

*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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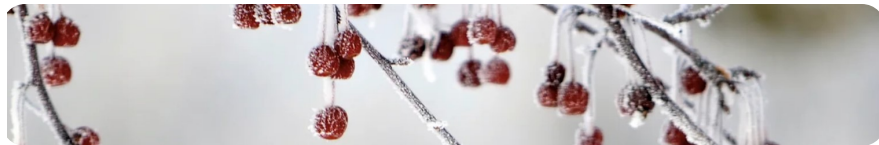
## The Yellowstone Arboretum

Scott Meyers is Volunteer Curator of the [Yellowstone Arboretum](#) on the grounds of ZooMontana. The February 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of YVAS will include an illustrated talk by Scott covering all facets of a working arboretum from "What is an arboretum" to "Why Plant Trees" to "What's New for 2023".

A few years back while helping his partner Nancy Welch with her volunteer work in ZooMontana, Scott realized that there weren't just trees on the grounds of the Zoo but special trees, unique trees and somewhere in the past there was a "plan" for these trees. Having grown up in the Midwest Scott always enjoyed the many varieties of trees found both in rural and urban areas and as a young boy he visited the many delights of the Morton Arboretum near Chicago, one of the largest arboretums in the U.S. In his adult years he found himself fascinated by trees and their more formal cultivation in arboretums both in the U.S. and Europe, especially the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, England.

So, the sight of the unique trees at ZooMontana set off a spark of imagination. What would it take to get the Zoo established as a "real" arboretum? So begins the journey of creating just the second accredited arboretum in Montana.

Join us for the 7PM YVAS program February 20<sup>th</sup> at the Mayflower Church to learn more about the Yellowstone Arboretum. A wealth of information on the trees and the animal habitats of the Zoo can be found on the [yellowstonearboretum.org](http://yellowstonearboretum.org) website.



*During December and January, YVAS members made important contributions to citizen science.*

### Historic Christmas Bird Counts for Billings Montana

The results of the Billings 2022 Christmas Bird Count are in! Jerry Dalton and team have finalized the report of the species and birds observed by a large team spread out over 177 square miles on Dec 17, 2022. The tally of bird species and numbers reported during previous Billings Christmas Bird Counts from 1973 to 2022 can be found on the YVAS website at: <https://yvaudubon.org/birding/> and additional details on page 3 of this newsletter. As you review the results, please keep in mind that the weather and number of volunteers can influence the counts year to year.

### National Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

On January 7, 2023, nine YVAS volunteers led by Brian Henderson and Barb Pittman carried out a survey of Bald Eagles along the Yellowstone and the Clarks Fork Rivers. The purpose and the results of the survey are discussed on page 2 of this *Flyer*.



## National Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

On Jan. 7, 2023, five YVAS volunteers led by Brian Henderson traveled from Billings Heights to Columbus, counting eagles at access points along the Yellowstone River. The group recorded a record number of 75 bald eagles, about half adult and half immature. There were a couple of occasions where there were so many eagles coming and going that it was very difficult to keep track of them. The weather was quite mild on this day, but large sections of the river were completely covered with ice due to very cold weather in previous weeks. Apparently, that did not deter these eagles - perhaps there was even less open water for them to fish farther north? We may never know, but the weather conditions and the amount of ice coverage are among the data reported on the survey.

Also, on Jan. 7 another group of four YVAS volunteers led by Barb Pitman surveyed a section from Red Lodge and near the Clark's Fork Yellowstone River. They also counted a record high 56 Bald Eagles plus 5 Golden Eagles.

The purpose of the eagle survey is to monitor the status of Bald Eagle wintering populations in the contiguous United States by estimating national and regional count trends, overall and by age class. The data collection is administered by the US Geological Survey which is the science agency for the Department of the Interior. According to their website, <https://corpslakes.erdc.dren.mil/employees/bird/midwinter.cfm>

- Each January, several hundred individuals nationwide count eagles along standard, non-overlapping survey routes.
- Most survey participants are employees of state or federal conservation agencies, but private volunteers also participate in the survey.
- Approximately 44% of the surveys are conducted from vehicles; 18% are conducted from fixed wing aircraft; 8% are collected from boats; and 7% are conducted by helicopter.

- Unlike nesting surveys, it provides information on both breeding and nonbreeding segments of the population at a potentially limiting time of year. It also provides an opportunity to monitor modifications or threats to habitat at important wintering areas.

*Submitted by Brian Henderson*



*Photos taken by Ginny Waple include YVAS eagle counters and a mature and a juvenile Bald Eagle.*



## 79<sup>th</sup> Billings Christmas Bird Count, Dec 17, 2022

**11546 individual birds of 53 species were recorded by 34 field observers and 17 feeder watchers**

As a group, *feeder watchers* reported 25 species. They had high counts of 3 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1 Cooper's Hawk, 13 Downy Woodpecker, 8 Blue Jay, 92 American Crow, 73 Black-capped Chickadee, 15 Red-breasted Nuthatch, 23 Dark-eyed Junco, 121 House Finch, 6 Cassin's Finch, and 158 House Sparrow. The feeder watchers were Rita Cetrone, Helen and Peter Cummins, Lois Dalton, Brenda Delaney, Candace Forrette, Larry Handsaker, Cindy Holtz, Jay Kintzing, Robin Manfredi, Joanne Miller, Monica Patterson, Carol Pearson, Jack Sterling, Ruth Vanderhorst, Ginny Wapples, and Tricia Williams.

Brenda and Jeff Dunham covered the area between Dover Park and Huntley along the Yellowstone River. They had the high-count of 1187 Canada Goose, 33 Eurasian Collared-Dove, 829 European Starling, 53 American Goldfinch, and the only American Kestrel.

Peter and Helen Cummins spotted a Golden Eagle and 135 Robins in their area along the top of the Rimrocks, and along Alkali Creek.

Kris Decker, Bill Morgan, Bob Mackin, and Jerry Dalton covered Billings Heights and Two Moon Park. They saw the usual species you would expect including Canada Goose, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Bald Eagle, Pigeon and Collared-Dove, Downy, Magpie, Crow, Chickadee, Robin, Starling, House Finch, and House Sparrow. None of the species were unique or high counts.

The Norm's Island/Briarwood group of Fran and Dennis Nun, Mary Johnson, and Kim Watterson reported 24 species. They had the second highest count of 831 Canada Goose, 13 Bald Eagle, and high counts for 97 Wild Turkey, the only Northern Harrier, 5 Rough-legged Hawk, 15 Northern Flicker, and 30 Black-billed Magpie.

The Montana Audubon Center team of Emily Chilcoat, Becca Mathias, Steve McConnell and Loretta Todd covered Pictograph Cave and Four Dances Natural Area. They matched the Lockwood group with 1 Northern Shrike.

Exxon Ponds didn't have any Yellow-rumped Warbler this year, but Mike Weber, Tom Tully, and Tom Howard, did report 30 species. Theirs was the only group that reported 1 Cackling Goose, 2 Wood Duck, 6 Hooded Merganser, 2 Double Crested Cormorant, 1 Great Blue Heron, 1 Virginia Rail, 1 Belted Kingfisher, and 1 Yellow-shafted Flicker. They also had the high count for 10 Bufflehead, 250 Common Goldeneye, 18 Common Merganser, 21 Ring-necked Pheasant, 15 Bald Eagle, 9 Red-tailed Hawk, 400 Rock Pigeon, 250 Robins, and 13 Song Sparrow.

Along Pryor Creek Road from I-90 to Huntley, Ron Kuhler and Will Crain reported 25 species. They had the

## Upcoming Events at the Montana Audubon Center

Submitted by Rebecca Mathis (406) 294-5099

<https://mtaudubon.org/center/>

**Owl Prowl:** Friday Feb 3rd & March 17th, from 6:30-8pm We'll talk about the different species of owls that live in Billings and throughout the state, then we'll go for a hike to look and listen for them.

*Suggested donation \$5/Member of MAC, \$10/Non-Member, Free for children <12*

Advance registration is required on this website: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/owl-prowl-tickets-504823399377>

**Bird Stroll:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month. beginning March 11th, 2023, from 8:30 to 10am.

Enjoy a morning stroll by the river and learn a few birds along the way. Great for beginning birders! On this monthly birding adventure, we will cover some birding basics, learn some bird calls/songs for ID by ear and work on our description skills to visually ID the species that we see.

*Suggested donation \$10/adults, \$5/students, or free for members of MAC.*

Advanced registration requested on this link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/monthly-morning-bird-stroll-tickets-437428619777>

only report of 46 Pinyon Jay, and 80 Bohemian Waxwing, as well as high count of 38 Cedar Waxwing and 7 Townsend's Solitaire.

Lockwood between I-90 and Hwy 87 South revealed 26 species to Bill and Bonnie McIntyre, Cara Chamberlain, and Bernie Quetchenbach. They were the only group reporting 1 Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk, 1 Merlin, 10 Mourning Dove, 2 Hairy Woodpecker, and 8 Pygmy Nuthatch. They shared with another group 1 Cooper's Hawk, 1 Northern Shrike, 4 Ravens, and had the high count for 26 Horned Lark, and 10 White-breasted Nuthatch. They had all three nuthatches, Red-breasted, White-breasted, and Pygmy.

Our ladies of the city parks, covering Riverfront, Mystic, and Coulson Parks, shared good counts of 5 Blue Jay, and 4 Raven. The ladies are Carolyn Jones, Sue Weinreis, Kristin Neva, and Rita Harding.

In the triangle north of Hwy 312 East and east of Hwy 87 North, Ruth Vanderhorst and Pam Pipal were the only ones to report 1 Ferruginous Hawk. Last year they saw three. They also counted 2 Rough-legged Hawk, and 1 Red-tailed Hawk.

For more information about the Billings Christmas Bird Count, see historical results at <http://yvaudubon.org>. For details and results of all Christmas Bird Counts everywhere, see <http://audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

*Submitted by Jerry Dalton*

## Ten Fun Facts about Blue Jays

**Male and female Blue Jays look the same.** So how can you know? Males tend to be a little bigger than females, but it's the courtship behavior that will give you a clue. A group of males will typically follow a single female. If she flies, they will, too; if she lands, so will they.

**Blue Jays can live a looong time.** Most wild birds have a lifespan of 5-7 years. The oldest known wild Blue Jay was 26 years and 11 months! Banded in Newfoundland in 1989, it was found dead in fishing gear in 2016.

**Most Blue Jays die from predators,** although in recent years West Nile Virus has taken its toll. Blue Jays are one of the most susceptible to this disease.

**Blue Jays fly slowly,** around 20-25 mph, compared to ducks that fly 60 mph and falcons, which can fly up to 200 mph. This makes Blue Jays good prey for hawks and explains why they have a special "hawk call," which alerts other birds, too, and prevents them from becoming hawk food.

**Blue Jays will make hawk sounds** even when no hawks are present. Other birds fly away, leaving the Blue Jay with the feeder all to themselves.



**The Blue Jay is the official state bird** of....nowhere. The Western Meadowlark is state bird of SIX states, and the Cardinal of SEVEN states! However, Blue Jays are the provincial bird of Prince Edward Island in Canada....and the team symbol of Canada's only major league baseball team, the Toronto Blue Jays.

**Blue Jays are highly intelligent,** as are all the birds in the Corvidae Family. How smart are they? Brown-headed cowbirds are commonly known to sneak into other birds' nests and lay eggs, forcing the surrogate parent(s) to incubate the cowbird eggs and feed their young! Blue Jays are too smart for this. Instead, the Jays look at it as a fast-food delivery and enjoy a delicious lunch!

**Blue Jays store light-colored flakes of paint!** Paint contains calcium, which they need in their diets, particularly the females who need it for strong eggshells. They will take paint flakes right off your house, so do yourself (and them) a favor by setting out your eggshells.

**A group of Blue Jays is referred to as a "party" or a "band,"** a great collective noun for an aggressive bird that hangs around in groups and makes a lot of noise singing and shouting!

**You can attract Blue Jays to your yard** by providing a LARGE, OPEN FEEDER filled with sunflower seeds (black-oil or striped), peanuts (in-the-shell or out) and corn (cracked or whole kernel), water, and a yard full of large trees and shrubs.

Submitted by Sue Weinreis, with thanks to Scott at <https://birdwatchinghq.com> for the idea.



### Chirps and Tweets



- \* The 2023 Audubon Photography Awards are now officially accepting submissions! YVAS has many excellent photographers. If anyone is interested in submitting a photo, go to National Audubon's link at: <https://www.audubon.org/photoawards-entry>
- \* YVAS Memberships and renewals are \$20 when paid in person at a Chapter Meeting or Birding Field Trip. Regularly, they are \$25.

## YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

**Next Board of Directors Meeting:** Feb 13, 2023 —The YVAS meeting of the Board of Directors will be held from 4 pm to 6 pm. Board of Directors meetings are held the second Monday of the month. Board meetings are open to all members.

**In-Person Program: FEB 20, 2023.** Programs will be held on third Monday of the month at Mayflower Church on the corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive in Billings. Programs are held the third Monday of the month. Doors open at 6:30; the program begins at 7:00 pm.

### Board of Directors

President (Acting): Steve Linder 406-380-0073 becon1@bresnan.net  
 Vice President:  
 Secretary: Sue Weinreis 406-855-4181 granpeak47@gmail.com  
 Treasurer: Pam Pipal 406-245-4517 ppipal@charter.net

### Board Members

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 Steve McConnell 509-868-8277 mcconnells@billingsmt.gov  
 Kristin Neva 406-672-8912 ksneva@gmail.com  
 Deb Regele 406-200-7873 debregele@gmail.com  
 Bruce Waage 406-698-3126 bruce.waage@outlook.com

### Committees and Assignments

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 Facebook: Doreen Hartman 406-697-0277 rdzlhman@bresnan.net  
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 Flyer Editor: Kristin Neva 406-672-8912 yvasflyer@gmail.com  
 Injured Raptors: Montana Raptor Conservation Center 406-585-1211

Injured Waterfowl: WJH Bird Resources 406-652-7175 wjhbird@yahoo.com  
 Membership Data: Peter Cummins 406-248-8684 membership.data@yvaudubon.org  
 Mt Bluebird Habitat Project: Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449 carolyn684@gmail.com  
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 Osprey Nest Monitor Coord: Deb Regele 406-200-7873 debregele@gmail.com  
 Osprey Research Coord: Marco Restani 460-425-2608 restani@stcloudstate.edu  
 Program Committee: YVAS Board of Directors  
 Publicity: YVAS Board of Directors  
 Recycling (aluminum): Larry Handsaker 406-855-9832 or 918 Ave C, Billings  
 Recycling (baling twine): Deb Regele 406-200-7873 debregele@gmail.com  
 Doreen Hartman 406-697-0277 rdzlhman@bresnan.net  
 Website: Deb Regele 406-200-7873 debregele@gmail.com

### Membership Updates

Chapter members listed below are up for renewal. Please use the application form below (include your email address) and submit, along with a check, to any Board Member or mail it to the address on the application. Contact the Data Base Administrator, Peter Cummins at membership.data@yvaudubon.org with any questions.

\* Feb renewal: Barbara Garrett, John & Carol McNeal, Charles W. Paris, Pam E. Pipal, and Sarah Stockburger.

\* Jan outstanding: Jim & Virginia Court, Larry & Janice Handsaker, Steve McConnell, William & Bonnie McIntire, and Lisa Ranallo.

### 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 \$25. If applying for a new or renewing student membership, make check for \$15 and indicate academic affiliation. PayPal option is also available for renewing or joining YVAS. It can be found on the YVAS Website under Memberships.

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







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AUDUBON FLYER**

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Photos by William Crain

Above: Yellow-shafted Flicker and  
House Finch

Top Right: Cedar Waxwing

Bottom: American Robins