

*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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DECEMBER 2010/JANUARY 2011

## New This Issue

- **Christmas Potluck Fund-raiser**
- **The Osprey Project**
- **Field Trip Notes**
- **Yellowstone River Clean Up**



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## **THE CMR IS MORE THAN JUST INITIALS ON A MAP!**

The 1.1 million acre CMR NWR (Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge) became a National Refuge in 1976. Since then it has seemed to many YVAS members to be simply an intriguing, if distant, place on the Montana State map. Beverly Skinner, Wildlife Refuge Specialist at the CMR will help change that misunderstanding when she speaks to our Chapter **on January 17**. She will provide an overview and history of the Refuge, and give us details on the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Refuge. (The CCP for the CMR will include an Environmental Impact Statement to develop future management direction for the Refuge). Just as interesting, Ms Skinner will update us on where the CMR CCP stands on issues of migratory/resident birds and environmental education.

Ms Skinner will also share information on what birding work is being done at the CMR. She is currently establishing a new bird program for the

The National Wildlife Refuge System, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the world's premier system of public lands and waters set aside to conserve America's fish, wildlife and plants. Since President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida's Pelican Island as the first wildlife refuge in 1903, the System has grown to more than 150 million acres, 553 national wildlife refuges and other units of the Refuge System, plus 38 wetland management districts.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## **YVAS MEETINGS**

**All YVAS Meetings are at Mayflower Congregational Church, corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive, Billings, MT unless otherwise noted. The public is welcome, there is no admission fee and ample free parking is available.**

**Monday, December 6, 6:00pm: Christmas Fundraiser Dinner at the Masonic Center**

**Monday, January 10, 6:00pm: Board Meeting**

**Monday, January 17, 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting**

**We will hold a YVAS fundraiser dinner before the membership meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. It will feature some special soups, with salads and desserts. To contribute to dinner and/or for dinner reservations, call Norma Devan at 656-6488.**



 We're on the web! [yellowstoneaudubon.org](http://yellowstoneaudubon.org)

**THIS FLYER IS PUBLISHED ON SFI CERTIFIED PRODUCT**





## DON'T FORGET

# YVAS ANNUAL CHRISTMAS POTLUCK AND FUNDRAISER

DATE: **Monday, Dec. 6, 2010**    Time: **6 p.m. Dinner**

PLACE:    **Masonic Center, 1101 Broadwater**

(come early and browse the Silent Auction & Raffle)

Since we are no longer able to sell bird food, this is our major fundraiser.

- **ADMISSION:** \$5.00 per person ( covers coffee, punch, rolls and building rental)
- **FOOD:** Be sure to bring plates and utensils for personal use, and food to share according to the following direction:

If your last name begins with A ...G \_\_\_ salad, enough for your party plus 6

If your last name begins with G...M \_\_\_ dessert, enough to share for your party plus 6.

If your last name begins with N...Z \_\_\_ entree or side dish, enough to share for party plus 6

- **PROGRAM**

Bob Landis will again share his wonderful and often humorous photography taken in Yellowstone National Park. He is an Emmy award-winning wildlife cinematographer who has produced many films for programs such as National Geographic and Nature. His work has taken him to Denali, Kluane, and Algonquin National Parks, but his home is Yellowstone National Park where he has excelled in the art of wildlife film-making for over 30 years.

- **RAFFLE AND SILENT AUCTION.** Think about doing your Christmas shopping on this night. If you have donations for the raffle and silent auction contact Robert Lubbers at rslubbers@q.com, or 245-2970
- **RESERVATIONS!**

Call or email Rita Harding at 259-7586 or mtroses22@bresnan.net. Tell her the number in your party, your name and what type dish you are bringing.

**THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE YVAS FLYER WILL BE SENT IN FEBRUARY. ALL ACTIVITIES FOR DECEMBER AND JANUARY ARE INCLUDED IN THIS DEC/JAN ISSUE.**



**MONTANA AUDUBON SOCIETY** reports that Montana's state bird list just got longer by two birds - for a grand total of 427 birds. The Montana Bird Records Committee recently evaluated 52 reports of rare birds, which are defined as species for which fewer than 20 accepted records exist for the state. Two of these reports resulted in the addition of new species to the state list: Crested Caracara (found near Hot Springs) and Carolina Wren (found near Arlee). The official list also includes the Pacific Wren, which recently was split from the Winter Wren by the American Ornithologists' Union.

## Summary of YVAS Osprey Project for 2010

The Osprey Project conducted by YVAS members, with assistance from Montana Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and in cooperation with Yellowstone Valley Electric Co., was initiated in 2009. Osprey nest locations from Big Timber to the confluence of the Big Horn and Yellowstone Rivers were recorded, GPS located, and mapped. In the spring of 2010, a nesting platform and pole was constructed and erected by Yellowstone Valley Electric at the Duck Creek fishing access. This nesting platform was intended to be an alternate nesting site, replacing a nest at the Duck Creek Bridge. The old nest presented an electrocution and power outage hazard. The new nest was partially used this year and will become a permanent nest site in future years.

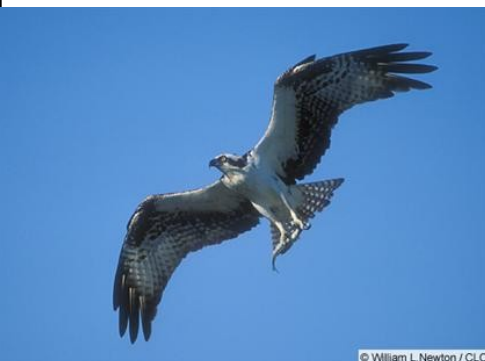
This year, 26 Osprey nests were surveyed for activity throughout the nesting season. The results were as follows:

- 10 nests produced 17 fledged Osprey.
- 6 nests had adult Osprey activity in the spring but no young were seen.
- 6 nests had no Osprey activity at all.
- 3 nests were blown or torn down.
- 1 nest was occupied by Canada geese.

Some observations of interest resulted from this year's survey. At times more than one pair of adult Osprey was seen at or near a nest site. This is normal since Osprey often do not breed until they are 3 to 5 years old. These sub-adults probably hang out around the nesting birds. It is important to be able to distinguish between adults and juvenile birds. The juveniles have lighter colored edging on the upper wing and back feathers. These feathers are dark brown on the adults. Males and females can be distinguished by the larger female size and the presence of brown streaks forming a "necklace" across the breast, while males are smaller and have solid white breasts.

Some of the nests where young were not observed but still had adult activity indicate that the fledging survey may need to be moved up from August to mid-late July. Many of the young were fledged by August this year. Baling twine was abundantly found in a majority of the nests. How many Osprey died or were injured by becoming ensnared in the twine was not able to be determined, but its presence has definitely been shown to be a hazard to adult Osprey and chicks.

Since this was the first year that survey data was available for this area, no comparison to previous years can be made. As the surveys continue in future years, this data base will provide important information for the management of Ospreys and add to the richness and diversity of the Yellowstone River ecosystem.



OSPREY

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Sincere thanks to those who donated their time, monies, and support to the Osprey Project. We will definitely need assistance again next year.

Future plans include adding more nest sites to the nest survey as they are found, working with electric power companies and co-ops to provide alternate nesting platforms where power line conflicts occur, and exploring the possibility of erecting an Osprey nesting platform and video camera for education and research at the Audubon Conservation and Research Center here in Billings.

Thank you to Monty Sullins

One of the largest birds of prey in North America, the Osprey eats almost exclusively fish. Osprey numbers declined drastically in 1950-1970s from pesticide poisoning and egg-shell thinning. After the ban on DDT, populations increased rapidly. They are still listed as endangered or threatened in some areas, especially in inland states where populations were small or extirpated after the pesticide years.



## FIELD TRIP NOTES



SURVEYING THE AFTERBAY

On Saturday, November 13, in 37 degree weather, George Mowat led his loyal band of 12 birders out to the Yellowtail Dam Afterbay. As exciting as the destination was for water-fowl, the journey along Old Hardin Road provided a festival of raptor sightings, including a magnificent Bald and 2 Golden Eagles, numerous Red-tailed and Rough-legged

Hawks, American Kestrel and Northern Harrier. We added American

Crow, Black-billed Magpie, European Starling, Common Raven, Townsend's Solitaire, American Robin, Rock Pigeon, Ring-necked Pheasant, Northern Flicker, House Sparrow. Rick and Starr Stevens hosted the group with muffins and coffee at their Lodge on the Big Horn River in St Xavier where Black-capped Chickadees and American Tree Sparrows had their own feeders. The Afterbay and its surrounds provided a wonderful afternoon of waterfowl viewing, including Canada Geese, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Mallard, Gadwall, Canvasback, American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Western Grebe, American Coot, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Northern Shoveler, Hooded Merganser, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Goldeneye, Barrow's Goldeneye, and the American Dipper.

Yellowtail Afterbay Reservoir is in Fort Smith, Big Horn County, Montana, and has a normal surface area of 181 acres. The Afterbay pool is 2 miles downstream from Yellowtail Dam, constructed in 1964 on the Big Horn River. While the Big Horn River is well known for its trout, the Afterbay provides a protected source of open water for resident winter waterfowl.

### AMERICAN DIPPER PROFILE



AMERICAN DIPPER

A group of dippers is collectively known as a "ladle" of dippers.

The American Dipper is a small, dark gray wren-like bird, with a straight black bill, short, cocked tail, and white eyelids that flash when blinked and allow it to see underwater. Typically found on fast-moving, clear, unpolluted western streams (with cascades, riffles, and waterfalls), the American Dipper is North America's only truly aquatic songbird. It catches all of its food underwater in swiftly flowing streams by swimming and walking on the stream bottom, while constantly bobbing up and down. Unlike most other songbirds, but similar to ducks, the American Dipper molts its wing and tail feathers all at once in the late summer and is flightless during that time. To be able to survive in cold waters during the winter, it has a low metabolic rate, extra oxygen-carrying capacity in its blood, and a thick coat of feathers. Populations are not well censused. Bridges provide nesting sites, but stream pollution can destroy food supplies, and availability of suitable nest sites appears to limit the population. (Excerpted from Field Guide to Birds of North

America and the Cornell Ornithology Lab.)

## HAPPENING AT THE AUDUBON CENTER

**December 11<sup>th</sup>:** Family program, Making Natural Ornaments, 9:30 – 11 AM. Fee is \$3 per child.

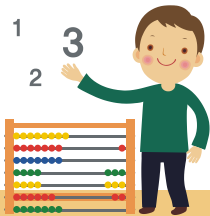
**January 15:** Free family program, Amazing Animal Adaptations, from 9:30 – 11 AM. Pre-registration required.

**January 23:** Free family program, Awesome Arachnids with Amy Weidlich, from 1:30 – 3 PM. Recommended for students ages 5+. Pre-registration required.

**January 24:** Winter afterschool and preschool programs begin.

**January 25:** Free adult lecture by Susan Gilbertz on contemporary Yellowstone River culture from 7 – 8 PM. No registration required.

**Contact the Center at 294-5099, 7026 S. Billings Blvd, or online at [ww.mtacec.org](http://ww.mtacec.org) for**



## THE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18

Grab your checklists, wool gloves and binoculars on Saturday December 18, for the 111th year of the Christmas Bird Count, the National Audubon Society's premier citizen science event. Experienced and new birders alike are encouraged to participate. Please call Helen Carlson at 248-8684; she will sign you up and provide information about your route, group, etc. There is a \$5.00 fee to join up. Participants will meet at 7 a.m. on **DECEMBER 18**, at Denny's Restaurant (501 N 27th Street, in downtown Billings), unless otherwise notified by their section leader. The bird count is an all-day activity, with lunch as decided by the individual groups. At the end of the birding day, participants gather for a soup supper at Helen's house (519 Highland Park Drive, Billings), where they will tally what they have seen.



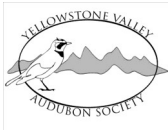
## YELLOWSTONE RIVER CLEAN-UP

Supported by volunteer teams from Billings Clinic, ExxonMobil and Wal-Mart, YVAS, in partnership with Rocky Mountain College, sponsored the fourth annual Yellowstone River Cleanup on Saturday, October 23rd. This successful event was organized thanks to the efforts of YVAS Past President and Assistant Professor of Environmental Science at Rocky Mountain College, Kayhan Ostovar. Participants worked on foot, from canoes, and from a drift boat to clear the banks of the Yellowstone of literally mountains of debris extending from the Duck Creek Bridge to Coulson Park, including Schoenthal Island, and Two Moon, Mystic and Riverfront Parks. Of particular interest to YVAS members is the impact of this project in reducing pollutants which affect the Osprey population in the area.

## HELP WITH A RESEARCH STUDY AT MUHLENBERG COLLEGE, ALLENTOWN, PA

Many birds are killed each year by various forms of human technology and activity. Some of these human-made hazards attract more attention than do others. We are interested in how factors that influence people's perceptions of the risks posed to humans by nuclear power or sources of water pollution may also contribute to peoples' perceptions of hazards to birds. This information will be useful in helping strategize campaigns to raise awareness to different kinds of threats to birds and other natural systems. We would greatly appreciate it if you could fill out the survey found at the following link: <http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22BDFEUJWXT>

Your participation will remain anonymous and confidential. The survey takes about 25 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, you will be re-directed to a separate page where you can request a summary of what we find. This research project has met Muhlenberg College's Institutional Review policy requirements. If you have any questions about the project, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Jeffrey Rudski Professor of Psychology at [rudski@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:rudski@muhlenberg.edu)



The monthly Flyer is an essential tool in informing our membership about items of critical interest and events of the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society. In an effort to streamline our publishing and mailing process and costs, we fell victim to computer programs that weren't speaking to each other. I sincerely apologize to all the YVAS members who received their Flyers late, or with incorrect address information or incorrect information about their membership status as a result. We are very fortunate to have our talented Membership Secretary Joel Bowers and Anne Stroebe at POSTNET who have worked tirelessly to put everything back on track for future issues. We are also considering notifying you of your membership status by postcard, instead of including renewal information on the mailing label, where it confuses the computer. Please contact Nancy Wiggins, Editor, if you need further information.

**Membership Information**

Although the National Audubon Society gives complimentary membership in our chapter as a benefit, no dues come to us. We strongly encourage you to join YVAS as a Supporting Chapter Member, which is offered for \$20 a year. Use the bottom application form on the right to join as Supporting Chapter Members or to renew your chapter member.

1. An application for *initial* membership in the National Audubon Society (NAS) is included in YVAS Flyer (see form on top right). If you are NOT a member of the NAS and wish to be, please use this form to join and send it, with the fee, to the address provided. Our chapter will then receive payment for recruiting a new member.
2. **Moving???** Let us know as early as possible when you plan to move. The Post Office does charge us a fee for returned flyers. Include your old address as well as your new address so we can track you. You may write, call, or email the information to the Membership Secretary.
3. Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society offers Supporting Chapter student memberships for a reduced rate of \$10 a year. If you applying for a new student membership or are renewing a student membership, make sure you indicate your academic affiliation in your application . Joel Bowers, Membership Secretary

**National Audubon Society**  
 Recruitment Code: COZN500Z  
 Application for New Membership

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society. I understand that I will receive the Audubon Magazine and Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Flyer. Make check payable to National Audubon Society. \*Renewals will be sent to you through National Audubon.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

One Year Membership

\$20 One year new membership

Send this application and your check made out to **National Audubon Society** to:

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society  
 Attention: Membership Secretary  
 P.O. Box 1075  
 Billings, MT 59103-1075



**Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society**  
 Recruitment Code: COZN500Z  
 Application for New & Renewal Membership

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 Chapter benefits. Make check payable to Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society for \$20. If applying for a new or renewing student membership, make check for \$10 and indicate academic affiliation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send this application and your check to:

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society  
 Attention: Membership Secretary  
 P.O. Box 1075  
 Billings, MT 59103-1075



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AUDUBON FLYER**

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## Field Trip Calendar:

*All field trips depart from Rocky Mountain College parking lot on Rimrock Road, adjacent to Billings Studio Theater, unless otherwise noted, and will be by car. All field trips are open to the public. Passengers will share gas costs with driver when car-pooling. Do make sure you check all field trips with listing in flyer each month for any changes..*

- **Dec 18 (Sat) ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT.** See page 6 of this Flyer for more details or call Helen Carlson at 248-8684
- **Jan 1 (Sat) NEW YEARS DAY FIELD TRIP.** 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Bring a sack lunch. **Yellow-tail Dam Afterbay.** Helen Carlson, leader.
- **Jan 8 (Sat) 33<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL EAGLE MIDWINTER SURVEY in Lower 48 States.** 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. **Yellowstone River: Billings to Columbus.** Leader: Brad Hall or George Mowat. **No host lunch. (Note: this trip is not listed in the 2010-2011 field trip list)**
- **Feb 5 (Sat) WINTER WANDERERS FIELD TRIP**—Rare winter birds. **Pro-gressive birding and eating.** 9 a.m. to dark. **FUNDRAISER. Reservations required by Feb 3rd.** See Flyer for more details.
- **April 16 (Sat) EXXON PONDS AND EMERALD HILLS.** 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. **One mile walk.** Bring a sack lunch

**Field Trip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467**

