

*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.*

OCTOBER 2023

VOLUME 53, NUMBER 9

## Birding the Seven Continents with Gary Swant



Gary Swant in Antarctica

Gary Swant will present an entertaining program on favorite birds he has encountered on each of the seven continents, starting with a trip in 1994 to the Marianna Islands of the South Pacific Ocean, including Saipan and Tinian, and ending with a trip to Antarctica in January of 2021.

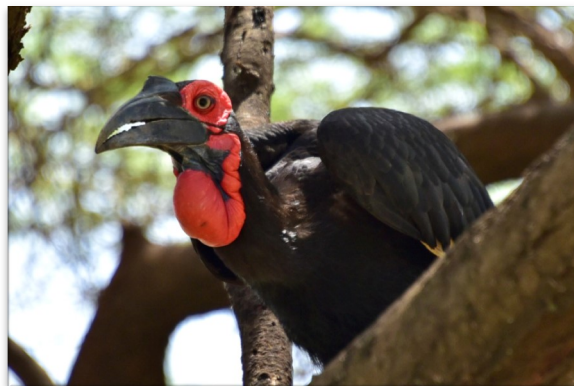
Gary's presentation will take us on a journey to remote parts of the world where he has sought out and photographed birds. Some of the stories of these adventures are humorous, and others tell of the difficulties encountered while tracking rare birds such as the Helmet Vanga and Long-tailed Ground Roller.

Gary became interested in birding while teaching a field ecology class in ornithology at Powell County High School, but it wasn't until his retirement in 1993, after 25 years of teaching, that he started making his life list of bird sightings. Since then, Gary has birded extensively all over the world, led many birding trips,

participated in bird counts, taught classes, won awards, and, most recently, authored a book called *My Montana Birds*. This reference book includes 272 pages of photos and articles on topics such as birding ethics, Montana birding areas, checklists, how to choose and care for binoculars and scopes, and much more. Gary has also birded all 22 ABA world birding areas, finishing that goal in February of 2022.

Beginning birders will enjoy this presentation and experienced birders might be challenged to explore bird species far from home.

Join us on Monday, October 16th at the Mayflower Church for an entertaining and informative presentation on Gary's favorite birds from each of the seven continents. Doors open at 6:30 PM for coffee and cookies, with the program beginning at 7:00 pm.



Southern Ground Hornbill by Gary Swant

*Submitted by Sue Weinreis*

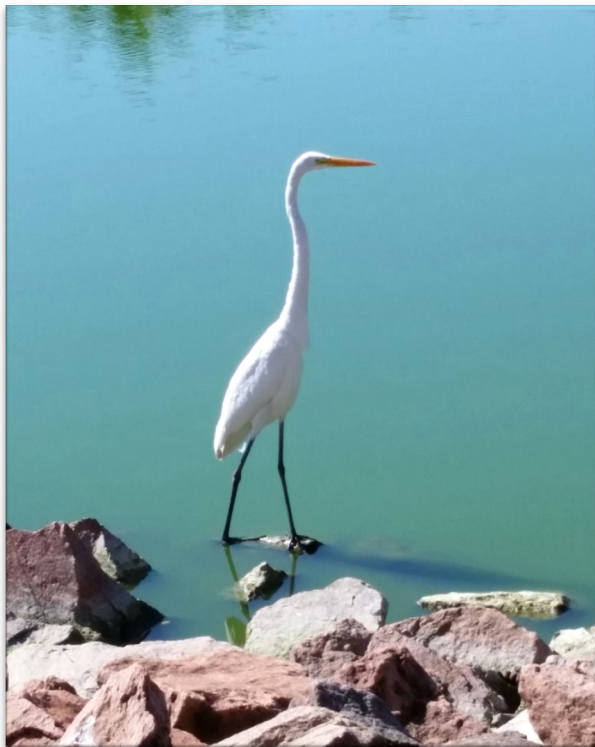
YVAS programs are free and open to the public. They are held on the 3rd Monday of the month at the Mayflower Church on the corner of Poly and Rehberg Lane. A social with coffee and cookies begins at 6:30 PM; the program begins at 7:00 PM.



## Chirps and Tweets



- The September program was a standing room only show of bird photography by Jim Petek. His photos included some award-winning shots and several photo journals of nesting birds: eggs to fledglings.
- The Fall YVAS program line-up includes two prominent wildlife photographers: Gary Swant, who is featured on the cover of this *Flyer*, and Bob Landis who will return for the December meeting.
- Board member Sue Weinreis applied for and was awarded a Humanities Montana grant to bring a speaker for the May program. Sabre Moore will speak on: Dark Skies: Light Pollution and the Story of Montana's Dark Skies. The grant has a \$75 match, as well as advertising and reporting requirements.
- The YVAS Board received and is evaluating an unsolicited proposal for a Barn Swallow nesting structure to be built as part of the Eagle Scout requirements at Rose Park or St. Francis School. The proposal will be evaluated under the YVAS requirements for conservation grants.



Great Egret vacationing in Florida  
Photo by Steve Linder

## Billings Hotspots

Looking for a new birding spot close to home? YVAS has a convenient map of birding hotspots around town. To access the map, on the [YVAS website](#), under **BIRDING**, click on [Birding Hotspots & Bird Lists](#).

Of course, you can look for sightings on eBird, but what about a checklist of likely species in a particular location? The website also provides conveniently printable checklists for most of the hotspots.



## Montana Audubon Center Calendar

*Please register in advance on the MAC website for all activities: [mtaudubon.org/center](http://mtaudubon.org/center)*

### **Oct 14 Bird Stroll:** 8:30 am - 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. Come with your own gear or borrow some from us; we have binoculars and guidebooks available to check out. Rain, snow, or shine, we'll be out there birding. We hope to see you there!

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

### **Oct 14 Weekend Wonders:** 10:30am-12pm

This expert-led program is perfect for people of all ages! Every month features a nature theme, an outdoor adventure, and a hands-on learning experience from an expert in their field. Time to get some fresh air, learn something new, and have some fun in nature with your friends and family.

Suggested donation \$5/child or free for MAC members.

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



## Red Lodge Area Hawk Watch



Photo of Raptor Watchers by Ginny Waples

On 16 September, nine adventurous YVAS members tackled the deeply rutted Meeteetse Trail for a bone-jarring, teeth-clenching, spine-aligning drive to the hawk watch site. The sky was clear, and temperatures reached near 75F by midday. The day was mostly calm with occasional light to moderate winds, conditions suitable for thermal and slope soaring. Observers counted 37 raptors of 9 species, an average tally along the Beartooth Front. Sharp-shinned hawks ruled the day (15 counted), followed by Cooper's Hawk (5), Broad-winged Hawk (4), Red-tailed Hawk (4), American Kestrel (3), Golden Eagle (2), Northern Harrier (2), Turkey Vulture (1), and Peregrine Falcon (1).

The volume of migrants on any given day is related to season – some species migrate earlier or later during autumn than others – and includes variation shaped by weather. For example, two counts conducted last year only a day apart yielded vastly different totals: on 17 September, 39 raptors of 11 species were counted, whereas weather conditions the next day facilitated the movement of 137 raptors of 12 species. And two counts conducted on the same date a year apart also exhibited significant variation: on 18 September 2021, 25 raptors of 9 species were observed, and on the same day a year later 137 raptors of 12 species were counted. We don't know how many raptors we'll see next year, but we do know that weather will rule the day.

*Submitted by Marco Restani*



The bone-jarring Meeteetse Trail. Photo by Ginny Waples

## Malta and Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge

Field Trip September 9-10, 2023

*Articles submitted by Sue Weinreis and Susan Hovde*

I love to go a-wandering in search of fall migrants!

Especially when we have wonderful leaders like Stan Heath and Susan Hovde!

Especially when we are headed to Malta and the Bowdoin Wildlife Refuge on a gorgeous fall day! **(Sue W.)**

So, Stan Heath did not tell me that he signed us up to lead a Fall trip to Malta. I found out about it by reading this newsletter. After hours of strategic planning-- who am I kidding --we set a date and time. As it turns out, eleven hearty souls showed up to see what we could see. **(Susan H.)**

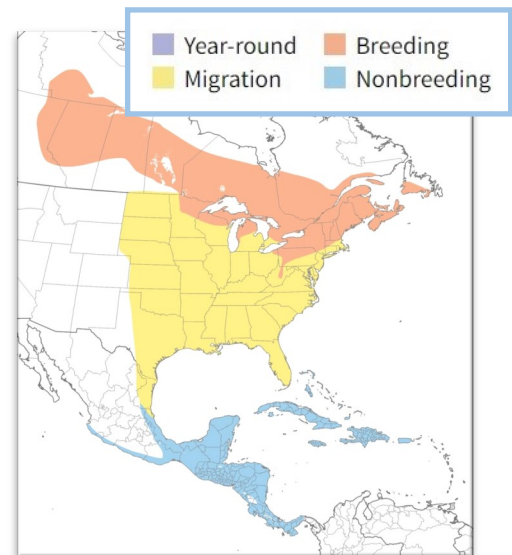
Our group met at Trafton Park in Malta on Saturday morning for a leisurely stroll along the rain-washed banks of the Milk River where we notched 21 species before breakfast. We were especially pleased to see a flock of 30 Cedar Waxwings, 2 White-faced Ibis, an American Redstart, and a Broad-winged Hawk. We realized how close we were to our northern border when we heard 5 White-throated Sparrows greeting the day with, "Oh, Sweet Canada, Canada, Canada."

After a breakfast break, we set out for the Main Event: Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge.

We were greeted by a loud contact call, and we followed it behind the Visitor Center building, discovering a couple of Brown Thrashers telling us about their friend.... A little yellow-breasted bird with faint side stripes and white undertail coverts that look as if they were dipped in ink. Our new friend was a Magnolia warbler just traveling through. He was very accommodating and let everyone have a good look.



Magnolia warbler photo by Susan Hovde



Although Magnolia Warblers breed in Canada and New England, they migrate south to Central America in the winter, passing through the Central and Southern US where they were first seen and classified sitting on a magnolia tree. Montana is out of the way for this little fellow, so we were lucky to see him. Other warblers seen over the weekend included the McGillivray's, Yellow-rumped, Yellow, and Orange-crowned Warblers.

(Range map from the Cornell Lab: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Magnolia\\_Warbler/maps-range](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Magnolia_Warbler/maps-range))

*Malta Bowdoin Field Trip Continued*

We spent the remainder of the day birding the circumference of the refuge. We made four stops and saw all manner of waterfowl and shorebirds, including several duck species, the Pied-billed and Eared Grebes, 1000 Franklin Gulls in several huge groups, and uncountable numbers of American Avocets, coots, sandpipers (Baird's, Semipalmated, Least), and White-faced Ibis. The Great Egret was a showstopper, stalking along, head forward, looking like Ichabod Crane. Everyone enjoyed views of the Marbled Godwit, Semipalmated Plover, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and at least 50 Long-billed Dowitchers.

We got some exercise trying to get a good look at the plover which turned out to be Black bellied in variety instead of the less common American Golden plover. We continued the drive with frequent stops where there was action.

Black-bellied Plover  
Photo by Susan Hovde



Sunday morning, we went back Bowdoin for one last glimpse of the Magnolia Warbler.

We decided to meet at the Visitors Center again Sunday where we were looking at a unique tree... turns out it was a "magnolia tree!" We did not need the iNaturalist app to tell us that as our little yellow bird was still around.

We are thinking this needs to be a regular fall trip tradition again.

Between the two days, birders tallied seventy-seven species. Thanks to Stan and Susan for a wonderful trip!



YVAS birders at Bowdoin NWR—Photo by Susan Hovde



## Meet Your YVAS Board of Directors

### Board Member: Sue Weinreis

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

I was born in Beach, ND. My Dad's farm is on the ND/Montana state line. I worked several years as an English teacher and school librarian and retired in 2016 after working in the MSUB Financial Aid Office for 30 years.

#### What bird hooked you into birding?

The Yellow-Breasted Chat. I was with Norm Schoenthal's ornithology class on a field trip to Two Moon when I saw a Yellow-Breasted Chat for the first time. I couldn't believe there could be such a bird in Montana! Where had I been for 40 years?!?

#### What is your favorite Montana bird species?

Ruby-Crowned Kinglet. I love the red cap and the heebie-jeebie song. I know I'm in the mountains when I see or hear this little guy.

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

Gardening for pollinators – hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies and moths.

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

Each year for the past three years, I have had an unusual bird "happening." In 2021, an Eastern Screech Owl roosted on our deck for a month. In 2022, an Anna's hummingbird stayed until November 6! And in 2023, an immature male Scarlet Tanager hung out for two weeks in May.

#### What do you like best about YVAS?

The PROGRAMS and the BIRD TRIPS!



## Birding Field Trips Coming Up

Contact Carolyn Jones at [carolyn684@gmail.com](mailto: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 Nov 4: Yellowstone Dam Afterbay

8:00 a.m. at Rocky

Brian Henderson, leader

Sack lunch

#### Sat Dec 16: Christmas Bird Count

More details coming in November

Jerry Dalton, leader

## YVAS MEETINGS &amp; PUBLIC PROGRAMS

**Next Board of Directors Meeting:** Oct 9, 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:** Oct 16, 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**

Claudia Janucek 406-633-0912 claudiajan50@gmail.com  
 Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449 carolyn684@gmail.com  
 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**

Christmas Bird Count: Jerry Dalton 406-656-3656  
 jerrydalton96@gmail.com  
 Facebook: Ginny Waples 406-850-1056  
 waplesv@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

**\*\*\* 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.

**October renewal:** Beth Horn, Steve Linder, Robin Manfredi

**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  
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BILLINGS, MT  
PERMIT NO. 27



**Juvenile Red-headed  
Woodpecker**

**Say's Phoebe**



***Photos by Tracy Enterline  
taken in Columbus***