



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.

Nov - Dec 2023

VOLUME 53, NUMBER 10

Safe Passages for Wildlife with Blakeley Adkins



Wildlife Crossing - Photo by Blakeley Adkins



Elk Crossing - Photo by Blakeley Adkins

Blakeley Adkins resides in Livingston and works for the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. After 15 years of working as a wildlife technician across North America and as a grizzly bear viewing guide in British Columbia, her current role is focused on grizzly bear conflict mitigation as well as promoting wildlife crossings throughout the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Blakeley is a member of the statewide partnership *Montanans for Safe Wildlife Passage* as well as the locally led group *Yellowstone Safe Passages*, both of which are working with agency partners and community members to reduce vehicle accidents involving wildlife.

Recent data from State Farm Insurance states that 5% of all vehicle accidents nationwide involve wildlife. In Montana that number jumps to 10%, and in places like HWY 89 in the Upper Yellowstone Watershed, 50% of all reported accidents involve wildlife. Vehicle-wildlife collisions have detrimental impacts on human safety, incur a huge economic cost, and greatly influence wildlife conservation.

Join us at 7 PM on Monday, November 20th, when Blakeley will discuss this topic in depth including solutions, challenges, and what we can all do to help.



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.

Save the Date for Bob Landis: On December 18th, the Emmy Award-winning wildlife cinematographer Bob Landis will once again share his latest Yellowstone videos. He will present new footage on Yellowstone ravens with added commentary on raven research findings by John Marzluff and Doug Smith. Limited seating; the doors open at 6:30 PM.

News from the YVAS Board

On behalf of YVAS, the Board of Directors has signed on to Yellowstone River Parks Association's letter addressed to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and all Incident Command teams that responded to the Montana Rail Link derailment at Reed Point on June 24, 2023. These teams include Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Montana Rail Link, and Stillwater County Disaster and Emergency Services.

Nine other local and state environmental and outdoor recreation businesses and organizations, and concerned citizens, have signed the letter.

The YRPA letter requests that public information sessions be held to address the 440,000 pounds of molten asphalt that spilled into the river including question and answer sessions. Up to now, there has been a lack of transparency and limited information provided to the public about this disaster.

Submitted by Deb Regele

Birding Field Trips

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. Stay tuned for the 2024 Trip List!

Sat Nov 4: Yellowstone Dam Afterbay

Stan Heath, leader Meet at Rocky, 8:00 AM
Sack lunch

*** Membership Updates ***

Chapter members listed below are up for renewal. Please use the application form (include your email address) and submit, along with a check, to any Board Member or mail it to the address on the application.

Nov renewal: Carl & Virginia Kimmel, James Snyder, Judy Weddel

Oct outstanding: Steve Linder, Robin Manfredi

2023 Billings Christmas Bird Count

All Volunteers Welcome - Please Sign Up!

Save **Saturday, December 16, 2023**, on your calendar for the Billings 2023 Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

The CBC is a long-term citizen science survey started in 1900 by National Audubon, and probably conducted in Billings for the first time about 1940. Every count area is a circle of 7.5 mile radius. Ours is centered on the Billings Exxon Refinery. The extent of the circle area reaches the Huntley bridge across the Yellowstone River on HWY 312, six miles north of HWY 312 on HWY 87 N, the east edge of Zimmerman Park, Rehberg and Grand, King Ave West and South 24th St West, ¼ mile West of Norm's Island, Blue Creek Road at Briarwood Golf Club, HWY 87 S at Pryor Road, I-90 at Pryor Creek Road, and back to Huntley, including Lockwood, Billings Heights, and the close-in part of West Billings.

This year we will meet for breakfast (optional) from 7:00 – 8:00am at Perkins, 825 N 27th St, and will convene again about 5:00 pm at the Montana Audubon Center, 7026 S Billings Blvd, to compile the species observed, and to enjoy free food provided by YVAS.

Each participant will be assigned to an area with specific boundaries by the count organizer/compiler. Maps and recording sheets will be distributed at breakfast or in advance to a group leader for each area. Please return the results of the count to the Montana Audubon Center around 5:00pm on count day or to the compiler as soon as possible afterward.

Feeder watchers are also needed on count day, December 16. Birders living in the count circle can tally and report the species and numbers of birds they see at their feeders and/or from their home. You may be the lucky one to add a species to the count total. More feeder watchers would be welcome.

Please contact one of the count organizers well before December 16. Let them know you want to help.

Lois Dalton, Feeder Watcher Organizer
daltonlois921@gmail.com
406 656-3656

Jerry Dalton, Billings CBC Organizer/Compiler
jerrydalton96@gmail.com
406 656-3656
2255 Darcy Lane, Billings MT 59102

NEWS FROM MONTANA AUDUBON

Montana Audubon Center Calendar

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

Nov 4th Holiday Wreath Workshop: from 2-4pm

We'll go for a hike and learn about local conifer trees as we collect fresh boughs. Then we'll warm up with a hot drink while we assemble our wreaths. All materials will be provided. You may choose to work with friends or family members to make one wreath together to take home.

\$30/wreath for Non Members / \$25/wreath for Members

Advanced registration required- mtaudubon.org/center/adultprograms/workshopsclasses/

Nov 8th New Moon Night Hike: Wed from 7p-8:30pm

During this unique guided experience, we'll tap into our own sensory awareness and mindfulness as we experiment with our ability to navigate in the darkness. We'll also discuss how different types of animals have adapted to thrive at night.

Wear warm layers, bring a flashlight and good walking shoes.

\$10/person or \$5/members

Nov 11th 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. We hope to see you there!

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

Nov 11th 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. November Theme: Nature Ornaments workshop using natural materials!

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

Dec 9th Holiday Market: Sat, from 10am-2pm

Join us for our third annual Holiday Market at the Montana Audubon Center. We will be featuring nature-inspired gifts created by local artists and crafters. Truly unique gifts made from people in your community. We hope to see you all there!

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

News briefs from Montana Audubon

North Bridger Bison becomes First Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana!

North Bridger Bison, located in Wilsall (about 30 miles north of Livingston), is the first Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana! This means that North Bridger Bison can now use the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal, a product label that lets consumers know that these products come from bison that grazed on ranches managed for birds and biodiversity. Learn more on the MT Audubon website:

<https://mtaudubon.org/audubon-and-partners-announce-first-bird-friendly-certified-bison-ranch-in-montana/>



The Last Chance Audubon chapter based in Helena will co-host the next **Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, May 31 – June 2, 2024.**

Submitted by Lauren Smith lauren@mtaudubon.org

How 'Bout Them Bluebirds?

Each year, right around the beginning of April, the Mountain Bluebirds return to the high lands surrounding Billings: Emerald Hills in Lockwood, the Acton BLM, and my favorite place - PHIPPS PARK.

So why Phipps? Because Phipps has everything a bluebird could ever want. Open fields. Bushes. Trees. Insects. And 13 Bluebird Boxes with holes just the right size, facing just the right direction (east), and fitted with predator guards to keep out the snakes and mice.

Each year, dedicated YVAS members are ready and waiting for them at Phipps Park, with binoculars, cameras, screwdriver, cell phones, pen, and notebook at the ready.

What do they do with all that equipment? Using their binoculars, they scan the area in the vicinity of each box looking for Mountain Bluebirds, of course. When the way is clear, they use the screwdriver to loosen one screw on the front of the box and carefully drop the front down two inches – just enough to insert a cell phone and quickly photograph the contents of the box. Then the front slides back up, the screw is tightened, and the monitors quickly back off before stopping to record the contents of the box.

Is the box empty? Is there a nest in progress? Are there eggs, nestlings, or even an adult bird sitting on the nest? What bird made that nest? Hopefully, it is the small, tidy nest of a Mountain Bluebird, perhaps filled with 4-6 blue eggs. But often it is a large, messy nest filled with the distinctive big blue feathers and white eggs of the tree swallow. Repeat once a week for three months or until the nests are empty, nestlings fledged, and the nest monitors are in shape.



Bluebird photo by Will Crain



May birders in Phipps Park spotting Bluebirds. Photo by Kristin Neva

Then comes the year's summary: How did 2023 stack up?

2023 was the best year for Mountain Bluebirds at Phipps Park in the last five years. Bluebirds occupied 7 of the thirteen nest boxes producing 29 fledglings! Compare this with just ONE occupied box in 2019, and all six nestlings from that box perished. The three years in between produced, in order, 5 fledglings in 2020; 16 in 2021; 18 in 2022!

So How 'Bout Them Bluebirds? Can they make the Series again in 2024?

Submitted by Sue Weinreis

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: Nov 13, 2023 —The YVAS meeting of the Board of Directors will be held from 4pm 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: Nov 20, 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: 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 Janecek 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
 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: Deb Regele 406-200-7873 debregele@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: Doreen Hartman 406-697-0277 rdzlhman@bresnan.net
 Deb Regele 406-200-7873 debregele@gmail.com

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

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Owl Tell You Five Fun Facts About the Owl

- **Owls belong to either the “Typical or True” owl family (Strigidae) or the “Barn Owl” family (Tytonidae).** Typical owls have facial feathers that form a round pattern. The facial feathers of Barn Owls form a heart shape.
- **Owls have long, tube-shaped eyeballs.** They cannot roll their eyes and must turn their heads in order to see in different directions.
- **Eye color indicates when an owl hunts.** Owls with dark brown or black eyes are nocturnal and prefer to hunt at night. The dark eye color is evolutionary to help camouflage them in the darkness. Owls with orange eyes are crepuscular, meaning they’re active during low light periods such as dusk and dawn. Yellow-eyed owls are diurnal and hunt during the day.
- **Owls can get divorced.** About 25% of Barn Owls divorce, but only when breeding isn’t going well. When owls separate, the female leaves to find a more compatible (not better looking) mate. (She gets the “jeep” and he gets the “palace.”)
- **There are 18 species of owls in United States.** Only the Spotted Owl, Hawk Owl, Elf Owl, and Ferruginous Pygmy Owl cannot be found in Montana.

Check out these great websites for more information about owls:

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/january-february-2015/whos-who>

<https://www.owlpages.com/owls/>

<https://www.owlresearchinstitute.org/owls-1>



Great Horned Owl



Barn Owl

Submitted by Sue Weinreis