unique and rapidly changing ecosystem. Accompanied by photography instructor Dave

Shumway, also from RMC, the group met up with noted bear expert Jim Halfpenny from Montana who has observed bears in Churchill for the past 20 years.

Situated on the southwestern end of Hudson Bay, Churchill is known as the polar bear capital of the world. The community of less than 1,000 annually hosts 12,000 tourists and is uniquely located amid three major biomes: ma-

(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, March 12, 6:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting

Monday, March 19, 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting

We will hold a YVAS fundraiser dinner at 5:45 before the March membership meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. The chili dinner will be hosted by the members of the Board of Directors. Please call Nancy Wiggins at 651-0218 or e-mail nwiggins83@gmail.com by Friday, March 16 to make reservations.



☞ We're on the web! yvaudubon.org

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rine, northern boreal forest and tundra. Polar bears flock to the area because it is one of the first places for the ice to freeze, allowing the bears to start their seal hunting season.

In this rugged landscape there are many migrant bird species but only 11 species of resident birds. The group saw about three polar bears each day in addition to arctic fox, ptarmigan, arctic hares and even a wood toad. As many people know, the polar bear is now being used as a poster child to highlight the impacts of climate change. Many Arctic species are specialists, well adapted to certain conditions. As the climate changes rapidly, these animals will face competition from species migrating north as the weather becomes warmer, and from direct changes to the fragile Arctic habitat. Come hear what this group saw and learned on this trip and see a collection of beautiful photographs by Dave Shumway.

MAKE NOTE:



⇒ **Take a minute right now and turn to the back page of the Flyer to check for your YVAS membership renewal date, then follow the instructions on page 7. Your support is appreciated!**

⇒ When filling out the 2011 Montana income tax form this year, check the box to make a voluntary, tax-deductible contribution to Montana's Nongame Wildlife Program. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) reminds us that the annual nongame income tax check-off fund, a voluntary check-off contribution on the Montana income tax form, is an important funding source for management of the state's nongame wildlife species.

Those of us who enjoy watching bats, loons, amphibians and a variety of songbirds will especially appreciate FWP's Nongame Wildlife Program. One new program involves proactive surveillance for white-nose syndrome in bats. Bat population declines of 80-97 percent have been recorded in the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states that were affected by this rapidly spreading infectious disease. In the past 28 years, the income tax check-off has raised more than \$496,000 to support native, nongame species conservation, monitoring, management and public education. Every \$10 donated may be matched up to three times with federal dollars.

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:

President: Bill DeMeyer, 671-7501, battie@bresnan.net
Vice-President: Steve Regele, 962-3115, sregele@juno.com
Secretary: Dorothy Bartlett, 252-0757, dpadanyi@live.com
Treasurer: Deb Regele, 962-3115, dregele@juno.com
Past-President: Kayhan Ostovar, 256-7481, kayhan@q.com

Board of Directors:

Donn Bartlett: 252-0757, donnbartlett@msn.com
 Rita Harding: 259-7586, mtroses22@bresnan.net
 Jeanette Tasey, 669-3169, jtasey@gmail.com
 Nancy Wiggins: 651-0218, nwiggin83@gmail.com

Montana's Congressional Delegation:

Sen. Max Baucus: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510
 website: <http://baucus.senate.gov>
 email: max@baucus.senate.gov
 Billings: 657-6790 Wash. D.C.: 1-800-332-6160
Sen. Jon Tester: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510
 website: <http://tester.senate.gov>
 email: senator@tester.senate.gov
 Billings: 252-0550 Wash. D.C.: 1-866-554-4403
Rep. Dennis Rehberg: U.S. House of Rep. Wash. D.C. 20515
 website: www.rehberg.house.gov
 email: denny.rehberg@mail.house.gov
 Billings: 256-1019 Wash. D.C.: 202-225-3211

Committees and Special Assignments:

Archives and History.....open
 Audubon Adventures.....Jeannette Davis ,656-7618
 Bird Questions.....George Mowat, 656-7467 or
 Helen Carlson, 248-8684
 Christmas Bird Count.....Helen Carlson, 248-8684
 or Billie Hicks, 962-3798
 Conservation Chair.....Kayhan Ostovar, 256-7481,
 kayhan@q.com
 Editor.....Nancy Wiggins, 651-0218, nwiggin83@gmail.com
 Field Trip Chairs... George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467,
 gmowat@bresnan.net
 Greeters.....Phyllis Holt 252-7373
 Audrey Jurovich 656-2748
 Injured Raptors...Jeanette Tasey 669-3169,jtasey@gmail.com
 Membership Secretary.....Joel M. Bowers, 534-3672,
 cell: 591-5635, jmba@jmba.com
 Program Chair.....open
 Recycling (aluminum).....Tom Davis 656-7618
 Website.... Tom Lyman, Tomglyman@gmail.com

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

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



FIELD TRIP NOTES



HELEN CARLSON Photo by Will Crain

decorated for St. Valentine's. Thank you to Bernie Mowat

FEBRUARY 4: WINTER WANDERER'S FIELD TRIP

To start the day off, we enjoyed the breakfast very much at Ruth Vanderhorst's and Anne Cowan's home. There was much visiting but not many birds. Then we proceeded to another member's home near Buffalo Trail north of Laurel where we viewed many birds coming into the feeders. Among the birds were Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco, Pine Siskin, and Common Redpoll.

We then drove to Jeannette and Tom Davis' home to view birds and shared a delicious lunch. Some birds seen there were House Finch, Blue Jay, and Dark-eyed Junco. In the late afternoon some of us sampled delicious desserts at Helen Carlson's home, which was beautifully

A LOOK BACK IN TIME:

"CEDAR WAXWINGS ARRIVE FOR ANNUAL VISIT HERE"

Billings Gazette SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 1931

In the late winter nearly every year, a flock of cedar waxwings makes its appearance within the confines of the city and spend some little time on their annual winter visit. During the past week they have again descended upon their favorite haunts here and have attracted no little attention. The visit this year has been somewhat earlier than usual, according to D. O'Donnell, whose home on Clark Avenue is in the neighborhood which they most frequent. Mr. O'Donnell has watched these birds come and go for many years and has made a study of their habits.

There are two species of the cedar waxwing, known to many persons as 'winter buntings'. One is found in the far north and the other throughout North America. It is probable that the bird which visits Billings in the midst of winter is the waxwing of the north, and this is probably close to the extreme southern limit of its range. The birds vary their fare according to the season. In the summer they eat various wild berries, while in the winter, cedar berries and those of the woodbine, sour gum, and others provide them with food. In Billings, they appear to find a satisfactory repast on cedar and similar evergreen berries and the nuts of the cinnamon tree. They congregate in flocks wherever these trees are found and because these varieties have been chiefly planted in the west end of the city, they are most frequently seen there. In Chapman's "Bird Life," a description of the life of the cedar waxwing is given, which corresponds closely to those of the Billings visitors.

The waxwings possess to an unusual degree two characteristics which are not often associated, socialibility and silence. None of our birds are more companionable, none are more quiet. In their fondness for one another's society they seem to delay the pairing season, and long after other birds have gone to housekeeping, they are still roving around in flocks. Finally, late in June they settle down and build a nest of generous proportions, often in some fruit tree, approximately 10 feet from the ground. The three to five eggs they lay are pale bluish gray or putty color, spotted with black or brownish black. Waxwings fly in close alignment and as near each other as nature or the perch will allow. They sit very still, like little parrots or doves, but often raise and lower their crest and perhaps whisper in a fine lisping note, which is prolonged into louder call—a string of beady notes—as they take wing. In August the waxwing shows a mean gift as a fly catcher, while as a destroyer of the cackworm he is especially beneficial, repaying with interest for the fruit he may have appropriated earlier in the season. The waxwing's wide range and ability to withstand great extremes in temperatures are doubtless due to the ease with which it adapts itself to a change of fare. It nests from Virginia to Labrador, and winters from Costa Rica to Canada to the north.

The description as to habitat refers to the common cedar waxwing, the bird which comes here having a more northern range. The northern waxwing in general habits, however, is very similar to its more widely known cousin. Courtesy of Kevin Kooistra, Community Historian, Western Heritage Center





SNOWY OWL USFWS

SNOWY OWL SIGHTINGS

For the real snowy owls, researchers say the drive for food is likely behind their increased migrations south. They observed that snowy owls hatched unusually large clutches last season, up to seven owl chicks compared to the more normal two.

An abundance of their favorite food, rodents and lemmings in particular, yielded the large clutches. The younger owls, mostly male, have migrated south throughout 2012 to avoid competition. More snowy owls migrating has led to the increased sightings. Wildlife experts report the owls are often found malnourished and in poor health from these extended migrations.

Bottom Line: Snowy owl sightings have soared in the lower 48 states of the U.S. in early 2012, spurred on by a booming population and lack of food in their Arctic habitat. In Northern Hemisphere winter of 2012, thousands of

birders have reported seeing the beautiful Arctic white owls, known to many in the fictional books of Harry Potter as the magical familiar Hedwig.

Denver Holt, head of the Owl Research Institute in Montana, has studied snowy owls in their Arctic tundra ecosystem for two decades. He told Reuters: What we're seeing now – it's unbelievable. This is the most significant wildlife event in decades. (EarthSky // Blogs // Biodiversity By Jorge Salazar Jan 31, 201)



COMMON AMERICAN SWAN
from John James Audubon's
"The Birds of America"

A BIG BIRDING BOOK SELLS BIG

1/20/2012 Huffington Post NEW YORK — A rare first edition of John James Audubon's illustrated "The Birds of America" depicting more than 400 life-size North American species in four monumental volumes was purchased at auction Friday for \$7.9 million.

Christie's auction house identified the buyer as an American collector who bid by phone. The winning bid was within the presale estimate of \$7 million to \$10 million for the work, considered a masterpiece of ornithology art. Another complete first edition of "The Birds of America" sold at Sotheby's in London in December 2010 for \$11.5 million, a record for the most expensive printed book sold at auction.

The 3 1/2-foot-tall books feature hand-colored prints of all the species known to Audubon in early 19th-century North America. Audubon insisted on the book's large format – printed on the largest handmade sheets available at the time – because of his desire to portray the birds in their actual size and natural habitat. He found creative ways to paint them to fit the page, including showing large species feeding with their necks bent. The set at Christie's was offered for sale by the heirs of the 4th Duke of Portland. It was accompanied by a complete first edition five-volume set of Audubon's "Ornithological Biography."

Experts estimate that 200 complete first-edition copies were produced over an 11-year period, from 1827 to 1838. Today, 120 are known to exist, with 107 in institutions and 13 in private hands. The book, part scientific and part art, includes 435 hand-colored, life-size prints of 497 bird species, made from engraved copper plates based on Audubon's original watercolors.

Audubon sold the engraved plates in a subscription series in England, Europe and North America.

Events at the Audubon Conservation Education Center

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



- March 5 Registration opens for the Audubon Center's Spring session of Adventures in Nature Afterschool and school break Camps, Hands-on Home School Science classes, and Nature Nuts Pre-school program. Classes begin the week of April 9th. For more info and a registration form, visit www.mtacec.org or call 294 – 5099.
- March 9 Nature Night at the Audubon Center! Drop your child off for an evening of outdoor adventures with our Teacher Naturalists. Program is open to 1st – 6th grade students, and runs from 6 – 8 PM. Fee is \$10 per child. Call 294 – 5099 to register
- March 23 Wilderness Investigations Teacher workshop with Steve Archibald from the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. Friday 4:30 – 6:30 PM and Saturday 3/24 from 8:30 – 5. 10 OPI credits available. Free! Visit www.mtacec.org for a registration form.
- March 25 Well Educated Weekend Wonders family program from 1:30 – 3 PM: Learn where your family's water comes from and learn fun, practical tools to monitor it. Free! Call 294 – 5099 to register.
- March 27 Free evening lecture from 7 – 8 PM on citizen science and bird conservation efforts presented by Amy Cilimburg, MT Audubon's Director of Bird Conservation. Ms. Cilimburg works to educate and inspire action around issues related to climate change, birds, wildlife, and energy both here in Montana and nationally, working closely with Audubon's Program Director, Janet Ellis, on these policy issues. Ms. Cilimburg coordinates our Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program and collaborates with other key biologists and conservationists to protect Montana's birds and their habitat. Prior to coming to Audubon, she was the Assistant Director of the University of Montana's Avian Science Center. She received a M.S. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana in 2001.

JUNE 8-10 2012 *Wings Across the Big Sky* Bird Festival

Greening the festival. Montana Audubon is dedicated to lessening our impact on the planet and the annual bird festival is no exception. We continue our efforts to become a carbon neutral organization, and in doing so, we plan to both reduce and "offset" the impacts from this year's festival. One of the best ways to reduce our carbon footprint is by carpooling. The festival transportation committee is working diligently toward that aim so that field trips and pre-festival workshops are covered by group transportation (vans, buses, or SUVs). This committee will also facilitate carpooling once festival participants have registered and confirmed their field trips. We'd very much like to hear from anyone who wishes to volunteer their minivan/SUV as a lead field trip vehicle, or recommend a person or organization with an available van or bus. Please contact Kathy Ross at mtkat@montanaport.net. If we could halve the number of cars coming to the festival, we would cut ~20 tons of carbon dioxide from the festival's footprint!

In order to "offset" the waste we cannot reduce outright, we support carbon sequestration programs. What better place to embark on forestation than at our Audubon Conservation Education Center in Billings? For a \$15 donation we will plant two trees that will sequester more and more carbon dioxide as they mature. The more trees we plant, the more carbon we can offset. Look for that option when you register. At the hotel we plan to offer shade-grown coffee and compostable plates and cups when washable dishes are not available. Last but not least, remember to bring from home your refillable water bottle and coffee to-go mug!

Saturday presentations. We have a diverse lineup of speakers and topics for Saturday afternoon. We're very excited to bring Cornell's Brian Sullivan to the festival to talk about the **eBird program**. Brian will kick off

(Continued on page 6)

the sessions with a presentation to all festival goers about how we can share our bird sightings and help conservation in Montana and beyond. He's a magnificent photographer and brings a truly compelling program to life. Then we'll offer two sessions of concurrent talks. Choose topics ranging from ...

- raptor migration projects in Montana
- seeing tangible results when teaching kids about the natural world
- colonial nesting waterbirds on the Flathead Indian Reservation
- Montana Audubon's Gambia birding tour
- recording bird sounds

No doubt, it'll be hard to choose. Ponder your options after reading more via our website....**Festival registration.** Begins the first week in April. Look for the registration brochure to arrive in your mailbox at the end of March. For additional updates, visit <http://www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival.html> and "like" us at <http://www.facebook.com/MontanaAudubon>.

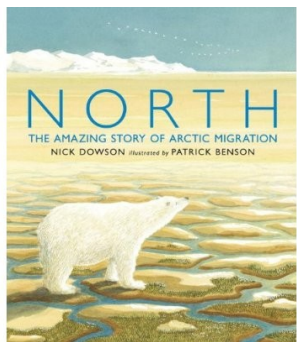
2012 SOUTH TEXAS BIRDING

Sunday, April 22th – Sunday, April 29th



Because of its southern latitude, diverse mix of habitats and unique position along a major migration corridor, South Texas offers a nearly unparalleled opportunity to observe birds in North America. Not only are there a suite of resident species with limited North American ranges like Green Jay, Tropical Parula, Ferruginous Pygmy-owl, Great Kiskadee, Altamira Oriole, Olive Sparrow and more, but in late April, a tremendous variety of neotropical migrants sweep through the area. The first part of this trip will involve birding the spectacular King Ranch (825,000 acres), which encompasses a whole range of habitats from coastal grassland to thorn-scrub brush to stands of live oak that are home to nearly all of the South Texas specialty birds.

The second part of the trip will be in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, home to more birds that have slim U.S. ranges. Throughout the trip we'll have the flexibility to take advantage of favorable weather patterns to visit coastal migrant traps where a vast number and diversity of migrating songbirds can be seen at close range. We will likely see between 175 and 200 species on this tour, possibly more if conditions are good. Brian Williams and Steve Hoffman will be your expert guides. *The cost is \$1795/person which includes double occupancy lodging (single supplement \$350), meals, and transportation from Harlingen, Texas. A \$425/person deposit reserves your place. All tours are on a first come, first served basis. Complete trip itineraries and bird species lists are available upon request. For more information please go to: <http://mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/tours.html>. For reservations call the Montana Audubon office 406-443-3949 or email norane@mtaudubon.org*



NESTING MATERIALS: NEW CHILDREN'S BOOK For age level: 7 and up | grade level: 2 and up. A passionate nature-lover and a renowned artist trace the awe-inspiring spring migration of millions of creatures to the Arctic--the greatest journey on earth.

At the top of our world is a huge wild place called the Arctic. In the winter, it is a cold and barren land where few animals can survive. But when spring comes, animals from every corner of the earth arrive in the Arctic. Gray whales, white cranes, wolves, and caribou begin their migrations as the snow melts, gradually making the long journey north. Once they reach their destination, they will raise their young, feast on the lush Arctic tundra, and

bask in the sunlight that lasts all summer. Still, this season too must pass, and by the time winter grips the Arctic once again, the visitors have gone--only to return the following year. This lushly illustrated picture book celebrates the cyclical nature of the seasons, showcasing the barren and beautiful landscapes of the Arctic Circle and reminding the reader of the hardships and harmony of life in the wild.

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



**YELLOWSTONE VALLEY
AUDUBON FLYER**

**Non-Profit Organization
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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.

Apr 21 (Sat) EXXON PONDS AND EMERALD HILLS. 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sack lunch. One mile walk. Ron Kuhler and George Mowat, leaders.

May 5 (Sat) LAKE BASIN 8 a.m. Sack lunch. Mike Weber, leader.

May 12 (Sat) MEET AT RIVERFRONT PARK at 8:00 a.m. Half day. George and Bernie Mowat, leaders.

May 17 (Thur) MEET AT RIVERFRONT PARK. 5:30 p.m. Mike Weber, leader.

May 19 (Sat) STILLWATER AND WOODBINE AREAS. 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sack lunch. Ruth Vanderhorst, leader.

May 26 (Sat) POMPEY'S PILLAR. 7 a.m. to early afternoon. Sack lunch optional. Ruth Vanderhorst, leader.

June 2 (Sat) BILLIE HICKS'S HOUSE. 6:30 a.m. at Rocky or 7:00 a.m. at Billie's house. Brunch. Singing birds. Summer Fundraiser--\$7.50. **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED.** Phone Billie at **962-3798 by Thursday night.**



FIELD TRIP CHAIRS: George and Bernie Mowat 656-7467