

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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SEPTEMBER 2019

September 16, YVAS Chapter Meeting, 7PM, John Carlson presents: Observing the Natural World



John Carlson will share photographs and stories centered on his lifetime observing the natural world around him. John first became interested in photography over 40 years ago when his father loaned a camera to him. His father's initial investment of patience and time behind the camera with John fostered a lifelong passion for capturing images of nature in our world. John hopes to convey the same sense of wonder and appreciation for the natural world that he sees. He will weave stories into these images from journeys ranging from explorations close to home (his backyard in Billings) and the prairies in northeastern Montana to forays into Africa and Antarctica.

John is a wildlife biologist in Billings with a large federal land management agency. He grew up in Fort Peck, Montana where he was immersed in the natural world around him at an early age through a number of adventures with his dad, Chuck Carlson. He has traveled to both ends of the earth (Arctic and Antarctic Circles) always with a camera in hand.

Originally scheduled for January 21, 2019 the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society had to cancel John's program due to unfavorable weather conditions and travel advisories at that time.



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, September 9, 4:00pm: Board of Directors Meeting

Monday, September 16, 7:00pm: Chapter Meeting



The Board invites everyone for NO-HOST POTLUCK dinner at 5:45pm prior to the Chapter meeting. Please contact Carolyn Jones, 406-670-4449 by Friday, Sept. 13 if you would like to contribute a main dish, salad, side dish, bread, or dessert sufficient to serve 6-12 persons. No charge for dinner.

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☞ We're on the web! yvaudubon.org

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

YVAS Board of Director Highlights, August 12, 2019*Submitted by Sue Weinreis*

- Congratulations to Dr. Marco Restani on his new position as the biologist at Northwestern Energy! Because of the traveling involved, Marco has resigned from the YVAS Board; however, he will continue in YVAS activities by keeping the Policy Manual up to date in digital format, helping with program speakers, being a speaker and field trip leader, and participating in all things Osprey. Thank you, Marco, for your great contribution to YVAS!
- YVAS Committees and Contacts will be updated in the Flyer to more accurately reflect current positions.
- The YVAS Board will send a letter of appreciation to Montana Audubon acknowledging their policy of allowing donations to be earmarked specifically for the Montana Audubon Center. This policy is critically important to and appreciated by many Billings area supporters, including YVAS.
- The grant to Human Resources Development Council (HRDC) has been and will be used at the MT Audubon Center for HRDC participation in MAC educational opportunities.

George and Bernie Mowat are downsizing and have a number of birding books, old and new, that they would like to share with anyone who would like them. The books will be at the September 16th Chapter Meeting, available for anyone to go through and choose to take for their own use.

Please refer to the yvaudubon.org for renewal forms this month. Do to space constraints in this issue it has not been included. It is in all past Flyers and will return next issue.

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

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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

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, 860-0450,
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Membership Committee Chair: Dorothy Bartlett, 628-5058,
dpadanyi@live.com

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

Publicity: contact any Board Member

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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 Monday 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, August 3 Shorebirds, Hawks and Prairie Birds

Submitted by Robin Manfredi

The day was already getting hot at 8 a.m. when 10 YVAS birders set off from RMC to Big Lake for a day of searching for shorebirds, hawks and prairie birds. The water was high and the lake was teeming with shorebirds of every description. Most abundant were seagulls: California, Franklin and Ring-billed. Double-crested Cormorants were quite numerous. American White Pelicans, Great Blue Heron, Marbled Godwit, White-faced Ibis, Long-billed Dowitcher, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson’s Phalarope, American Coot, three species of Grebe: Eared, Western, and Pied-billed, and numerous PEEPS. Only three species of duck were identified: Northern Shoveler, Mallard and Ruddy. The light wasn’t always optimal for specific identification. Heard but not seen were a Sora and a Greater Yellowlegs. In a windmill near the lake there were two Ravens tending their nest. Sandhill Cranes were browsing along the hillside nearby and a Bald Eagle wasn’t far off, taking in the whole scene with more than watching on his mind. It was so noisy, if you closed your eyes, you could imagine you were by the seashore.

While the birds at Big Lake were impressive, the drive up took three hours because we stopped so often to look at the fields. There were the usual suspects: Western and Eastern Kingbirds, Western Meadowlarks, Horned Larks, American Robins, Barn Swallows and Tree Swallows. We saw quite a few, maybe close to a dozen Swainson’s Hawks, including immature birds, sitting on round bales in a hay field and soaring overhead. Mike Weber mentioned that at about this time of year Swainson’s Hawks begin to gather in loose groups for the coming migration. The fields and hay bales also yielded Long-billed Curlew and Upland Sandpiper. The Chestnut-collared Longspur made a roadside appearance, too. There were numerous sparrows and blackbirds: Vesper Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Savannah Sparrow, Brewers Blackbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Red-wing Blackbird. But the treat of the day was a Grasshopper Sparrow perched on some brush, singing for us as long as we wanted to watch.

To top off the day, we stopped at a prairie dog town on the Molt-Columbus Road and saw three Burrowing Owls doing a little hunting. A Golden Eagle was also spotted on the ride back. In all, we got 54 species for the day. It was a great way to spend a hot, hot August Saturday. Thank you to Mike Weber for leading this one. *Photo by Dorothy Bartlett* of folks viewing the mud flats near Big Lake.



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

Sept. 7, 2019	Sat	Bridger Creek	Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Itch-Kep-Pe Park in Columbus. Stan Heath, leader. Bring a Sack lunch.
Sept. 11, 2019	Wed	Riverfront Park	Meet at Riverfront Park, S. Billings Blvd. 1 st parking lot on the right at 5:00 p.m. Mike Weber, leader.
Sept. 14, 2019	Sat	Red Lodge area Hawk Watch	Meet at 8:00 a.m. in Red Lodge at the Town Pump, Conoco C-Store. Marco Restani leader. Bring a Sack lunch.
Nov. 9, 2019	Sat	Yellowtail Dam Afterbay	Brian Henderson, leader. Bring a Sack lunch.
Dec. 14, 2019	Sat	Christmas Bird Count	Jim Court, leader.



August 2019 Hailstorm & Wildlife at Lake Basin*Submitted by Steve Regele August 23, 2019*

It is common knowledge that a bad hailstorm came through the Billings area and areas on the way to and from Billings on Sunday August 11, 2019. The effects of the hailstorm on people, buildings, and wildlife was somewhat localized but a real hardship and tragedy for many.

The Billings Gazette and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks reported that the hailstorm “killed and maimed more than 11,000 waterfowl and wetland birds at the Big Lake Wildlife Management Area west of Molt”

https://billingsgazette.com/news/state-and-regional/birds-killed-or-maimed-by-hailstorm-in-yellowstone-county/article_998353fe-4985-50fb-94b4-30f156896612.html



Montana FWP photo: A few young birds walk among the carcasses of pelicans and double-crested cormorants killed by two-inch hail and 70 mph wind Sunday, Aug. 11, 2019, at Big Lake Wildlife Management Area west of Molt.

Big Lake is a fantastic wetland in the midst of a wonderful prairie and playa area often referred to as Lake Basin, an area of roughly 300 square miles and about 25 miles northwest of Billings.

Many other birds and wildlife were certainly hurt by the hailstorm. This Basin is home to an impressive abundance of bird species including many species of raptors, game birds (waterfowl and upland), grassland birds and shorebirds. Routinely Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society (YVAS) members will record between 50 and 100+ bird species in a day of birding within the Basin. It is also home to many other animals such as badger, white-tailed jack rabbit, cottontail rabbit, coyote, fox, skunk, prairie dog, various reptiles and amphibians, antelope, deer, and occasional elk. This hailstorm was a devastating hit to many of these animals, especially to those that can't take cover underground!

Many agencies including Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Bureau of Land Management and Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation manage significant and invaluable tracts of public lands in Lake Basin, some that fell within the path of that hailstorm.

The Agencies routinely have to deal with these real world circumstances. YVAS is one of many entities that has received a number of inquiries about the hailstorm related circumstances and issues related to wildlife. Following is a summary response to some of those inquiries: Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks reports (August 22, 2019):

“FWP staff found discovered the dead and dying birds at Big Lake WMA on Wed Aug 14th while conducting maintenance at Big Lake WMA. The storm that cause the damage and deaths occurred on Aug 11th. The WMA is approximately 4,800 acres and includes much of Big Lake, which is around 4000 acres at this time. Big Lake is an ephemeral lake, meaning it does not always contain water. Some years, it is completely dry. This year it is unusually full of water. Staff found thousands of dead birds (mostly gulls and ducks) which were largely on shore as of Aug 18th. We are fortunate that the storm created winds that drove the dead and dying onto shore and then let the water recede when the winds died down. The result is that the vast majority of birds are well out of the water, which reduces our botulism toxin concerns. Additionally, the size, turbidity, and current clarity of Big Lake reduces the concern of botulism. Botulism outbreaks start with the buildup of high organic material from dead and decaying birds, fish, plant materials, along with conducive environmental conditions that allow the bacteria Clostridium botulinum to go into its reproductive phase. Conducive environmental conditions are high temperatures and generally stagnant water.

We are also fortunate that this is a rare event. While damaging hail storms do occur every few years in the general area around Billings, Montana, their distribution and scale vary greatly. Even within this storm, areas only a mile apart experienced very different hail sizes and therefore very different levels of damage. In this case, 2+ inch hail pummeled Big Lake, but a lake only a few miles Northwest within a National Wildlife Refuge reported zero mortalities.

The numbers of ducks would make any total cleanup effort huge and I do not believe we would have the biological impacts desired of a cleanup. Most of the birds are decaying already and infested with maggots. Vegetation blew onshore as well and carcasses are buried in the vegetation. We would be picking up carcasses that are largely on shore already (less disease concerns) and would miss birds that might be submerged in the lake itself (real disease concerns).

We did clear a ~150 yard section of shore on the East end of the lake to allow us to monitor for new deaths. The local biologist will check this section every couple of days for dead and dying birds. Around the brood pond (a smaller man-made pond on property), where the bank is steep and the total area is much smaller, we cleared dead birds from the water's edge and placed them well above the waterline. A much higher percentage of birds were actually in or touching the water here due to the steep slopes of the man-made dam and riprap.

Our plan is to monitor the lake via general observations and the biologist's periodic checking of the shore area we cleared. If new deaths or illnesses are detected, it will be investigated and samples sent to the lab if warranted. The carcasses that are on land will decay rather quickly in the hot weather we are experiencing. The maggots are certainly helping with that. The lake was checked on 8/21/19 and no new mortalities were identified. FWP will continue to monitor the lake and its birds every couple days to monitor for any disease concerns.

At this time, we are not planning to remove the remaining carcasses. If we were to do so, we would consider contacting local groups that may be interested in assisting.

This incident at Big Lake is certainly an unusual occurrence. It is the result of a perfect storm to create the large hail and the random chance that the hail storm hit Big Lake when it was full of water and covered in waterfowl. If this same storm had struck Big Lake two years ago, we would not have experienced this result."

*Kevin R Rose, CWB®, CE
Regional Wildlife Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 5*

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reports (August 23, 2019 phone call) that based on their post-hailstorm on-site visit at Grass Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) there does not seem to have been impacts from the hailstorm. No dead birds were seen, in fact the Refuge was in great shape - an abundance of birds, vegetation is in good shape, and lots of water. Grass Lake NWR is located about 4 miles northwest of Big Lake and is closed to most public uses.

USFWS personnel also visited Spidel Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) and found that WPA in the same condition as Grass Lake NWR. Spidel WPA is open to many public uses. YVAS birders have been to Spidel WPA a few times since the hailstorm and found the same conditions as USFWS - and great birding!

Localized natural calamities like the August 11 hailstorm are a clear reminder of the importance of having numerous safe harbors across Montana, the USA and the world for wildlife to survive in and to replenish impacted populations.

YVAS thanks the agency folks that submitted the above information and that do their level best to prudently manage wildlife and ecosystems in Montana and throughout the US.

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 SEPTEMBER. 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.



SEPTEMBER Renewals: Shari & Robert Dayton, Ann V. Shesne, Ross & Ginny Waples.

AUGUST (outstanding) Renewals: Donn & Dorothy Bartlett.



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At left, Robin Manfredi, Mike Weber and Trenay Hart. Ya, Mike was already “hot” at the 8AM meeting time for leading the group to Big Lake. *Dorothy Bartlett* submitted this irresistible shot!

Can you spot the 3, very camouflaged, **Sora's** in the photo below by *Will Crain*?

At right, **Long-billed Curlew** on a round bail during Big Lake trip by *Dorothy Bartlett*.

