



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.

JUNE - JULY 2024

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Broadview Pond: It's not (just) the destination, it's the journey



Broadview Pond birders Photo by Ginny Waples

According to Google Maps, Broadview Pond is 30 miles from the RMC parking lot. On Saturday, May 11th, YVAS field trippers demonstrated that birders can get there in 4 1/2 hours on a good day. And it was a very good day.

Susan Hovde and Stan Heath volunteered to lead our car caravan northward on a beautiful, sunny morning. The first stops were at two nameless ponds near the highway. A flock of American Avocets were standing in the first and a variety of waterfowl floated in the second pond, while a pair of coyotes stalked past an adjacent prairie dog town. A couple of Red-necked Phalaropes mingling with the Wilson's were declared a highlight. This turned out to be the first of many highlights.

After that promising start, we abandoned the paved road and stopped at a respectful distance from a Golden Eagle nest. A fluffy, white eaglet was visible in the nest while an adult Golden could be seen flying over the fields in the distance. A Green-tailed Towhee managed to compete for the eagle-watchers' attention by his boldness and proximity. We weren't far down the back roads before we began seeing Burrowing Owls. By the end of the trip, we had passed multiple Burrowing Owl colonies--I have never seen so many owls in a single day!

Marbled Godwits were easily viewed close to the side of the gravel road and they provided a delightful spectacle, both on the ground and calling in the air. Another stop provided us with the pleasure of listening to the buzzing calls of Grasshopper Sparrows in a field. You've got to love a sandpiper who avoids wetlands and travels from South America to summer in Montana, so coming upon Upland Sandpipers further down the road was a treat.

Of course, we also enjoyed the usual suspects--Western Meadowlarks, Long-Billed Curlews, Vesper Sparrows, etc. Susan hoped to get a closer look at the Whimbrels, which appeared to have landed a tantalizing distance away. In search of a back road that might bring us to them, we came upon more Burrowing Owls, a flock of plastic Pink Flamingos and, eventually...Broadview Pond!

The Pond hosted a good variety of birds, from waterfowl to denizens of the cattails and willows. Our view of a couple of Yellowthroats was remarkably good for a bird that is often heard but difficult to see, and a Yellow-rumped Warbler was FOY for me. The Yellow-headed Blackbirds were impossible to ignore. I gave up on list-making at Broadview Pond, but Susan Hovde did submit some sightings to eBird for those who might want more details about the destination.



Marbled Godwit Photo by Ginny Waples

Submitted by Ginny Waples



Chirps and Tweets



- ◆ Summer Break has started! The next YVAS in-person meeting will be held on Sept 16th at the Mayflower Church. Doors open at 6:30pm and the program starts at 7pm.
- ◆ For the last couple of months, dozens of YVAS Osprey nest monitors have been back in the field monitoring their assigned nests and recording data on nesting Ospreys. Some of these volunteers have been with the Osprey Nest Monitoring Project since its beginning in 2009. The Osprey banding and study work is now in its 13 th year. Under the guidance and expertise of Dr. Marco Restani, nest monitors carefully watch for the incubation and hatch dates. Since there is a narrow window for banding nestlings, these important dates aid Marco in determining when he can safely do so. Many, many thanks goes out to these YVAS' volunteers!
- ◆ Support YVAS and our programs this summer by recycling your aluminum cans with us. See the YVAS website at yvaudubon.org for more information.

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Elects New Leadership

The Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society (YVAS) is pleased to announce the results of its annual elections, held during the May 20th member meeting.

Officers and Board Members

President: Steve McConnell

Secretary: Susan Weinreis (re-elected)

Treasurer: Pam Pipal (re-elected)

Board Members:

Carolyn Jones (re-elected, term 2024-2026)

Deb Regele (re-elected, term 2024-2026)

Cathy Breeding (new member, term 2024-2026)

Continuing Board Members:

Kristin Neva (term 2023-2025)

Bruce Waage (term 2023-2025)

YVAS welcomes Steve McConnell as the incoming President and Cathy Breeding as a new board member. We extend our gratitude to all members for their continued dedication and participation in the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society.

Montana Audubon Center Events

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

Get ready for a summer full of exploration and adventure!

Learn more about these and other activities on our website: mtaudubon.org/center

Programs:

- Nature Nuts - toddler & me program, Every Tuesday 10:00 am- 11:00 am, suggested donation \$5 per person, free for members.
- Weekend Wonders Family Program, June 8th , 10:30 am - 12:00 pm, suggested donation of \$5 per person, free for members.
- Morning Bird Stroll, June 8th, 8:30 am-10:00 am, suggested donation of \$10 for adults, \$5 for students, and free for members.
- Evening Explorations: 1st Tuesday (June-August) 4 pm- 7 pm, Explore the grounds with a nature knapsack as your guide, materials and activities included, canoe rentals (\$10 / canoe - seats up to 4 adults, Free for Center members), ask a naturalist table with field guides and binoculars to borrow.
- Herpetology Hunt: Date TBD 8pm-9:30pm. Join naturalists for a frog-filled and toad-ally exciting adventure searching for reptiles and amphibians. Learn about our often misunderstood local slick and scaled-skinned creatures before heading outside in search of them. Bring your friends and family for this amazing outside adventure! (Non-Members: \$10 / Individual, \$25 / Family, Members: \$5 / Individual, \$10/ Family)

Spring 2024 Climate Watch Surveys

Audubon's Climate Watch takes place from May 15 to June 15.

This program involves participants conducting twelve short point count surveys for six bird species: the Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pygmy Nuthatch, Mountain Bluebird, Western Bluebird, and Spotted Towhee.

Interested in participating? Email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org.

Learn more on Montana Audubon Citizen Science website: <https://www.montanabirdsurveys.com/climate-watch.html>

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.

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
June 11	Tue	Pryor Mountain, Sage Creek 7:30am Rocky OR 8:30am Bridger Park south end of Main St in Bridger	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde, leaders Sack lunch
June 15	Sat	Red Lodge area 7am Rocky OR 8:15am Red Lodge Town Pump	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde, leaders Sack lunch
June 22	Sat	Bear Canyon 6:30am Rocky OR 7:30am Bridger Park south end of Main St in Bridger	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde, leaders Sack lunch
June 29	Sat	Grant Marsh 8am Love's truck stop Hwy 47 just off I90 Hardin	Megan O'Reilly, leader
Aug 3	Sat	Shorebirds, Hawks, Prairie birds	Mike Weber, leader
Aug 17	Sat	Bridger Creek 8am Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus	Susan Hovde and Stan Heath Sack Lunch



Golden Eagle Photo by Ginny Waples



Bridger Creek birders Photo by Dorothy Bartlett

A Day of Firsts at Exxon Ponds May 5th

May 5th is the day that I associate with the return of the Yellow Warbler, a day of expectation, a day that usually marks the arrival of this colorful and feisty warbler. And that soon the woods will be brimming with their song and ardent courtship and territorial chases and fights. (Note that the “firsts” described are the author’s first of the year birds.)

Exxon Ponds is a varied habitat of grassy meadows, thickets of almost impenetrable Russian Olive, cattail rimmed ponds and cottonwood riparian. It is bordered on the west by the Yellowstone River.



YVAS birders at Exxon Ponds Photo from Bob Mackin

About 15 birders showed up with the youngest, a 1-year-old girl strapped into her mother’s baby backpack. The bubbling song of a House Wren just inside the Exxon gate was the first first of the year. It took a while to spot this secretive bird. We also had a quick flyover of a Merlin that was not much more than a blur to most. It seemed that not more than a few minutes went by when we were serenaded by the lovely song sparrow melodies of many individuals.

It took us a while to ID a strange sparrow sitting atop a tree. This prairie bird seemed out of place, but I imagined this sparrow flew throughout the night and as dawn hit, it tumbled out of the sky to rest at this place. How many more miles would this Vesper Sparrow have to fly before it returned to its natal home to breed?

And I suppose that goes for many of the birds we encountered this early May bird stroll. Overhead was the call of an Upland Sandpiper; another first. When did it leave its wintering home in the Southern Cone? How many miles did this bird fly last night? Was it going to stay in Montana to breed, or go to Alaska or Northern Canada?

We saw a good variety of waterfowl such as Ruddy Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Shovelers, Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, Wood Ducks, American Widgeon, Western and Pied-billed Grebes and Double-crested Cormorants. A Great Blue Heron stalked the shoreline of the largest pond.

Near the terminus of the southern pond trail, we accidentally flushed a Sandhill Crane from its nest. It flew around with its mate trumpeting loudly until we turned tail and left the area. In the nest were two cream-colored eggs, with faint brown spots. Nearby was a trio of firsts, male Brown-headed Cowbirds. A Spotted Towhee briefly paused on an olive branch, another first. Other notable songbirds were Common Yellowthroats, American Goldfinch, Cedar Waxwings and a Chipping Sparrow. Near the river was a nice fall-out of Yellow-rumped Warblers of both Myrtle and Audubon’s subspecies. A number were singing. Along the Yellowstone a lone Caspian Tern was cruising up and down the river hunting for fish. A Spotted Sandpiper flew along the bank. We picked up Barn and Rough-winged Swallows.

The walk back was punctuated with an emphatic bird song, “sweet sweet sweet, you’re so sweet.” My heart leapt when I recognized the song of a Yellow Warbler. We scanned the trees for a bit before Jerry Dalton found him and we got great looks at this bright lemony-colored bird. This bird was the first of the year for all in attendance. As we drove away after a fine morning birding there was another first of the year, a dapper Western Kingbird. Around 41 species were seen or heard on the bird walk.

Submitted by Mike Weber

Bridger Creek May 18th

Stan Heath led a merry band of a dozen birders out to Bridger Creek Road after meeting up at Itch-Ke-Pe park in Columbus at 8:00am. The 40-mile loop from though Absarokee, up the Stillwater River Road to Bridger Creek gave us Ospreys, Turkey Vulture, a Red-tailed Hawk, and Sandhill Cranes. The snow covered Beartooth Mountains were a stunning backdrop for a Bobolink on a wire, two Long Billed Curlew in a field, and a Wilson's Snipe on a fence post right next to the road. The Bridger Creek area was startlingly quiet, but we did see a Clark's Nutcracker, Common Yellowthroat, and lots of Eastern Kingbirds. One pull-out into the Ponderosas yielded the elusive Hammond's Flycatcher. We were treated to a show of Lazuli Buntings and a Black-headed Grosbeak at a friendly rancher's feeders. In the end, we logged in over 40 species and had a wonderful day of birding and camaraderie.

Submitted by Cathy Breeding



Wilson's Snipe Photo by Dorothy Bartlett



Great Horned Owl Photo by Dorothy Bartlett



Green-tailed Towhee Photo by Dorothy Bartlett

Up the Stillwater to Woodbine

Six of us gathered May 21 at Itch-Ke-Pe Park at 8am, determined to brave the cold and possibly snowy weather that was predicted. Turned out that we were blessed with chilly, but beautiful weather all day. We listened to Yellow Warblers and numerous Starlings while we funneled into 3 cars. Ruth Vanderhorst graciously agreed to lead the way, while Stan brought Sue Weinreis and myself in his car, and the Bartlett's brought up the rear. Our first stop, Fireman's Point, yielded a stridently singing Black-headed Grosbeak, and a lovely Gray Catbird along with all the usual suspects. Just out of Absarokee we spied a Bobolink on a fence post and Sandhill Cranes along with tons of deer in the fields. The Cliff Swallow fishing access yielded its namesake birds peeking out of their mud nests along the cliffs. We were thrilled to watch an American Dipper hunting and feeding its baby who was tucked into a hollow along the river's edge.

Our best stop of the day was at Castle Rock fishing access. It was teeming with birds. We all went in different directions, there was so much to see. Sue and I were watching a Northern Flicker pick its way along the road when we were startled by a brilliant blue bird. No, not a Bluebird... a BLUE bird! He gave us time to really look at him and we realized that it was an Indigo Bunting. He even had his lady friend with him. Everyone ended up getting great looks at him and he was definitely the highlight of the day. This spot also featured several Calliope Hummingbirds buzzing around our heads.

We ate our lunch at Woodbine Campground, where we were serenaded by Ruby-crowned Kinglets, an Ovenbird, and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Although we didn't see or hear the elusive Golden-crowned Kinglet, we did get a good look at the Hammond's Flycatcher. All-in-all, a wonderful day with great people and logging in about 50 bird species. Many thanks to Ruth and Stan for their excellent leadership.

Submitted by Cathy Breeding



Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*

Photo by Susan Hovde posted to Cornell Lab's eBird ML619452881 on May 22, 2024 from Castle Rock Fishing Access on the Stillwater River.

Observation details:

Bright male feeding with loose flock of Siskin, Chipping sparrow and a few Lazuli. Right near entrance to fishing access. Found yesterday by Yellowstone Valley Audubon and refound today.

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: August 12, 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: Sept 16, 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: Steve McConnell 509-868-8277 smc571@msn.com
Vice President: Vacant
Secretary: Sue Weinreis 406-855-4181 granpeak47@gmail.com
Treasurer: Pam Pipal 406-245-4517 ppipal@charter.net

Board Members

Cathy Breeding 406-371-6040 catbyrd15@gmail.com
Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449 carolyn684@gmail.com
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



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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.

Memberships for renewal at the end of **June** are Rita Cetrone, Nancy & Dale Detrick, Brenda & Jeff Dunham, Susan Hovde, Jenny Koffler, Zelie Lorenzana, Carol Pearson, Jim & Jean Sells and Steve Yungblut.

Membership for renewal at the end of **July** is Linda Wham.

Memberships within the grace period are Patricia Crisp, Jeff DiBenedetto, Gwen Emmerson, Tracy Enterline, Sandy Kunkel, June Luptak and Gordon & Susan Hills.

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

