

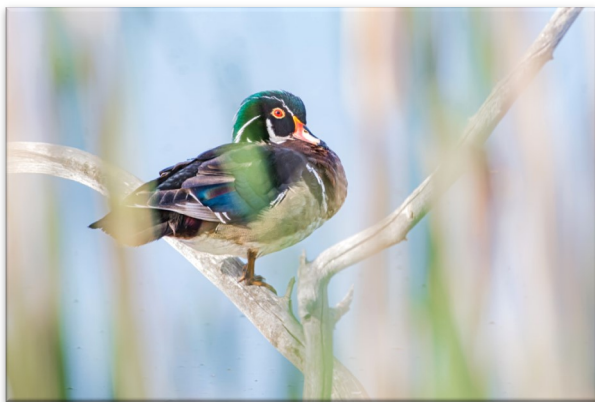
Mission: Building on the tradition of special interest in birds, Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society is organized to promote enjoyment and protection of the natural environment through education, activism, and conservation of bird habitat.

SEPTEMBER 2023

VOLUME 53, NUMBER 8

Nature Photography by Jim Petek

Jim Petek became interested in nature photography 50 years ago. A now-retired, heavy equipment operator by trade, he is a self-taught amateur who honed his craft by visiting National Wildlife Refuges throughout Montana and the western US pursuing his passion – birds. His images have appeared in numerous magazines and calendars, one of which was chosen by the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History in 1993 to be included in a 3-year traveling exhibit titled “Nature Photography: A Current Perspective.” His striking photo of Bohemian Waxwings won the “Composition and Form” category in the prestigious, international *BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year* competition. He traveled to London to receive the award in 2000. Originally from Billings, where he still holds the single game scoring record in basketball for Central High, he is a longtime resident of Red Lodge where you might see him on local outings with camera in hand.



Wood Duck by Jim Petek



Great Grey Owl by Jim Petek

Join us for the evening YVAS program on September 18th at the Mayflower Church to view some of Jim’s best photographs of birds. Doors open at 6:30PM.

Submitted by Marco Restani

YVAS programs are free and open to the public. They are held on the 3rd Monday of the month at the Mayflower Church on the corner of Poly and Rehberg Lane. A social with coffee and cookies begins at 6:30 PM; the program begins at 7:00 PM.

Osprey Project 2023 Summary



Photo of banded osprey nestlings by Marco Restani

The YVAS Osprey Nest Monitoring Project reached a major milestone in 2023 by completing its 15th season! As in years past, a cadre of highly-motivated volunteers observed about 100 nest sites from Gardiner to Miles City. Beginning in April, monitors recorded occupancy, and then throughout the summer documented breeding behavior and reproductive success.

This year, 12-15 nests that are usually productive failed during the late incubation and early nestling stages, presumably due to the frequent torrential downpours in May. Two adults and one nestling became entangled in baling twine: one adult freed itself and the nestling was rescued during banding (see a recent [study](#)* for an analysis of twine entanglements along the Yellowstone River). Four ospreys were electrocuted. Although entanglements and electrocutions are distressing, the numbers have remained relatively constant over the years while the breeding population has doubled in size, which is a testament to the quick response by nest monitors and the public to emerging hazards.

Since 2012, the project has banded 859 ospreys, but who's counting?! Ospreys banded along the Yellowstone have wintered as far south as Costa Rica and Puerto Rico, and observations reported this winter will be shared with the YVAS membership in future Flyers.

Beartooth Electric Cooperative, NorthWestern Energy, and Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative kindly provided assistance to band nestlings. We thank the Wolf Creek Charitable Foundation for funding.

Submitted by Marco Restani

* Restani, M. (2023). Individual and population effects of entanglement mortality on ospreys from plastic baling twine in nests. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 44, e02496.

Happy News - YVAS Twine is Recycled!

Friday morning, July 21, 2023, a semi-truck and trailer filled with baling twine left the Twine Collection & Recycling Site (TCRS) and headed to I-90 Reprocessing in Minnesota. There it will be reprocessed into small coffee bean-size beads before being shipped to manufacturing centers for repurposing. Baling twine is a #5 polypropylene plastic.

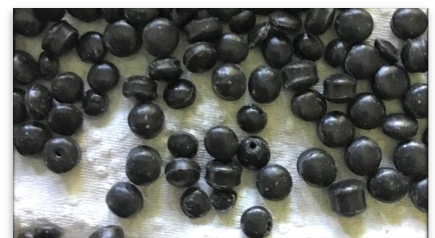
Transferring the twine from the storage shed into the top-loading semi was a full-day's job with some volunteers working until it was too dark to safely do so. Assisting with the loading besides myself, were Steve Regele, Jerry Dalton, Bruce Waage, Jack Sterling, Ross Waples, Tom Regele and Charles Ballard (semi-driver and excavator operator from Utah). An all-around great crew to have! The twine was delivered to the TCRS by twine users ranging from southwest of Bozeman to Broadus to Cody WY, including but not limited to White Sulphur, Ashland, Shepherd, Huntley, Billings and Laurel. PAYS also deposited their used twine in the YVAS horse trailer parked in the stockyard.

This project would not have succeeded without the assistance from dozens of YVAS volunteers and twine donors over the last few years. Whether you attended the organizational meetings for the twine recycling project; contacted businesses for donations; sat at YVAS' twine recycling tables at the MATE, Gardeners Market or at the TCRS on weekends; helped unload countless large tote sacks of twine weighing more than 500 pounds; helped out with the maintenance of the TCRS and grounds; or you were one of the numerous twine donors, kudos to you all!! We proved it can be done!

As one of my favorite lines in a Dr. Seuss book reads, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

Submitted by Deb Regele

Reprocessed
twine pellets





Chirps and Tweets



Sad News - Closing of the Twine Collection & Recycling Site

We are sad to announce that the Twine Collection & Recycling Site will be closing. Because of health complications of several of our volunteers that manage the heavier equipment, we are not able to keep up with the twine management and deliveries. Within the next 30 days, we will begin cleaning out and starting on the reclamation work of the site.

While we had hoped to find another group, individual or business to help or take over the management of this project, especially since the amount of twine delivered to the TCRS grows every year, it just didn't happen.

If you or someone you know is interested in this project, please contact me soon at debregele@gmail.com or 406-200-7873. The location site can easily be relocated. Currently there are over a dozen ranchers or equine facilities that have twine loads ready to deliver to the TCRS. They have all requested to be notified if the TCRS should open again.

Submitted by Deb Regele



Membership Secretary Position Open

YVAS is looking for a Membership Secretary to maintain the names, mailing addresses, renewal and expiration dates of our Chapter's members. This information is emailed to you regularly by the Treasurer. It requires the use of MS Excel, the internet and email. This work can be done on a home computer or laptop and includes the use of MS Excel, email and internet. Included in the job description is the emailing of addresses monthly to the printer that prints and mails the Chapter's monthly newsletter, *The Flyer*.

If you are interested or want more information, contact Deb at debregele@gmail.com or 406-200-7873.

Montana Audubon Center Calendar

Please register in advance on the MAC website for all activities: mtaudubon.org/center

Sep 9 Bird Stroll: 8:30 am - 10am

Enjoy a morning stroll by the river and learn a few birds on the way. Suggested donation \$10/adults, \$5/students, or free for MAC members.

Sep 9 Weekend Wonders: 10:30am-12pm

Designed for families, every month's program features a nature theme, an outdoor adventure, and a hands-on learning experience from an expert in their field. Suggested donation \$5/person or free for MAC members.

Sep 22 Native Plant Seed Swap: Friday 5:30pm-7:30pm

Join the Montana Native Plant Society-Artemisia chapter at the Montana Audubon Center to meet fellow native plant enthusiasts, share and learn tips and tricks to make your garden more successful and, of course, swap seeds! Don't have any native seeds to bring? Don't worry, there will be plenty of seeds to help get you started on growing your sustainable native plant garden.

Sep 30 Exploring Nature Poetry with Anne Holub:

Two Saturday sessions: 10:30am-11:30am Youth Program, for 12-18 year olds and an Adult Program 1pm-2:30pm.

Have you ever wanted to write about the natural world but can't find the words? Learn how you can use careful observation to craft beautiful language. In this new educational offering, participants can read, discuss, and start to write their own nature poetry based on our local and seasonal environmental changes. No previous writing or poetry experience necessary! Sign up to explore modern and classic poetry about the natural world with local poet and Master Naturalist student, Anne Holub.

The sessions will include a packet of a variety of published poems geared toward the reading levels in the class. We hope to offer continuing classes as the seasons progress!

Please bring a notebook and be prepared for a brief outdoor walk near the Audubon Center during class.

Members: \$8/person, Non-Members: \$10/person

*Submitted by Rebecca Mathias
Community Programs Coordinator
(406) 294-5099 (Office)
rmathias@mtaudubon.org*

Lake Basin Birding Aug 5, 2023

After the Big Lake trip, a friend asked me if I had seen any good birds. That is always an interesting question. Usually that means: did you see anything rare or unexpected? Nothing to me was rare, but with birding there are always great moments, and this day did not disappoint.

The first of many great moments was at the seasonal pond north of the grain elevators at Molt. Many swallows had gathered. Usually, in early summer only the breeding barn swallows are present in this spot, but this being early August, swallow migration was underway. We counted 15 cliff swallows and 4 bank swallows among the many barn swallows. There were likely other swallow species present but we could not ID them for the distance.

We were also a little more than a month into shorebird migration and greater and lesser yellowlegs were flying about and calling. A group of about 10 avocets sat together in the pond, their burnished rusty-orange colors quickly fading into an off-white winter plumage. We saw several flights of Wilson snipe. They would rise up out of



Hills South of Big Lake — Photo by Mike Weber

the wetland and fly about in loose untethered flocks, only to quickly dive down into the reedy lakebed and disappear. Their loose flight formation is quite unlike their cousin the dowitcher, which tend to fly in much tighter and noisier flocks. We counted 25 snipes, which is unusual, as you typically only see one or a small handful of these secretive birds at a time. There were over 20 Wilson's phalaropes feeding in the shallow pond. I scanned the phalarope flocks carefully for the red-necked phalarope but came up empty.

Other gems we enjoyed seeing were Eastern kingbirds, Say's phoebe, yellow-headed blackbirds and 3 great-blue herons. We heard at least 3 sora's calling in the dense grassy area around the pond, but we never got a look at this shy bird. It was fun to have a couple new birders come on this trip and watch them delight in the bird sightings.



White-faced Ibis - Photo by Will Crain

On the way to Big Lake we saw a Western kingbird and a couple of Swainson's hawks, their chests washed in a handsome chestnut brown. Dozens of vesper sparrows and horned larks flushed from the roadways. When we arrived at Big Lake, we first stopped at the culvert area where the overflow from Grassy Lake NWR fills up Big Lake. The water level behind the culvert had dropped considerably from my visit a month prior. I was hoping we would see some peeps around the mudflats here, but we only saw one spotted sandpiper. Off in the distance a flock of about 20 marbled godwits took flight. A few eared grebes were seen, and a large flock of Canada geese loafed along the shoreline. From a distance a flock of 4 white-faced ibis were flying low and directly at us; they passed by us closely and their iridescent green and mauve plumage was visible as they winged by. A lone Franklin's gull was already sporting its winter plumage.

We drove to the parking spot near the breeding island. Most of the California and ring-billed gulls had fledged and were gone and a couple dozen chicks remained. There were perhaps 100 American white pelican chicks of various ages, some almost adult sized and they were trying out their wings. Double-crested cormorant could be seen on the far side of the island with a mix of adults and young birds.

From observing the Pelicans and the cormorants the past few summers we made some interesting observations. When the Pelican chicks have hatched there are flights of adult pelicans landing and shortly after they land, other pelicans fly off the island. The incoming pelicans can be seen in small flocks that are very high and slowly spiral downward before gracefully banking in for landing.

The new arrivals can be seen feeding their chicks. The departed pelicans begin circling and flapping, forming flocks of

a few birds to flocks of a dozen or more birds. As the birds catch a thermal there is less flapping as the warm air lifts them higher and higher before they depart for a lake or river where they can fish. These birds can be gone overnight before they return to feed their chicks the next day. Cormorants also are coming and going but without the dynamic soaring of the pelicans.

The water level in Big Lake was high and so there were no exposed mudflats and hence almost no shorebirds. Ducks included redheads, shovelers, ruddies, American widgeon, mallards, blue-winged teal and gadwalls. After lunch most of the birders left for home. I drove around the south side of the lake and was joined by Ginny and Ross. We saw several loggerhead shrikes on the way in, presumably a family. Later we saw a soaring bald eagle and a noisy 50 plus ravens circling overhead in a cacophonous flock.

After Ginny and Ross left, I hiked into the brood pond which is a pond just south of Big Lake which is fed by another drainage. This also has a nesting island where during high water years is used by pelicans, gulls and cormorants. It was dry this spring and the pond was not filled until the June rains, so the island was not used by these birds. There were hundreds of ducks in the pond and every around 50th duck had a brood of young ducklings. I spotted a female blue-winged teal with 10 tiny ducklings and when the female saw me she started flapping around the water as if she was injured, a classic distraction display. We surmised that the reason we saw so many young duckling broods was the June rains may have submerged the duck nests and the birds had renested. I saw the only peeps of the day, a flock of 5 Baird's sandpipers that were mixed in with a dozen killdeer. The weather was beautiful as it barely cracked 72 degrees. We ended the day with just over 50 bird species.

Submitted by Mike Weber

**Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society
Annual Report of YVAS Funds July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023**

	Operating Fund	Osprey Fund	General Projects Fund*	Twine Recycling Project	Endowment Fund 2/	Billings Community Foundation Endow. 1/
Bal. 7-1-22	27,390	23,151	13,719	16,886	164	101,544
Revenue	4,251	8,350	272	25	990	1,805
Expenses	(2,976)	(5,229)	(960)	(1,529)	(1,124)	(12,036)
Bal. 6-30-23	28,665	26,272	13,031	15,382	30	91,313

TOTAL YVAS FUNDS: 174,693.00

***General Projects Fund includes:**

<u>OSPREY PROJECTS</u>	
Osprey Rescue Fund	\$ 2,672.20
<u>CONSERVATION PROJECTS</u>	
Conservation Grant	707.00
Unspecified Conservation Projects	2,025.84
Endangered Species Donation	332.00
Clark's Fork WMA	233.88
<u>SPECIAL PROGRAMS</u>	
Holiday Fundraiser/Other	144.71
CBC 'Party' Fund - In memory of Jim Hansen	94.11
Birdathon 2018/2019 - YVAS "party" fund	110.00
<u>EDUCATION</u>	
Rose Sylling Trust	2,472.20
Birdathon 2016/2017-Dover Park signs	1,344.32
Audubon Adventures Repurposed	1,886.61
M and K Fried Community Education	500.00
Chapter Dinner 1-16-17, 1-15&5-21-18	358.00
Matching Grant Program	150.00
Nocturnal Bird Call Recording Project	-
TOTAL	\$ 13,030.87

1/ Revenue represents deposits by YVAS to the Endowment Fund and Expenses represent net changes to the Fund.

2/ Expenses represent transfers to the Billings Community Foundation Endowment.

Prepared by Pam Pipal

Meet Your YVAS Board of Directors

Board Member: Deb Regele

Where are you from and what was/is your profession?

I was born and lived in various towns in Wisconsin until I was nine. My family then began moving throughout the lower 48 every one to three years as my father followed the work he enjoyed. I landed in Montana in 1977 and have been here ever since. My "careers" have included, law firm billing clerk and secretary, 911 dispatcher, and city court clerk. For 14 years, I was the business manager in a Limited Liability Company Partnership with my husband.

What bird hooked you into birding?

That bird would have been my mother.

What is your favorite Montana bird species?

That is really hard to narrow down. Every year or two a different bird will intrigue me more than others. Snowy Owls were at the top of that list not too long ago. This year I would have to say, it is the Say's Phoebe since Steve and I have a nine-month old puppy named after this stunning little bird.

What is a conservation topic that you are excited about right now?

The intentional release of non-native species into Montana's rivers, lakes and streams without regard to the impacts these species will have on native Montana species whether in the water, on land or in the air.

What is your favorite/funniest/most interesting piece of Wildlife Trivia:

With a little help from Google: the world's deadliest animal isn't a shark, bear or tiger, but the mosquito. And only the female mosquitoes bite!

What do you like best about YVAS?

The membership, especially the volunteers!

Where is your favorite place to go birding in Montana?

Anywhere away from towns and crowds.



Submitted by Sue Weinreis

BIRDING FIELD TRIPS COMING UP

Contact Carolyn Jones at carolyn684@gmail.com or leave a TEXT for her at (406) 670-4449 to be included on the **Bird Trip Notification List**. Impromptu trips, changes and cancellations are notified by email to members on this list. Field trips depart by car from the Rocky Mountain College parking lot on Rimrock Road next to Billings Studio Theater at 8:00 a.m. unless noted otherwise in the specific trip information shown below. Passengers will share gas costs with drivers. Please DO NOT bring pets.

Sat Sept 2: Bridger Creek

Stan Heath, leader

Meet 8:00 AM at Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus Sack Lunch

Sept 9-10: Malta & Bowdoin NWR

Stan Heath & Susan Hovde, leaders

Meet at 6:30 AM in Trafton Park in Malta for a warbler walk, followed by PM birding in Bowdoin and more birding on Sunday. Sack lunches and arrange your own lodging in Malta.

Sat Sept 16: Red Lodge Area Hawk Watch

Marco Restani, leader

Meet 8:00 a.m. at Red Lodge Town Pump Conoco Sack lunch and lawn chair.

Sat Nov 4: Yellowstone Dam Afterbay

Brian Henderson, leader

8:00 a.m. at Rocky Sack lunch

Sat Dec 16: Christmas Bird Count

More details in November

Jerry Dalton, leader

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: Sep 11, 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: Sep 18, 2023. Programs will be held on the third Monday of the month at the Mayflower Church on the corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive in Billings. Doors open at 6:30 for coffee and cookies; the program begins at 7:00 pm.

Board of Directors

President (Acting): Open—Contact any Board Member
 Vice President: Vacant
 Secretary: Sue Weinreis 406-855-4181
 granpeak47@gmail.com
 Treasurer: Pam Pipal 406-245-4517 ppipal@
 charter.net

Board Members

Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449 carolyn684@gmail.com
 Steve McConnell 509-868-8277 mconnells@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

Christmas Bird Count: Jerry Dalton 406-656-3656
 jerrydalton96@gmail.com
 Facebook: Ginny Waples 406-850-1056
 waplesv@gmail.com
 Field Trip Chair: Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449
 carolyn684@gmail.com
 Flyer Editor: Kristin Neva 406-672-8912
 yvasflyer@gmail.com

(Committees, continued)

Injured Raptors: Montana Raptor Conservation
 Center 406-585-1211
 Injured Waterfowl: WJH Bird Resources 406-652-
 7175 wjhbird@yahoo.com
 Membership Data: Peter Cummins membership.
 data.yvas@gmail.com
 Mt Bluebird Habitat Project: Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449
 carolyn684@gmail.com
 Sue Weinreis 406-855-4181
 granpeak47@gmail.com
 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
 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.

September renewal: Ross and Ginny Waples

August outstanding: Donn and Dorothy Bartlett, Mary and Bob Francis

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society
 Application for New & Renewal Membership



Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our federal tax ID number is 51-0206955.

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.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____
 Email _____

Do you want to receive the YVAS 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**

P.O. Box 1075
Billings, MT 59103-1075

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization
PRST STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BILLINGS, MT
PERMIT NO. 27

Loading the Semi with
twine for recycling in
Minnesota

Photos by Deb Regele

