



# 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.*

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## Jim Petek Nature Photography



Common Yellowthroat Photo by Jim Petek

Jim Petek became interested in nature photography 50 years ago. A retired, heavy equipment operator by trade, he is a self-taught amateur who honed his craft by visiting National Wildlife Refuges throughout Montana and the western US pursuing his passion – birds. His images have appeared in numerous magazines and calendars, one of which was chosen by the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History in 1993 to be included in a 3-year traveling exhibit titled “Nature Photography: A Current Perspective.”

His striking photo of Bohemian Waxwings won the “Composition and Form” category in the prestigious, international BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. He traveled to London to receive the award in 2000. Originally from Billings, he is a longtime resident of Red Lodge where you might see him on local outings with camera in hand.

Join us for the evening YVAS program on November 18th at the Mayflower Church for a captivating presentation of Jim’s wildlife photos. Doors open at 6:30PM.

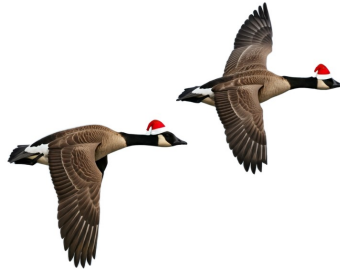
*Submitted by Marco Restani*

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.



Short-eared Owl Photo by Jim Petek

## 2024 Billings Christmas Bird Count



Mark Saturday, December 14, 2024, on your calendar for the Billings 2024 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 Schoenthal'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 meet 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.

Feeder watchers are also needed on count day, December 14. 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.

Please contact Jerry or Lois well before December 14. Let them know you want to help.

Jerry Dalton, Billings CBC Organizer/Compiler, 406 656-3656 [jerrydalton96@gmail.com](mailto:jerrydalton96@gmail.com)

Lois Dalton, Feeder Watcher Organizer, 406 656-3656, [daltonlois921@gmail.com](mailto:daltonlois921@gmail.com)

*Submitted by Jerry Dalton*

## Yellowstone Safe Passages Update



Blakely Adkins, a member of [Yellowstone Safe Passages](#) as well as an Osprey Nest Monitor for YVAS, was the speaker at our chapter program in November 2023. The Safe Passages nonprofit group, consisting of a coalition of 15 local, state and nonprofit organizations, has been researching and promoting wildlife crossings throughout the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem for many years.

AND this month, Yellowstone Safe Passages has received two grants to continue their work! This is only the first step. One grant is for the Paradise Valley and the other is for the Gallatin Gateway area. If you would like to read more, here are the links:

[The Billings Gazette 10/9/2024: Paradise Valley wildlife overpass project receives grant](#)

[The Billings Gazette 10/6/2024: Gallatin Gateway wildlife passage project seeks federal grant](#)

*Submitted by Deb Regele*



## Chirps and Tweets



- **AV Tech Volunteer Needed**

YVAS is looking for a member to help with our audio equipment that is used during programs. Specifically, we need to buy a new speaker with a hands-free microphone that is fairly basic and easy to use. If you are familiar with this type of equipment and can help, contact Deb at [debregele@gmail.com](mailto:debregele@gmail.com) or 406-200-7873.

- ◆ **Aluminum Recycling Program Update - Nov 2024**

There is a slight change to YVAS' Aluminum Recycling. Aluminum cans, old license plates and other aluminum items can be left at Larry Handsaker's home located at 918 Avenue C. Please place them by the garage in secured bags.

If you have several bags and are unable to drop them off, call Larry at 406-855-9832 and he will happily pick them up. You can also bring them to one of the Chapter Programs from September through May, but do let one of the YVAS board members know.

YVAS has been collecting and recycling aluminum cans for over 20 years. For 15 years, Larry has been transporting the aluminum to the recycling center. The refund money supports YVAS' Educational Fund which has supported a variety of projects such as informational signs in public parks, Citizen Science Kits at the Billings Public Library and various educational efforts as needed.

## 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
Nov 2	Sat	Yellowtail Dam Afterbay – Ron Kuhler 8am Rocky – Bring sack lunch
Dec 14	Sat	Christmas Bird Count (All day) – Jerry Dalton
Jan 1	Wed	Yellowtail Dam Afterbay Annual New Year's trip With Ron Kuhler 8am Rocky – Bring sack lunch
Jan 5	Sun	Mid-Winter Eagle Count – Mike Weber Bring sack lunch

More information on the Dec 14 Christmas Bird Count may be found on page 2 of this Flyer and at the November 18 YVAS meeting.

### Montana Audubon Center Events

Learn more about these and other activities on our website: [mtaudubon.org/center](http://mtaudubon.org/center)

**Nature Nuts:** toddler & me program, Every Tuesday 10 am to 11 am, suggested donation \$5

**Morning Bird Stroll:** Nov 9th, 8:30 am-10:00 am, suggested donation \$10 for adults, \$5 for students

**Weekend Wonders Family Program:** Nov 9th, 10:30-12pm

**Holiday Wreath Making Workshop:** Nov 2 & 16, 2- 4pm

**Beaver Full Moon Night Hike:** Nov 15th, 7:00-8:30pm

*Submitted by Emily Chilcoat  
Montana Audubon Center Director  
7026 South Billings Blvd.  
Office: (406) 294-5099*

### Montana Audubon 2024 Citizen Science Report

This year, 53 volunteers took part in spring nesting surveys for three different projects: the pilot year of Western & Eastern Screech-owl surveys; Long-billed Curlew surveys; and Chimney Swift surveys.

Learn more about each project in Montana Audubon's 2024 Citizen Science overview report, which is now available on Montana Audubon's website: <https://mtaudubon.org/2024-citizen-science-report/>.

*Submitted by Lauren Smith of Montana Audubon*

## Leaving No Stone Unturned

William Crain and I had a planned day of drawing and painting with an artist friend that lives near Big Lake on September 15th. We were not planning to go to Big Lake, but just in case I brought my scope and binocs. After drawing and painting was done, it was an easy decision to forgo chores awaiting me at home and go to Big Lake.

Approaching the NE parking area of Big Lake, we got out of the car and scanned the area for shorebirds. It was pretty quiet. A dozen or so Baird's Sandpipers were scattered up and down the shoreline as well as a handful of Killdeers. Way out on the water, a flock of Red-necked Phalaropes were spinning in circles. Most of the Wilson's Phalaropes had migrated south.

I was hoping to see a few more species of shorebirds and carefully scanned the shoreline. I soon saw a head on the far side of a clump of "seaweed." It appeared to be just a Killdeer, but the bill was thicker, the pattern on the head was unusual for a Killdeer, and then a faraway memory sparked inside me, and I quickly turned and shouted to Will, "Turnstone, Turnstone!"



Ruddy Turnstone Photo by Will Crain

In May 1990, 3 friends and I were hiking around Hailstone National Wildlife Refuge near Rapelje, Montana, enjoying the bounty of spring bird migration. A cry came from my buddy Doug, "Turnstone, Turnstone!" And I would have fallen off my horse if I had been riding one.

It was a stunning Ruddy Turnstone in breeding plumage. A lifer for me and others and maybe bird of the year for me.

The present-day Turnstone at Big Lake soon walked out from around the large clump of dried algae where I could see its entire body. I was able to get good looks with my spotting scope and could see it was a Ruddy Turnstone in its drabber, non-breeding plumage. I followed it up the shoreline armed with my scope and binoculars.



Ruddy Turnstone Photo by Will Crain

It would repeatedly run forward and ram its forehead into the piles of dried algae and then flip the algae up and away with its bill to uncover invertebrates to dine upon. There were no stones upon this shoreline for this Turnstone to turn over.

After following the Turnstone up the beach for 20 minutes, I flushed a Short-eared Owl and all the shorebirds scattered. Fortunately, the Turnstone returned to the spot near our car and Will was able to get some good looks and some photos.

Thirty-four years had passed since I had observed my one and only Ruddy Turnstone in Montana. A seemingly long time. Both observations were equally memorable, unexpected, and impressive for me. I hope they turn up again for me in Montana, but much sooner.

*Submitted by Mike Weber*

## Think About It!

Did you know that paper editions of the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society's *Flyer* cost about \$25 per year per membership to print and send out? That's what your dues cost! What it boils down to is that your dues do not benefit YVAS if you opt for a paper *Flyer*. Our monthly programs, although free to the public, aren't free to us. We depend on dues and donations to cover these costs. The Board has suggested that, if you can, switch to the *eFlyer* (electronic) or add a donation to your annual dues payment to help us continue with our free programs.

The advantages of the *eFlyer* are that you get the newsletter by email as soon as it is published, you have direct access to the embedded informational links and no recycling is needed. For those who already read the *eFlyer*, thank you!

Let's keep our programs going.

*Submitted by Carolyn Jones*



## Eastern Screech Owl Friend Indeed

G'day bird lovers ~ I'll be brief though it's not my normal maneuver and this is no ordinary event ~

I was at the Billings Public Library as an exhibitor of Art for Sale during the October Art Walk, and proud to be in the selection of Artists for this Rare opportunity. It was a wonderful evening visiting with the many folks who enjoy Art Walk, no matter where, or for some who haven't a better option and jes wana pinch an Artist.

It was getting on to closing time but who's watching the clock when I responded to a gentleman who wanted to check out the 'stuff' I had set up behind me in the non-fiction part of our wonderful Billings Public Library.

As he began to slowly peek thru the catalogues I had provided, the conversation turned to Birds; and he selected one then another of my birds in art for purchase. I was delighted with his choice of the Bohemian Waxwings that I created following a memorable New Years Day with Mike Weber in Two Moon Park where we sighted a huge flock.



Eastern Screech Owl Photo by Ben Stringer

The conversation turned to Owls...and local places to see or find them...and then the conversation heated up as he showed me a photo of an Owl sitting on the long vertical of a painting tripod! Yeah, Photoshop I'm thinking, but then he showed me several more photos of this Eastern Screech Owl sitting atop his painting tripod. OMG is this for real!

This lucky man is Ben Stringer, curator at the Frame Hut Gallery and Framing studio on Grand Ave, sharing what I'm sure he knew was rare and this was a Rare encounter, photographed in and about his art and painting studio.

Can you imagine an owl coming into your studio and sitting atop the center pole of your tripod and watching you paint!!! This is a Bird Story of Avian stories to be sure.

Last I spoke with Ben, his Owl buddy was still in the area but wasn't atop the tripod since he had better options...

*Submitted by Will Crain*

(If you missed Will at the Art Walk, you can find his work at the Electric Storm Gallery 405 N 24th St in Billings. 503.970.4981 ~ Taylor Evans, proprietor /curator and artist).



Eastern Screech Owl Photo by Ben Stringer



Eastern Screech Owl Photo by Ben Stringer

## HELEN

I remember when my father died, my great aunt said to my mother “As much as he loved you, he would not want to come back from where he is now. And as much as you loved him you would not want him to come back.” It seems a strange thing to say, but when you think about it, it is perfectly true.

As much as she loved us all, I do not think Helen would want to come back. She is with her family and with Georgia, Bebe, Foxy, Billie Hicks, Theodora, Gordon and Lila Weber, and Phil McBride. We can imagine the fun they are having sitting on their clouds, calling out birds to one another.

I first met Helen in June 2012. Together with George and Bernie Mowat, we spent the day birding, and I can remember where we went: we went first to the Pictograph caves and after lunch to 48th Street, helping Helen up and down the slope so she could see a Black-necked Stilt, as it would have been a year bird for her. Then we went to Jeanette Tasey’s so we could see Pinyon Jays.



Helen Cummins 12/30/07

This was the first of many birding trips we took, both days out and longer trips to places like Choteau, Bowdoin, Fort Peck and Medicine Lake. Also, we made 2 road trips to Texas, taking in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. We also took a trip to Washington and Idaho. These have left me with very happy memories.

Helen was not above being a bit sneaky, I remember one time we were birding near Bridger, and I spotted a Say's Phoebe, Helen claimed it was a Robin, so I got the guide out to prove I was right. Helen just grinned and said she wanted to test my identification skills. I won't repeat my reply.

Wherever we went, Helen would always extoll the birds of Montana. She always had a supply of checklists to give to people to show the variety of birds here, she was a true ambassador for the birds.

Helen always encouraged people to look at the birds, be they young or old. In clearing out the house, it was no surprise to find letters and pictures of birds children had sent to her, some of which she framed and hung in the house.

As mentioned in her obituary, if ever she saw a new bird she had to hug someone. Similarly, if she found someone a new bird, they had to give her a hug. If there was more than one bird she would settle for one very big one.

The one trip she took outside of North America was when she went to the UK to meet my family. The highlight of the trip, apart from the new birds she saw, was when we went to Martin Mere Bird Reserve and she was interviewed by the local radio station, which happened to broadcast that day. This was the day after President Obama's re-election, and they used the byline “The American we told the result to.”

Helen, you gave so much, not only to me, but to all your family and friends. You will be greatly missed and fondly remembered, as you brought us sunshine in your smile, you brought us laughter all the while. In this world where we live there should be more happiness, so much joy you brought to each new tomorrow. You made me happy through the years, you never brought me any tears. Your arms were as warm as the sun from up above. You brought fun, sunshine and most of all love. God Bless you.

*Peter Cummins*

PS Thank you to all YVAS members who attended the service and/or sent messages of sympathy and donations to the Audubon Center. They are much appreciated and treasured.

**YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

**Next Board of Directors Meeting: Nov 11, 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: Nov 18, 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**

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  
Ginny Waples 406-850-1056 waplesv@gmail.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  
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  
  
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**Save the Date for Bob Landis:**

On December 16th, the Emmy Award-winning wildlife cinematographer Bob Landis will once again share his latest Yellowstone videos. Limited seating; the doors open at 6:30 PM.

**\*\*\* 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.

November reminders: Donn & Dorothy Bartlett, Cathy Breeding, Ed Gillig, Carl & Virginia Kimmel, Susan Weinreis

October reminders: Mary Davis, Beth Horn, Robin Manfredi, Raylene Wall, Florence Zundel.

September reminders: Heather & David Gaitonde.

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.