



*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.*

AUGUST 2024

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## 'Ice Cream Birds' on a Beautiful Day

June 15 - Our day of excellent birding started on Brophy Road in Red Lodge where we garnered a total of twenty-one species – almost all of them Ice Cream Birds, a “Norm Schoenthal” term for not- your-average-run-of-the-mill bird. Everyone got good glimpses of the Yellow-breasted Chat, Gray Catbird, Spotted Towhee, several Cedar Waxwings, the Bullocks Oriole glowing orange, and the neon blue of the Lazuli Bunting. Western Wood-Pewees and a Common Yellowthroat were heard. Yellow Warblers and Western Meadowlarks were calling from every direction, reminding us why we love spring in Montana. We sighted an American Kestrel, an Eastern Kingbird, a Brewer’s Blackbird, and American Goldfinches. Song and Vesper Sparrows were also spotted, as well as the usual suspects.



Black Bear cubs Photo by Ginny Waples



Red-tailed Hawk nestlings  
Photo by Ginny Waples

It was here on Brophy Road where we spotted the “BEST BIRD OF THE DAY,” two small black bear cubs in a tree. We stood watching them (and they, watching us!) for almost ten minutes, speculating where Mama Bear might be. She had to be close – eventually the cubs got the “high-sign” and clambered down.

Next, we hiked up Palisades Campground Road, where we added a Dusky Flycatcher, Warbling Vireos, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Western Tanager, Mountain Bluebird, Ruby-Crowned Kinglet, Mountain Chickadee, and Tree Swallows to our list. Suddenly we heard Ovenbirds calling from every direction! We spread out and quietly stalked our prey. Soon we were rewarded with views of the elusive bird!

Along the way from here to there, someone spotted a Red-tailed Hawk’s

nest with at least four nestlings. One was sitting high; the others were in various positions that can only be described as “hunkering.”

We lunched while feeder watching at Susan Hovde’s backyard feeders in Red Lodge. We were reluctant to call it a day, so Susan suggested that we take a quick look for Bobolinks. We got quick looks at Bobolinks in flight, but no good looks – until everyone was clearing out for home...then suddenly...Bobolinks everywhere! A fine end to a fine day and a HUGE THANK YOU to our two wonderful guides, Stan Heath and Susan Hovde.

*Submitted by Sue Weinreis*



Bobolink Photo by Will Crain  
from 2016 in Roberts MT  
(ML30457101)



## Chirps and Tweets



- ♦ Summer Break continues! 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.
- ♦ Many of you already know of the American Ornithological Society's decision to rename the English names of bird species, specifically those named after people. This will affect 70-80 bird species in North America. The process started this year. "As scientists, we work to eliminate bias in science. But there has been historic bias in how birds are named, and who might have a bird named in their honor," said Judith Scarl, Ph.D., AOS Executive Director and CEO. For more information, check the linked [AOS News Release](#) and the [NPR News Article](#) about the change of bird names.
- ♦ Support YVAS and our programs this summer by recycling your aluminum cans with us. See the YVAS website at [yvaudubon.org](http://yvaudubon.org) for more information.

## Ten Fun Facts about Osprey

1. Through the years, the Osprey has been called Sea Hawk, River Hawk, Fish Hawk, Fish Eagle, and White-headed Osprey.
2. The collective noun for Osprey is a Duet.
3. Osprey toes have barbs called "spicules," which help them hang onto a slippery fish.
4. Ospreys rotate their prey headfirst while carrying to improve their aerodynamics.
5. Ospreys are one of only five bird species found on every continent except Antarctica.
6. Ospreys have scaly legs, like a goalkeeper's padded gloves, which help them hold onto their prey.
7. Ospreys have eight different vocalizations to express feelings like excitement, alarm, and requests for food.
8. Ospreys can adjust their dive angle to account for the distortion of fish in water.
9. Ospreys can close their noses enabling them to dive into the water for fish.
10. Ospreys have a special transparent eyelid like a contact lens that protects their eyes underwater.

*Submitted by Sue Weinreis*

## 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](http://mtaudubon.org/center) And be sure to save the date Sept 14 for Montana Audubon's fund raiser featuring a dinner by Yellowstone Kelly's, live music from Brian Murphy, an open bar, live auctions, and a quarter beef raffle prize!

### 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, Aug 10th , 10:30 am - 12:00 pm, suggested donation of \$5 per person, free for members.
- Morning Bird Stroll, Aug 10th, 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. Bring your friends and family for this amazing outside adventure! (Non-Members: \$10 / Individual, \$25 / Family, Members: \$5 / Individual, \$10/ Family)



\$85/person; \$600/table (seats 8) | childcare available

Montana Audubon Center's annual fundraising gala



## YVAS Birding Field Trips

Contact Carolyn Jones at [carolyn684@gmail.com](mailto: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](http://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
Aug 3	Sat	Shorebirds, Hawks, Prairie birds 8am Rocky	Mike Weber, leader Sack lunch
Aug 17	Sat	Bridger Creek 8am Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus	Susan Hovde and Stan Heath, leaders Sack Lunch
Sep 13-15		Malta and Bowdoin NWR	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde, leaders
Sep 21	Sat	Red Lodge area Hawk Watch <b>*TO BE CONFIRMED*</b> 8:00 am in Red Lodge Town Pump Conoco C-Store	Leader TBA High clearance vehicles required
Nov 2	Sat	Yellowtail Dam Afterbay 8am Rocky	Ron Kuhler, leader Sack lunch
Dec 14	Sat	Christmas Bird Count	Jerry Dalton, leader
Jan 1	Wed	Yellowtail Dam Afterbay – Annual New Year's trip 8am Rocky	Ron Kuhler, leader Sack lunch
Jan 5	Sun	Mid-Winter Eagle Count	Mike Weber, leader Sack lunch



Field Sparrow Photo by Ginny Waples

### Yellowstone WMA Trip

From the June 1st field trip to Yellowstone WMA led by Megan O'Reilly:

When Merlin identified an unfamiliar song as Field Sparrow, we wanted to get a good look at the bird to verify. It was coded as uncommon and would be a lifer for at least one of us. Fortunately, he was a loud and persistent singer. So persistent, it seemed that by simply scrambling up a steep hill, I could get a photo. The pursuit turned out to be a twofer--two lifers for me, that is, because the summit of the hill also provided a view of a Red-headed Woodpecker perched on a power pole.

*Submitted by Ginny Waples*

## Pryor Mountain Birding - June 11, 2024



Blue Grosbeak Photo by Linda Wham

It was a beautiful sunny day for the eight birders who participated in the Pryor Mountain field trip lead by Susan Hovde and Stan Heath. At the start of the trip in Bridger we saw a Nighthawk resting in a tree; most of us had only seen them flying. Blue Jays were also seen at this location. We drove off on our quest to find the Blue Grosbeak. After three stops we finally we saw two Blue Grosbeaks, very clearly on a telephone wire and in the trees. The day was off to a fantastic start. The cars worked their way to Sage Creek campground, an arduous road with ruts and dumps. We stopped multiple times to view different birds in the area including swallows, Mountain Bluebird, White-throated Swifts, numerous Calliope hummingbirds, Veery, sparrows, and Bullock's Orioles. A Sharp-shinned and Red-tailed Hawk were observed flying.

Lunch stop was at the Sage Creek Campground and the greenery of the Pryors was at its finest. We motored up to Crooked Creek Road and stopped to walk up several small trails and saw and heard Warbling Vireos, Western Wood-Pewees, Chipping Sparrows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a splendid view of an Ovenbird, Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, Mountain Chickadees, Gray Catbirds, and a Western Tanager.



Ovenbird Photo by Linda Wham

Racing back to Bridger on Gyp Springs Road, we were thrilled to spot a family of Mountain Plovers: a male, female, and two chicks! This was a particularly exciting encounter, as I had personally tried numerous times to see this species, and many birders had never seen chicks in this area. This sighting added a lifer to my bird list, making this outing even more memorable. With over 50 bird species seen and heard, and a spectacularly diverse landscape, the Pryor Mountain trip was truly a highlight of spring birding out of Billings.



Mountain Plover chick  
Photo by Linda Wham

*Submitted by Linda Wham*

## Osprey Banding Day



Marco Restani banding osprey nestlings  
Photo by Ginny Waples

During July 2024, Marco Restani has banded 58 young ospreys as part of the long-term YVAS study of osprey populations nesting along the Yellowstone River Valley. More than 900 ospreys have been banded over a period of 10 years, enabling the tracking of breeding sites and dispersal by researchers and volunteer monitors.

Banding in 2024 was made possible through the in-kind support of Beartooth Electric Cooperative, NorthWestern Energy, Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative, and Yellowstone Valley Tree Surgeons.

In the photo, Marco applies identification leg bands to prostrate nestling #1. Unlike most nestlings, #2 is not lying down and assumes a defensive posture. The adult osprey usually fly off the nest as the cherry picker arrives, but they return once the banding has been completed and the truck departs.

## Custer Montana Breeding Bird Survey

Once upon a time, two guys, bird aficionados to be sure, acquired the opportunity to take on a Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). There are dozens of routes over Montana, with only a handful of routes not claimed. Currently we do the Custer BBS and another that starts near Big Lake in Stillwater County. The evidence on this route is collected in a specific manner: First, the routes start before the crack of dawn, exactly one-half hour before sunrise. One person is the data magnet, that'd be Captain Michael Weber, a 'true' bird whisperer. I swear he hears shooting stars, perhaps even ghosts. I log the species in the paperwork provided; then onto the next stop, half a mile down the road where Ranger Mike gets out and listens and watches for 3 minutes.

Proving I'm handy, not just along for the ride, keeping time on my device, and listening for 3 minutes...for the *bird whisperer* to produce some Data for this secretary, Major Will, if you will, to score for some other ranking Data Collector to arrange into some symphony of who's here and who's not, i.e., the Citizen Scientists contributing to chart the flow of birds who've made their way North or those who are the real "snow birds" and eke out a Winter existence.

As the listener hears like no other, a drama on my part ensues, and I wonder aloud will we see that elusive Dickcissel or not? Seriously folks, a bird named Dickcissel, I wanna see and Enquiring Minds as well.

It's Saturday 06.21.2024, 04:15 the alarm sounds; we're hardly awake as a thunderstorm raged and rained mightily on our tent for half the night, but not on our parade!

We leave our campsite nestled in the foothills of Custer, Montana, for our starting mark a few miles down a two-lane highway in the dark. We're in possible Dickcissel country. We have 50 stops, one every 1/2 mile for twenty-five miles. That's the length of all BBS routes.

Back to the reason we're here...and here we are at stop #3 of 50 and what did he hear? OMG OMG OMG Mike says he heard the call of the Dickcissel! Mike, don't be ...he says, "I'm not, I'm not!" Three minutes are up, time to motate to the 4th stop in the average BBS 5-hour survey/day. That's it! I get a 'sound bite' ... it's dark! Only 47 more stops to go. This is still in the predawn and birds are just silhouettes.

Around 10:00 AM we are finished with the route. The Captain has a plan: we're going right back where we started and the Dickcissel spoke to us! Well not directly to



Dickcissel male Photo by Jan Thom 27 Jun 2024

me cause I gave up my hearing so you could be free...They are but feathered jewels to me and capturing 'them' on disk is the ticket out of PTSD for me.

We arrive back at square one...Mike has exited the BBS mobile. I already have 'buck fever' thinking I'll get a rare shot at this Rare Bird ...watching Mike like a hawk ... look no more my head tells me he's heard another or same Dickcissel...then, there Mike with vision to match his hearing, points one out in the oddly dim lit day, on a slender metal post. The wind isn't helping, it's hot and that'll work for me to get a chance at a rather elusive bird who doesn't sit well for the cameraperson but doesn't like flying in the heat...my shutter is clicking away in this Nikon D3300, but I'm not getting focused, Mike is trying to be a steady brick wall for me. I know I'm getting at least documentation to ascertain this rare bird (for Montana) has been seen, thanks to brick walls.

Although my photos left a lot to be desired, our wonderful neighborhood of birding telegraphed the precise location of the gorgeous Dickcissel...and in a blink of a well-placed shutterbug, another birder had a perfect capture of one dandy Dickcissel.

*Submitted by Will Crain*

The Dickcissel is classified in the **Cardinalidae** family on the basis of its DNA. The Merlin app characterizes this bird as a "chunky grassland bunting colored like a miniature meadowlark." Normal breeding distribution includes a piece of Eastern Montana, but they are more likely to be found in the Central states.

*Added by K.Neva*



## Bear Canyon Field Trip

Highlights of our June 22 trip lead by Stan Heath and Susan Hovde included a pair of Blue Grosbeaks, certainly a lifer for me, two resting Nighthawks and one in flight, White-throated Swifts in Bear Canyon, the calls of the Canyon Wrens, and a Calliope Hummingbird on her nest. Visiting photographer Daria Huxley provided stunning photos.

We also reminisced about surviving a sudden hailstorm and flash flood in last year's field trip. Three snakes startled us on this trip, one was a rattler. A giant blue insect was identified as an Elm Sawfly.

*Submitted by Kristin Neva*



Blue Grosbeak and Western Kingbird Photo by Daria Huxley



Brown Thrasher Photo by Daria Huxley



Calliope Hummingbird Photo by Daria Huxley



Elm Sawfly Photo by Daria Huxley



Common Nighthawk Photo by Daria Huxley



Pryor Mountain Road Photo by Daria Huxley

## YVAS MEETINGS &amp; 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



**YELLOWSTONE VALLEY  
AUDUBON FLYER**

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

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Western Kingbird on Pryor Mountain Rd  
Calliope on nest in Bear Canyon  
Photos by Daria Huxley

The Calliope Hummingbird is named after **Calliope**, the ancient Greek muse of eloquence and epic poetry, who is said to have inspired Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Orpheus is her son.

**\*\*\* 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.

August reminders: Mary & Bob Francis, Steve McConnell and Cindy Meccage.

July reminders: Linda Wham.

June reminders: Zelig Lorenzana.

May reminders: Patricia Crisp, Gwen Emmerson, Tracy Enterline, Sandy Kunkel and Gail Speck.

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

