



YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

- FROM THE PRAIRIES TO THE PEAKS.

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.

MAY 2024

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DARK SKIES: LIGHT POLLUTION AND THE STORY OF MONTANA'S NIGHT SKIES



Medicine Rocks State Park Photo by Kristi Powell

YVAS hosts Humanities Montana's "Dark Skies: Light Pollution and the Story of Montana's Night Skies" with Sabre Moore on May 20th. Coffee and cookies served at 6:30 p.m. at the Mayflower Congregational Church (corner of Rehberg and Poly). The evening's program begins at 7:00 p.m. YVAS programs are free and open to the public.

The night sky has inspired generations of humanity to tell stories — some about heroes and adventures, others about life ways or the movements of seasons and animals. Today we find ourselves in a world in which dark skies are increasingly rare, especially in urban areas, due to the growing prevalence of light pollution. Join Sabre Moore, a founding board member of the Montana Chapter of the International Dark Sky association, to learn about the history and culture of the Dark Skies movement and the effects of light pollution on human, animal and environmental health. Along the way, audiences will hear about night sky stories, gain an understanding of Montana's dark sky places, including Medicine Rocks State Park, and how they can measure light pollution by phone, and join global citizen science efforts.

Sabre Moore grew up on her family's sheep and cattle ranch outside Douglas, Wyoming and is the Executive Director of the Carter County Museum in Ekalaka, Montana. She received her B.A. in History from Montana State University in 2013, her M.A. in Museum Studies & Nonprofit Management from Johns Hopkins University in 2016 and is currently a Ph.D. Candidate in American Studies at Montana State University. Her research focuses on museums and rural community vitality and how power is exercised in practices of place. Sabre is the President of the Museums Association of Montana, Chair fo Visit Southeast Montana, serves on the Montana Governor's tourism Advisory council and is on the Board of Directors for Starry Skies Montana and Carter County Chamber of Commerce. She is also an EMT for Dahl Memorial Healthcare Ambulance and a Site Steward for Medicine Rocks State Park and the BLM in Carter County.



Sabre Moore

Funding for Montana Conversations is provided by Humanities Montana through grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Montana's Cultural Trust, and private donations. We are funded in part by coal severance taxes paid based upon coal mined in Montana and deposited in Montana's cultural and aesthetic projects trust fund. For more information, please call 406-855-4181 or any YVAS Board member.

Submitted by Sue Weinreis



Chirps and Tweets



- ◆ The **last chance** to bid on one or more of the four beautifully framed engraved bird prints hand-signed by the artist Albert Earl Gilbert will be on Monday, May 20th, at our Chapter Meeting. Donated by Susan Barton in memory of John and Florence Black, they come with certificates of authenticity as well as profiles of the artist and engraver. See the March 2024 Flyer for more information. It can be found on the YVAS website under Publications' Archived Flyers or <https://yvaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/March-2024-Flyer.pdf>.
- ◆ Support YVAS and our programs by recycling your aluminum cans with us. See the YVAS website at yvaudubon.org for more information.
- ◆ The long-term seasonal Osprey Nest Monitoring Project initiated by YVAS in 2009 is well underway this April and will continue through August. Marco Restani and Deb Regele are coordinating the 40-some volunteers engaged in collecting data on nesting ospreys along the Yellowstone River in Montana from Gardiner to the North Dakota border.

Volunteers are now engaged in the delicate task of getting close enough to read osprey leg bands without disturbing the courtship and nest building of these fish-eating raptors. This usually requires a super zoom camera lens or a spotting scope.



Photo by Ginny Waples

For example, in the photo above, Ginny captured a female osprey, recently arrived from her wintering grounds in warmer climes taking a turn with nest building as the male looks on. The size and resolution of her photos make it possible to compare detailed features of the osprey to help tell one from another, even when they are unbanded.

MONTANA AUDUBON NEWS

Long-billed Curlew Surveys Are Back

The warm and sunny days of Spring are fast approaching, and with that comes the familiar “cur-lee-ee” of the Long-Billed Curlew, an icon of America’s prairies. The Long-Billed Curlew depends on Montana’s grasslands for breeding, and continues to decline across its range due to loss of this habitat to development of agriculture and infrastructure. With this decline, more research is needed to assess the health and conservation needs of the population, so we need your help surveying these charismatic shorebirds in three locations: Mission Valley, Helena Valley, and Blackfoot Valley. Two survey windows will be available for citizen scientists to participate in this effort: April 8th - May 7th, and May 8th - May 31st. Interested in participating? Email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org and visit our citizen science website for more information.



Montana Audubon Center Events

Register in advance for all events at <https://mtaudubon.org/center>

Morning Bird Stroll, May 11th, 8:30 am-10:00 am, suggested donation of \$10 for adults, \$5 for students, and free for members.

Weekend Wonders Family Program, May 11th, 10:30 am - 12:00 pm, suggested donation of \$5 per person, free for members.

Nature Nuts - toddler & me program, Every Tuesday 10:00 am- 11:00 am, suggested donation \$5 per person, free for members.

Montana Audubon Center
7026 South Billings Blvd.
Billings, MT 59101

Office: (406) 294-5099
Cell: (406) 794-8095

YVAS Birding Field Trips

Contact Carolyn Jones at carolyn684@gmail.com to be included on the Bird Trip Notification List. The people on the Notification List will receive email notification of any impromptu trips or schedule changes such as times, meeting place, or cancellations.

Check the yvaudubon.org website, Facebook page, or the YVAS Flyer for upcoming trips.

Field trips depart by car from Rocky Mountain College parking lot at Billings Studio Theater on Rimrock Road at 8AM, unless noted otherwise in the specific trip description. **DO NOT BRING PETS. PASSENGERS SHARE GAS COSTS WITH THE DRIVER.**

DATE		DESCRIPTION	LEADER
May 5	Sun	Exxon Ponds and Emerald Hills 7:30 am Rocky, OR 8:00 am Exxon Gate on Johnson Lane	Mike Weber, leader ONE MILE WALK
May 11	Sat	Broadview Ponds 8:00 a.m. Rocky	Carolyn Jones, leader
May 18	Sat	Bridger Creek 8:00 am Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde, leaders Sack lunch
May 21	Tue	Stillwater River/Woodbine Area 7:00 a.m. Rocky OR 8:00 a.m. Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus	Carolyn Jones, leader Sack Lunch Return to Billings by 5:00 p.m.
May 28	Tue	Riverfront Park: Evening Bird Stroll 5:30pm Riverfront parking lot to the right at the entrance.	Mike Weber, leader Mosquito repellent advisory
May 31	Fri	East Rosebud 7:30am Rocky	Brenda and Jeff Dunham, leaders
June 1	Sat	Yellowstone River WMA 8am Rocky	Megan O'Reilly, leader
June 8	Sat	Pompey's Pillar 7:00am Rocky OR 7:45am Pompey's Pillar parking lot	Carolyn Jones, leader



YVAS birders on Bear Canyon Rd April 13 Photo by Kristin Neva

What's Up at Montana FWP?



Osprey platform at Lake Elmo
Photos by Dana Harty

Osprey platform at Lake Elmo: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) replaced/repared the slanted osprey nesting platform at Lake Elmo on Tuesday April 9th . A big thanks to our maintenance division for taking this on and doing a beautiful job with very limited resources and to Dana Harty for the great photos of the work in progress!

Citizen Science Volunteer Opportunities

Poorwills: Common poorwills are a Species of Greatest Inventory Need (SGIN). We will be conducting roadside surveys for Common poorwills May-August and would love the help of our local citizen scientists! Surveys will be started 30 minutes after sunset and will consist of 10 stops, at least 1 mile apart. At each stop there will be both passive and active surveying for a total of 6 minutes per stop. We will have more details on available survey routes, etc... in the coming weeks. The goal of these surveys is to generate more information on this species to assess distribution and status. Please reach out to MFWP biologist Megan O'Reilly at moreilly@mt.gov, 406-794-6154 for more information or to sign up to help with these surveys.



© Kristi DuBois; 2004
Common Poorwill Photo by Kristi DuBois



Pinyon Jays: MFWP and partners are conducting statewide surveys on Pinyon Jays (PIJA) through the end of April. Currently, Montana Natural Heritage Program has 11 breeding records for PIJA in the state, and these records cover a wide geographic range. To effectively conduct planned 2025 pedestrian surveys, we will spend 2024 refining our knowledge of what habitats PIJA are using in Montana, and increasing the occurrence data for the species. More volunteer opportunities to come!



© Tyler Pockette
Pinyon Jay Photo by Tyler Rockette

Submitted by Megan O'Reilly, Wildlife Biologist at MFWP

Pryor Mountains Field Trip

A sizeable group turned up on April 13th by the Jim Bridger statue to follow Stan Heath and Susan Hovde into the Pryor's in search of the bird species that thrive in the dry sagebrush steppe. While waiting for the cars to arrive—we were 15 birdwatchers altogether—Susan described a strange encounter three days earlier with a bird in Red Lodge whose song she mistook for the metallic whine of a machine shop. The source of the sound was a beautiful Varied Thrush, totally out of his usual Northwest range.

The trip proceeded like clockwork with the Sagebrush Sparrow and Sage Thrasher found on Bear Canyon Road singing on the golden dried flowers of the Big Sage. The next stop, now trailing an Avian Ranger detail, turned up a pair of Sage Grouse, a Horned Lark and Mountain Plovers! On to Railbed Road, where we stopped at a



Varied Thrush Photo by Susan Hovde

Pryor Mountains Field Trip *continued from Page 4*

pond to observe several species of waterfowl and a solitary Sandhill Crane before moving on to view the beautifully camouflaged Great Horned Owl and her chick in a distant tree.

Traveling through the giant windmills of the Pryor Mountain Wind Farm, we pondered the problem of bird collisions and admired the Chugwater formation coloring the hills a deep red. Finally, we arrived at the barren pasture, home to acres of prairie dogs, by the X-X Ranch. There might have been a burrowing owl out there, but the simmering heat waves hinted that our excursion was over for the day.



Sage Thrasher Photo by Will Crain

Submitted by Kristin Neva

YVAS brings people and birds together

In 1989, I subscribed to Audubon Magazine because I liked the nature pictures. When someone from the local YVAS chapter called and invited me to a meeting, I had no idea that it would launch a lifetime of birding adventures. The group “took me under their wing” and taught me so much. YVAS field trips were where I learned about birds and met some lifelong friends.

I was reminded of this when I brought my 17-year-old grand-nephew on the Pryor trip last Saturday. He was visiting from Minnesota and had never been birding before. It was fun to watch his interest gain momentum as we saw new birds. It was like a treasure hunt. He was amazed when he looked through a scope and saw the camouflaged Great Horned Owl sitting on her nest. With his borrowed binoculars, he helped us spot the Mountain Plover running across a hill.

Speaking of the Mountain Plover, I couldn’t remember if I had seen one before. So, I looked back in my tattered Nat Geo field guide where I keep my life list. Low and behold, on Earth Day, April 22nd, 1990, Mike Weber, Doug Lay, Kris Decker, and I saw our very first Mountain Plover! The bird we saw on



Sagebrush Sparrow Photo by Will Crain



Mountain Plover Photo by Will Crain

Saturday was our second. I know this because I have kept my birding journals all these years. Although we now keep lists on eBird and other apps, I am so thankful for those old paper copies of lists from three decades ago. And I am so grateful for the good folks who climb in cars, tote their scopes, and share their passion and love for birds with each other and with the “newbies” that have the good fortune to tag along.

Submitted by Cathy (Marble) Breeding

Will’s two cents

I was jazzed up for this adventure ~ it has been a long year since my last field trip with YVAS ~ even though the Avian Rangers are birding 24/7 to be sure.

Another chance to photo the illusive MOPL i.e. Mountain Plover ~ Our vehicle had some adventures to clear before we could catch up because we had a new birder on board, 17-year-old Silas on his first birding adventure. Cathy’s grandnephew was smitten I do believe with this lust for birds; his first trip and we score a Mountain Plover...does not get sweeter than this.

Submitted by Will Crain

Winter Birding on a Spring Day (Big Lake Field Trip)

March 24th dawned cold, windy and snowy. I was surprised that anyone showed up because of the 19 degree blustery day, but 5 of us made the icy drive to Molt. Near the Molt grain elevator we watched a large flock of redwing blackbirds feeding on spilled grain. The arctic conditions did not spoil the redwing's enthusiasm, as they were all singing, which buoyed our group's spirits.

Up the road near a shelterbelt we saw 3 gray partridge, they were chasing each other through the stubble calling frequently, as if it was some sort of courtship. Later that day we saw 2 other pairs of gray partridge near other shelterbelts.

The second shelterbelt we were surprised to see a pair of ferruginous hawks and also a member of our party saw an owl but we could not identify it. The snowy fields forced numerous horned larks to the roadsides where we got close looks at these handsome larks. One close by on a fencepost had its horns poking up from its head. From this fencepost a nearby pond held mallards, a pintail and on the shore was a pair of sandhill cranes. Above a nearby stubble field a Rough-legged hawk was slowly circling in search of prey.



Horned Lark Photo by Ginny Waples



Mike and Cathy Photo by Ginny Waples

Upon reaching the NE entrance to Big Lake about one-half of it was still iced over. Getting out of the cars to set up our scopes spooked most of the nearby waterfowl. But we were able to dial in our scopes and see some new ducks: handsome canvasbacks, some green-winged teal, a smattering of common goldeneye, American widgeon and more pintails hugging the shoreline. A lone California Gull and Northern Harrier winged overhead. We saw a block of ice floating in the water, that all of a sudden sprouted a long and slender neck, with an oval head with a black bill. A moment of terror seized the group.... It was none other than Big Lake's own version of Nessie! I was mad at myself, as I left my field guide to mythical beasts at home. But someone spoiled the moment by declaring that Nessie was instead a Tundra Swan that was trying to keep warm by holding its head underwater. I was thinking it was feeding, but did not want to spoil the birder's own theory of why swans hold their breath underwater.

We drove around to the intake area of Big Lake and saw seven more Tundra swans, and oddly all of them heads above water. We then drove the short distance and parked near the island.

There was a frenzy of gull activity around the island of both ring-billed and California Gulls. We added redheads, gadwalls and Northern shovelers to our duck list. A few killdeer picked along the shoreline. A chorus of Western Meadowlark songs cut through the sideways blowing flurries, and not that we could see the meadowlarks, but their melodies were a sweet salve to our frostbitten ears.

We spotted a flock of 14 snow geese about 100 yards out. Most of the snow geese heads were stained with orange, and we surmised the staining was due to the mineral content of the water they were feeding in. They geese took off and circled above a fallow field a few times before landing to feed. We got great looks and these handsome birds.

We continued on our drive around Big Lake and saw a Golden Eagle perched on a hill. The SE section of the Lake held another 25 swans. There were 5 Bald Eagles, 3 perched along the ice and a couple more soaring. One airborne eagle was being harassed by a rough-legged hawk.

Despite being cold to the bone, it was exhilarating to see the new migrants.



Snow Geese Photo by Ginny Waples

Submitted by Mike Weber

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: May 13, 2024 —The YVAS meeting of the Board of Directors will be held from 4pm to 6pm. Board of Directors meetings are held the second Monday of the month. Board meetings are open to all members.

In-Person Program: May 20, 2024. 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

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: Deb Regele 406-200-7873
debregele@gmail.com
Mt Bluebird Habitat Project: Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449
carolyn684@gmail.com, and
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

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

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***** Membership Updates *****

In an effort to keep our members advised of their membership status, members within the renewal period will be printed at the back of each Flyer. A renewal reminder will also be sent by email or USPS. YVAS now has a 60-day grace period for renewals.

Your memberships help to provide for speakers at YVAS monthly meetings, the YVAS newsletter the *Flyer*, bird studies and conservation efforts. YVAS is affiliated with the National Audubon Society. We do not share your membership information including your address, phone or email address with any other organization.



Yellow-rumped Warbler Photo by Will Crain

Memberships up for renewal at the end of May are Patricia Crisp, Jeff DiBenedetto, Gwen Emmerson, Tracy Enterline, David Kennedy, Sandy Kunkel, June Luptak, and Marco Restani.



Memberships within the grace period Peggy Arnold, Angus & Margie Fulton, Trenay Hart, Gordon & Susan Hills and Pam Jones.

If you have any questions regarding your membership, please contact the Membership Administrator (Deb) at YVAS.membership.data@gmail.com or 406-200-7873.