



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.

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JANUARY 2018

January 15, 2018 Chapter Meeting 7PM

Grasslands of Montana with John Carlson, BLM Wildlife Biologist

Grasslands are one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. The prairies of North America once ranged from western Minnesota to the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana and from the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta to the central Mexico. Much of that extent has been plowed to produce crops or degraded through invasive species and energy development. Some of the best remaining prairie is found in Eastern Montana. These Montana prairie grasslands are home to a wide variety of grassland associated birds and the diversity and abundance of these species is exceptional. John Carlson, a Wildlife Biologist with the Bureau of Land Management in Billings, will discuss the nature of grasslands and the plight of the birds that inhabit these oceans of grass, in particular the grassland birds of Montana. He will also talk about how management of our remaining grasslands can ensure that we continue to experience the abundance and diversity of grassland birds in Montana. Photos by John Carlson, left to right: Chestnut-collard

Longspur, Sprague's Pipit and Long-Billed Curlew.



© John Carlson



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YVAS MEETINGS

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

Friday, January 12, 4:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting

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

We will hold a YVAS fundraiser dinner at 5:30, before the Chapter meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. Lois & Jerry Dalton have generously volunteered to coordinate. Please contact Lois at 656-3656 before Friday, January 12 to make reservations and your dish contribution.



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☞ We're on the web! yvaudubon.org

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

There was no Board Meeting in December. Sue Weinreis wants to report that hosts are still needed for pre-Chapter meeting potlucks for the months of February, March and May. If you are interested in hosting contact Sue at 855-4181 or granpeak47@gmail.com

RARE BIRD NOTIFICATIONS

George Mowat has distributed the “rare bird alert” information for a number of years and has earned the gratitude of birders in the Yellowstone Valley. Now, George has asked Donn Bartlett to take over the distribution of this information. Donn will continue to send out the information as it is received from various sources. If you are not receiving information from Donn and would like to receive the alerts, please email donnbartlett@msn.com

Please welcome Carolyn Jones as our newest Board member! The Nominating Committee has been “after” Carolyn to join the Board for awhile, and Carolyn recently accepted the offer when she completed some other volunteer obligations. Carolyn graduated from William and Mary University with a degree in Chemistry. She and her family moved to Billings in 1980. Carolyn is now retired and devotes many hours to volunteerism. She has been involved with the YVAS CBC and Birdathon, and is an Osprey Nest Monitor. In addition to YVAS, she is a docent at Pompey’s Pillar and has been involved in dog rescue and agility training with her rescue dog, Timmy. Carolyn loves all things outdoors. We welcome Carolyn and look forward to working with her on the Board.

Submitted by Dorothy Bartlett

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: 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, 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. 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, nwiggins83@gmail.com
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 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
 Publicity: Barbara Garrett 652-3180, garrettimprisonart@gmail.com
 Program Committee: Steve Regele, 962-3115, smregele@gmail.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 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, November 11 Yellowtail Dam Afterbay

Submitted by Robin Manfredi

It was a chilly day, complete with freezing rain that greeted YVAS birders for the outing to the Yellowtail Dam after bay. Six people ended up making the trip, and it turned out to be a great birding day in spite of the less-than-optimal weather.



There were numerous Rough-legged Hawks sighted on the way down and back sitting on power poles, in the tops of trees, and flying about. Also seen were Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers and Bald Eagles.

Large flocks of Canada Geese accompanied by Snow Geese were seen milling about in a field near Saint Xavier, and they were still there at the end of the day.

At the after bay there were a large variety ducks in addition to even more Canada Geese and Snow Geese. Duck sightings included Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ruddy, Northern Pintail, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Gadwall, American Wigeon and Lesser Scaup. But the duck highlight of the day was the thousands of Mallards flying into view and landing on the water over the course of about an hour. They flew in lines and classic V formation from afar, only to break up into a chaotic crowd as each duck chose its landing spot on the water. Their beating wings sounded like a far-off waterfall. Estimates on their number hovered between 10,000 and 15,000.

The Greater White-fronted Goose made an appearance, as did a few Cackling Geese who were mixed in with flocks of Canada Geese.

Ducks, geese and raptors dominated the day with few other birds sighted or even heard. Nevertheless, it was a very fun and successful outing. Thank you to Brian Henderson for leading this trip. *Photo of Marco, Brian and Robin by Trenay Hart*

Saturday, December 16 Christmas Bird Count

Submitted by James Court

65 species were observed this year. A total of 24,486 birds were observed. Canada Goose was the most numerous— 8,401 birds. Black-capped Chickadee was observed in all areas. One new species was observed— a Thayer’s Gull. Most species in an area was 44 at Exon Ponds. Average was 20 species per area. Species will be posted on the YVAS website after the first of the year. There were 52 participants including feeder watchers.

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

4/7/2017	Sat	Exxon Ponds and Emerald Hills	Leader TBD. ONE MILE WALK. Sack lunch.
Mid-Late April		Pryor Mountains	LEK Viewing plus additional birding. Leader TBD.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Upcoming Events at the Montana Audubon Center

Where: 7026 South Billings Blvd Located, just off I-90 on South Billings Blvd

Contact: 406-294-5099

Website and registration: www.mtaudubon.org/center

Online calendar: <http://mtaudubon.org/center/upcoming-programs-events/> see website for event details and cost.



- **Nature Nuts: Every Tuesday’s year-round from 10:00 - 11:00 am**
- **Saturday Morning Bird Strolls: Every 2nd Saturday of the month, Dec-March 2018 from 8-9:30 am**
- **Weekend Wonders Family Programs: 3rd Sunday every month Nov-March 2018 from 3-4:30 pm**
- **Coffee Walk with a Naturalist: 1st Saturday of the month, Dec-March 2018 from 10-11:30 am**

Birding and Public Land Access

Birders and other recreationists have new opportunities in Montana to contribute to improved access to millions of acres of public lands. It is critically important for all outdoor recreationists to ante up in support of the lands waters, wildlife and access that they depend on and treasure.

Hunters and anglers have been contributing funding through licenses and taxes on their sporting equipment for many years (see <http://www.yvaudubon.org/> , Publications tab, Editorials and Opinions, *A Nongame Wildlife Focus*).

Governor Bullock's December 18, 2017 announcement about the new Montana Public Land Access Network (MT-PLAN) is included below*. Visit the MT-PLAN web site at <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/trust/mt-plan>. The new network allows all recreationists a straightforward means of supporting Montana public lands access.

Additionally in 2017, the Governor also created the Montana Office of Outdoor Recreation. Ms. Rachel Vandervoort is the Director. You can visit that Office's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/MTOOutdoorRec/>

Watch the YVAS Flyer and website and the aforementioned Montana government websites for new developments with- in the MT-PLAN and with the Montana Office of Outdoor Recreation.

State Land Recreational Use Licenses are another great way to support public access on State Trust Lands. See <http://dnrc.mt.gov/index/divisions/trust/recreational-use-of-state-land> for details. "General recreational use" such as camping, hiking, skiing, sight-seeing, etc. (unless incidental to licensed hunting, fishing, and trapping) requires a "State Land Recreational Use License". This license is available from any authorized MT Fish Wildlife and Parks license agent or through FWP's online license service at the following web address: <https://app.mt.gov/als/index/index.html>. License price for 2017 (and likely 2018) is \$5.00 for seniors (age 60+), \$20 per family, or \$10 per individual.

Birding, hiking, camping, etc. on federal lands such as US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service lands is often free (exceptions include campground fees, entrance fees). Visit <https://www.fs.fed.us/> , <https://www.blm.gov/> , <https://www.nps.gov/index.htm> and <https://www.fws.gov/> for details.

Please support all state and federal public lands access efforts and opportunities and encourage your friends to do that too!

Steve Regele
Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society, president

* From: Governor Bullock <governor@mt.gov>
To: [various recipients]
Subject: Increasing Access to Your Public Lands
Date: Mon, 18 Dec 2017 17:05:34 -0700

Today, I announced a collaborative and innovative effort to increase access to public lands through the new Montana Public Land Access Network, or the MT-PLAN.

Public lands are our history, our heritage, and our birthright. We are blessed here in Montana to have access to millions of acres of public lands, but there's always more we can do to increase that access. Access to public lands is essential for present and future generations of Montanans from all walks of life, and it's essential for our economy. The MT-PLAN provides an opportunity for Montanans to help us gain access to even more of Montana's public lands.

In Montana, we have a rich history of coming up with collaborative and innovative ways to conserve, protect, and open up access to our public lands. During the 2017 Legislative Session, I signed House Bill 597 in to law which created a voluntary contribution account and grant program, known as the MT-PLAN.

(Continue on the next page.)

(Continued from page 4 article submitted by Steve Regele)

This account will be administered by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to pursue public access easements to open up public lands for recreational purposes and complete projects that enhance existing public access sites across Montana.

The MT-PLAN is widely supported by a diverse range of landowners and sportsmen groups for its innovative approach to provide incentives to private landowners for increasing public access across private land to otherwise inaccessible public lands.

This grant program is fully funded by private donations to DNRC and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Individuals or organizations can make a donation when buying a wildlife conservation or combination license online or at their locally authorized vendor. All donations are tax deductible, and payments to landowners are exempt from taxation.

To find out more about the MT-PLAN or to make a donation, please visit DNRC's website <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/trust/mt-plan> .

Outdoor recreation is a powerful economic engine and we should be doing everything we can to expand and protect public access to our public lands, clean air and water, wildlife, and the jobs and growing economy that rely on them. Thank you for your commitment, every day, to Montana's public lands, to our economy, and to the values we share as Montanans.

Sincerely,

STEVE BULLOCK, Governor

eBird : Going Strong

Submitted by Dan Casey

Perhaps when the Cornell Lab of Ornithology launched eBird in 2002, they had high expectations of what it would mean to amateur birders and to science. But I wonder if they expected that >25 million checklists would be submitted within 15 years, including nearly half a billion records, representing 10,364 of the world's bird species? The eBird program has become not only the world's largest biodiversity dataset, it has done so while also serving the needs and interest of birders. It tracks and updates your lists automatically, provides great tools for exploring bird distribution and seasonal occurrence, and links to the incredible McCauley library of bird images and sounds.

So, how much has eBird caught on in Montana, or in Yellowstone County? As 2017 winds down, "eBirders" have now entered more than 170,000 checklists including 420 species in Montana, with 345 species recorded on nearly 38,000 checklists in 2017 alone, including a state-first Wood Sandpiper at Three Forks. Here in Yellowstone County, 294 species have now been entered into eBird, with the addition of Dickcissel, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Surf Scoter from the nearly 1,500 checklists entered in 2017. That species total exceeds those of Missoula and Gallatin Counties, a testament to the diversity of habitats present in Yellowstone County. Phillips and Flathead Counties are the only MT counties where more than 300 species have been reported to eBird. Nearby Treasure County, east of Billings, has had just 93 checklists submitted, meaning that each additional checklist entered can really contribute to our knowledge of its avifauna. Twelve new species were added to that county list in 2017, including Cackling Goose, Peregrine Falcon, Long-billed Curlew and Bobolink.

If you have not yet explored eBird, visit www.ebird.org to see what it has to offer! You can generate outputs by hotspot, county, state, species, and/or month(s). For example, are you curious which bird species have been seen in Yellowstone County in January? How about where you might find Wood Ducks in winter in Montana? The creators of eBird were shrewd, knowing that many birders are rather compulsive listers, and that some even have a competitive streak. So for those that have entered checklists into the program, eBird generates "top 100 lists" of who has reported the most species, and also "target lists" that will help you determine which of the species which would be new to your own list have been seen in an area you will be visiting. All these tools provide incentives for birders to increase participation, which also increases our knowledge of the distribution and abundance of birds. eBird data are now being used to describe migration patterns, focal areas for conservation, changes in distribution and more. As 2018 begins, perhaps it is time for you to start your own contributions to eBird? Maybe even in Treasure County?

Bird Counting Techniques*Submitted by Pam Pipal*

By the time you receive this Flyer the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will have occurred (December 16), but here are some techniques you can keep in mind, for the next CBC, or for reporting on eBird, or for other bird-count record-keeping systems:

1. **Individual Counts:** Count birds individually when the birds can be clearly seen and are slow-moving enough to avoid over-counting or missing birds shielded behind other birds.
2. **Grouping:** In small or medium-sized flocks of birds, pick an increment of five or ten birds, and count the flock in those increments.
3. **Grids:** In large flocks of stationary birds, divide your field of vision into grids, then count birds in one grid, and multiply the number of birds you counted in that grid by the number of grids.
4. **Selective Counting:** When a large flock of birds has mixed species, single out the lesser number of birds and count them individually. Use the grid technique to count the entire flock and deduct the number of the lesser species to get the number of the primary species.
5. **Proportions:** When a large flock of birds has too many species for Selective Counting, estimate the proportion of one species to the next, and apply the grid technique. (This technique is best used when each species is spread throughout the flock.)
6. **Timing:** For quick-moving flocks, focus on a fixed point the flock is passing, and count the number of birds that pass that point in a certain period of time, e.g. 1-2 minutes. Note the time that the entire flock passes that point and divide that time by the number of minutes you chose. Then multiply the number of birds in a 1-2 minute increment by the total number of increments.
7. **Photographs:** Take a digital photograph the entire flock and download the photo to your computer for enlarging or printing out to enable counting.

Helen Carlson Cummins Bird Garden and Thoughtful Feeding Station*Submitted by Deb Regele*

Next spring, the Montana Audubon Center will dedicate a new garden area honoring long-time YVAS member Helen Carlson Cummins and her lifetime commitment to birds. Carolyn Sevier, Director of the Montana Audubon Center, made the announcement at the Bob Landis presentation on Monday, December 18th. The new garden will be named the *Helen Carlson Cummins Bird Garden and Thoughtful Feeding Station*. This project is a partnership between the Montana Audubon Center, YVAS, Wild Birds Unlimited, and the Sample Foundation.

Watch the spring Flyers for more information and for the date of the dedication.

December 18, 2017 Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society's Annual Christmas Gathering

YVAS members and other Billings area folks were treated to exceptional wildlife video with excellent insights and commentary by cinematographer Bob Landis. His "Highlights of 2017" included spectacular slow motion Bald Eagles in a talon lock, fascinating interaction scenes between grizzly bear, coyote, wolf and raven, otter antics, and beautiful scenic landscapes with weather in motion.

The event brought together many wildlife fans who appreciate and value the outdoors and the natural world. A great way to move into the holiday season and 2018.

Thanks Bob!

Contact him at landiswf@wispwest.net to purchase copies of his work.

Submitted with photo by Steve Regele





YVAS Bird of the Month

Red-breasted Nuthatch (Above)

This summer Will Crain had the luck to capture these great pictures of a Red-breasted Nuthatch drinking from his fountain, however he will likely be catching photos of them this winter as well. The Red-breasted Nuthatch was reported at all the feeder watchers feeders this Christmas Bird Count per Lois Dalton. She figures the RBNU population is doing well with this finding knowing that they are mainly birds of coniferous woods and mountains.

The RBNU with their excitable yank-yank calls that sound like tiny tin horns reside year round in our region. They creep up, down, and sideways on trees without regard for which way is up. Enjoy seeing these birds in short and bouncy flight around your backyard feeders apparently more abundant this year.

Submitted by Trenay Hart and adapted from All About Birds

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 January 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 with any questions.

JANUARY Renewals: Wiley Bland, Larry Handsaker, Doreen Hartman, Karen Heil, Phil McBride, Gerald Moore & Joy Mallard, Linda Pickard, Peggy Schottlaender, Carolyn Sevier, Linda Wham, James & Nancy 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**

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Snow Geese in the middle of thousands of Canada Geese and Mallards in the Afterbay, November 11 field trip. Photo by Trenay Hart

Below: Peter Cummins submitted this photograph and information regarding a charming **Long-tailed Tit** seen in his brothers garden in England. It is common across Europe from Ireland to Russia. It feeds on small insects and spiders. It builds a large elaborate nest decorated with lichens and feathers. In winter it can be seen in mixed flocks of tits and finches. It is related to the Common Bushtit.



At right: Deb Regele's granddaughter came up with these clever jokes while they were out deer hunting this fall. Thanks for sharing these creative play on birds, Deb!



Above: December 9th Robert Hill found this **American White Pelican** at Riverfront Park. Climate change?

Q: What do you give a sick bird?
A: Tweetment!

Q: When should you buy a bird?
A: When it's going cheep!

Q: Why do seagulls fly over the sea?
A: Because if they flew over the bay, they'd be baygulls!

Q: What do you call two crows stuck together?
A: Velcro!