

*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.*

VOLUME 39, NUMBER 4

APRIL 2009

**New This Issue**

- Audubon Conservation Education Center News
- 2009 MT Audubon Bird Festival
- Owl Profile and Owl Prowl Fieldtrips



# Prairie Dog Translocation Project

Allison Puchniak Begley is a biologist with Montana Fish, Game & Parks. For the last three years, she has been working with the Bureau of Land Management to translocate white-tailed prairie dogs to historic, but unoccupied colonies on BLM lands. Carbon County, Montana is at the northern edge of the range of the white-tailed prairie dog, a species petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

Many wildlife species depend on prairie dogs and their associated habitat, including mountain plovers, burrowing owls, and black-footed ferrets. Allison will discuss the translocation project as well as the importance of the prairie dog ecosystem to other species.



The long-term objective of this project is to ensure the maintenance of a viable population of white-tailed prairie dogs in our state.

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## YVAS Meetings

**All YVAS Meetings are at Mayflower Congregational Church, corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive, unless otherwise noted.**

**Monday, April 13th at 7 p.m. Board Meeting.**

**Monday, April 20th at 7 p.m. General Membership Meeting.**

At 6:00 p.m. a supper featuring "favorite casseroles of YVAS chefs" will be served for a \$6 donation to the ACEC building fund. You and your friends are invited to join us. Please R.S.V.P. to Georgia at 967-6812 if you plan to eat and/or want to donate food.



### From the Editor

One of our members, Joan McKeown, would like to bring our attention to the problem of direct mail, particularly the catalogs we receive. The Jan/Feb issue of *Audubon Magazine* included an article on how the Boreal Forest in Canada is being decimated to feed the catalog/direct mail industry. When I read this article, I vowed to do something to reduce the number of catalogs I receive. Well, I hadn't done it yet. But at last month's YVAS chapter meeting, Joan reiterated the need for us to take action, which spurred me on. If you are like me and get way too many catalogs each week, check out the following websites that can help us to reduce the direct mail we receive: [www.catalogcutdown.org](http://www.catalogcutdown.org), [www.catalogchoice.org](http://www.catalogchoice.org), [www.directmail.com](http://www.directmail.com), and [www.OptOutPrescreen.com](http://www.OptOutPrescreen.com). Joan has copied off "What You Can Do" information sheets as well, which will be available at our April YVAS chapter meeting. She also has other information about ways we can reduce our impact. March 21st was World Water Day, an international day to draw our attention to water issues. One easy step we can take is to reduce our bottled water consumption and help insure safe, affordable public water supplies. See [www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org) and [www.takebackthetap.org](http://www.takebackthetap.org) for more information.

The Robins are singing. Spring is officially here. And the spring field trip season is kicking into gear. You will notice there are several field trip opportunities highlighted in this month's flyer. The MT Audubon Bird Fest will be held in Great Falls this year. They are celebrating Grouse out in Idaho; YVAS is heading up north to the CMR and beyond. I hope you all have great field trip adventures, and if you would like to see your activities in the flyer, send me your information and pictures.

Any material for the flyer needs to be sent to [editor@yellowstoneaudubon.org](mailto:editor@yellowstoneaudubon.org).

I need material by the 15th of the month for inclusion in the next month's flyer.



#### Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:

**President:** Kayhan Ostovar, 256-7481, [kayhan@q-com](mailto:kayhan@q-com)  
**Vice-President:** Jerry Dalton, 656-3656, [loisnjerry@imt.net](mailto:loisnjerry@imt.net)  
**Secretary:** Georgia Frazier, 967-6812, [gjfrazier@netscape.com](mailto:gjfrazier@netscape.com)  
**Treasurer:** George Mowat, 656-7467, [gmowat@bresnan.net](mailto:gmowat@bresnan.net)  
**Past-President:** Kathy Haigh, 245-3266, [jkhaigh@bresnan.net](mailto:jkhaigh@bresnan.net)

#### Board of Directors:

Kathryn (Billie) Hicks: 962-3798, [lons\\_luv@hotmail.com](mailto:lons_luv@hotmail.com)  
 Dick Moore: 656-6241.  
 Robert Lubbers: 245-2970, [rslubbers@q.com](mailto:rslubbers@q.com)  
 Jeanne Olson: 656-7278

**open board positions: contact president or a board member if interested in serving**

**Website:** Mark Gale, [webmaster@yellowstoneaudubon.org](mailto:webmaster@yellowstoneaudubon.org)

Meetings are held September through May, at Mayflower Congregational Church, corner of Poly and Rehberg:

- Board Meetings second Monday of each month at 7p.m. Board meetings are open to entire membership
- General Chapter Meetings third Monday of each month at 7p.m. (All meetings are open to the public)

#### Committees and Special Assignments:

Archives and History.....Theodora Smith 259-7679  
 Audubon Adventures.....Jeannette Davis 656-7618  
 Bird Questions.....George Mowat 656-7467 or Helen Carlson 248-8684

Christmas Bird Count.....Helen Carlson 248-8684 or Billie Hicks 962-3798

Editor.....Jeanne Olson, [editor@yellowstoneaudubon.org](mailto:editor@yellowstoneaudubon.org)

Greeters.....Phyllis Holt 252-7373  
 Audrey Jurovich 656-2748

Injured Raptors.....Robert Lubbers 245-2970

Membership Secretary.....Ruth Vanderhorst, 245-5118, [acr@bresnan.net](mailto:acr@bresnan.net)

Recycling (aluminum).....Tom Davis 656-7618

#### Montana's Congressional Delegation:

Sen. Max Baucus: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510 [max@baucus.senate.gov](mailto:max@baucus.senate.gov) 800-332-6106

Sen. Jon Tester: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510 [tester.senate.gov](mailto:tester.senate.gov) 800-344-1513

Rep. Dennis Rehberg: U.S. House of Rep, Wash. D.C. 20515 [house.gov.rehberg](http://house.gov.rehberg) 202-225-3211

## Owls

Helen Carlson sat down to talk with me about her favorite birds—Owls. All kinds. She said she should be doing a bird profile on the Earned Grebe, which is the bird that “saved her life,” sparking in her a lifelong passion for bird watching. However, owls won out because they are so “interesting.”

Helen first became fascinated with owls many years ago when she lived in Bozeman: she had a Northern Pygmy Owl living in an evergreen tree in her front yard. Helen was featured in Montana Outdoors Magazine, holding this tiny owl. The owl was later relocated to a city park and eventually ended up as a study skin at MSU—Bozeman. Owls seem to be attracted to Helen too. Two years ago, returning home after cataract surgery, she was greeted by four young Eastern Screech Owls in her backyard. Recently she has been hearing a Horned Owl in her neighborhood.

There are nineteen species of owls in North America, with 15 species here in Montana. Helen has seen 13 of these species in Montana; she has yet to see a live Barn Owl and Boreal Owl. Right around Billings we have the Great Horned Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, Burrowing Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Short-eared Owl.

Owls are birds of prey, hunting other living things for their food. Their exceptional vision and hearing, along with the ability to fly silently, make them formi-

dable hunters. Helen once saw a Hawk Owl near Missoula eating its prey so delicately, it reminded her of someone “eating an ice cream cone.” Owls regurgitate pellets, which contain the bones and other indigestible matter of their prey, and researchers can then use these pellets to study an owl’s eating behavior.

Most owls are nocturnal, but we do see some hunting during the day; look for Burrowing Owls and Short-eared Owls. The Great Horned Owl is on the nest this time of year, and cottonwood river bottoms are good places to spot them. Burrowing owls can be found around Prairie Dog towns, and there has been an Eastern Screech Owl living at the 300 block of Clark Ave. here in Billings.

If you are interesting in looking for/listening for owls, see the owl prowl information below.

—Editor



### Owl Prowls Planned for April 2009

Come join Bozeman’s Sacajawea Audubon this April for one or both of the two planned Owl Prowls.

The first will be held the evening of Saturday, April 4th at the Battle Ridge Campground, where we will focus on finding (calling and listening) Boreal, Great Gray and Saw-whet Owls with possible other forest owls. Meet at the parking lot of the Bozeman City Hall (formerly the Library) on Rouse at 7:30pm.

The second will be held the evening of Saturday, April 11th in the East Frontage Road area. We will hope to hear (and maybe see) such owls as Great Horned, Western Screech, Northern Pygmy, Saw-whet, and Long Eared Owls. Meet at the parking lot of the Bozeman City Hall (formerly the Library) on Rouse at 7:45 pm.

Please note that increased human activities in both locations may inhibit owl breeding and nesting behavior.

In case of inclement weather or for further information, please contact Peter Norlander: [norlander@q.com](mailto:norlander@q.com) or 406-222-4646.

Please dress appropriately for **Nighttime** cold weather with snow boots or warm, waterproof boots (no sneakers). You may bring binoculars and a flashlight. Snowshoes may be helpful or necessary (particularly up at Battle Ridge Campground).

## Audubon Conservation Education Center News

**Montana Audubon announces partnership with Montana Conservation Corps.** Late winter programs at the ACEC will get a boost of energy and talent from the Montana Conservation Corps' Youth Crew Leaders. These AmeriCorps volunteers typically spend mid-February through May organizing and implementing community-wide service and conservation projects, promoting active citizenship among the youth of Montana, and developing the skills to lead summer youth conservation crews. Audubon Naturalists Heather Ristow and Carol Ward will share their lesson planning and classroom management skills with the volunteers, and then the volunteers will get their feet wet while assisting with the ACEC 4th grade field trip and in-class programs. We are thrilled to collaborate with them and look forward to expanding opportunities for their involvement at the Center.

**Students explore the winter world at the ACEC.** Winter in Montana presents fantastic opportunities to study nature. Animal tracks and signs hidden by vegetation in the summer are easily seen in the snow and mud present during the winter. This opens a unique and wonderful window into the lives of our winter residents. The curious naturalist can follow these tracks and put together pieces of a puzzle to gain insight into animal behavior during winter. Winter programs at the ACEC are focused on applying the skills of a naturalist to uncover the stories of wildlife adaptations in winter. Fifth-Eighth grade students from Elysian School took advantage of a recent snow storm and explored the frozen ponds at the ACEC to discover the tracks of red foxes, cottontail rabbits, deer, pheasants, and deer mice. Earlier in the winter, John Miller from West High School and Heather Ristow discovered a pile of feathers on the ice with perfectly preserved marks in the snow of the primary flight feathers of a mysterious predator.

**Billings West High School students conduct winter bird count.** In December, a hardy group of high school students

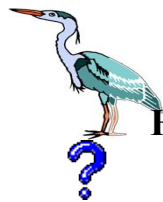
from John Miller's Billings West High School class braved single digit temperatures to go birding at the Center. The students were joined by equally hardy and dedicated volunteers from Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society who helped to document sixteen species at the ACEC and nearby Norm's Island. The expedition ended with a camp fire, roasted hot dogs, and s'mores.

**Thanks to the following volunteers for their help this winter:** Billie Hicks, George Mowat, Bob Mackin, Jeanne Olson, Lisa Carnicon, Carol Ward, Carolyn Parrish.

**ACEC gets ready for a busy spring field trip season.** Spring field trip season is right around the corner, and the ACEC has programs scheduled in April and May with over a dozen schools. Field trip programs will include examinations of the aquatic life in our ponds, insect investigations, native plant exploration hikes on Norm's Island and everyone's favorite: canoeing adventures. Spring will be a busy time of educational programming, moving into the new Wet Lab Building, and continuing restoration work with our partner, Yellowstone River Parks Association. We are eagerly awaiting a very exciting spring and summer at the Center. Please drop by for a visit to see all of our recent growth..

### **April 18th: Montana Audubon Earth Day Celebration**

Join us at the ACEC to celebrate Earth Day 2009. Members of the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society will help kick off the festivities with a bird walk from 7-8am. Then we will roll up our sleeves and get to work planting trees and conducting other restoration activities with members of the Yellowstone River Park Association. Volunteers will be rewarded with a BBQ lunch, followed by canoe rides, hikes, and tours of the land and new building. Please bring water, a shovel, work gloves, and a lawn chair or blanket. All ages are welcome to attend!! Call or email Heather Ristow, Senior Naturalist at the Center, with any questions: 322-2073 or [hristow@mtaudubon.org](mailto:hristow@mtaudubon.org).



**Do you see lots of birds and wonder what kind they are?**

**You need to sign up for**

**Helen Carlson's 33rd Annual Bird Identification Class**

Class Days are May 14th, May 21st and May 28th. Cost is \$25. Classes are appropriate for everyone from those just beginning to notice birds to more experienced bird watchers. Classes are all held in the field. And Helen promises there will be no hard final exam at the end. For more information about times, etc. call Helen at 248-8684.

All proceeds to go Audubon Adventures, helping teachers bring Audubon into their classrooms.

## Montana Audubon Offers Awards

Montana Audubon will be giving away at least 4 awards at its annual meeting this year. The awards acknowledge individuals who exemplify a commitment to birds, other wildlife and habitat conservation. This year awards will be given for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, Special Achievement, and Lifetime Achievement Award.

To nominate your candidate, please call the Montana Audubon office to request an award nomination form or download the form from our website at <http://mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html>. To be considered for this year's awards, nominations and all supporting material must be postmarked no later than May 8, 2009. All nominations and supporting material should be sent to Montana Audubon, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624, or by fax: (406) 443-7144. The award ceremony will take place on June 6 at MT Audubon's Bird Festival in Great Falls.

### Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival—Great Falls

Montana Audubon and Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Chapter invite you to attend the June 5-7 annual bird festival in Great Falls, MT. We'd like to introduce you to some of this year's festival events.

The 28 field trips will certainly be a weekend highlight. Five of your exciting choices are hiking through the riparian and grassland areas along the Thain Creek Trail (Highwood Mountains), participating in a bird banding demonstration, seeing a myriad of birds at nearby Giant Springs State Park, driving to Benton Lake and/or Freezeout Lake for a good view of the many shorebirds that inhabit or migrate there, or visiting the Bear-tooth Wildlife Management Area where flycatchers and Western Tanagers are a possibility.

A complete list of trips is online and in the registration brochure.

The festival includes something for everyone, from children and beginning birders to seasoned twitchers. Montana Audubon Education Director Paul Belanger has organized activities and a field trip for families. The Saturday afternoon speakers are stellar: Bob Martinka (dragonflies), Dan Casey (flycatchers), Sherry Ritter (biomimicry), John Carlson (Montana grassland birds), Kenton Rowe (bird/nature photography), Catherine Wightman (advances in bird conservation in Montana), Janet Ellis (lobbying to save the birds), and Amy Cilimburg (Montana IBAs).

Did I mention that ornithologist David Sibley and Montana Senator John Tester will be with us on Saturday? We hope you will be too!

Online registration will be available at

<http://mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival/html> no later than March 25th. A brochure with mail in registration will also be available to download soon. This brochure will also be mailed to members.

**\*\*Another excellent bird festival opportunity in Great Falls will take place June 12-14, 2009: The Mountain Bluebird Trails 35th Anniversary Celebration.** Registration information can be found at [www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com](http://www.mountainbluebirdtrails.com) or call Bob Niebuhr at 406-453-5143.

—Nora Gray, UMBA Festival volunteer

**Audubon, Birds, and Climate Change:** National Audubon has issued its latest report *Birds and Climate Change: Ecological Disruption in Motion* that looks at the last 40 years of Christmas Bird Count data, concluding that 58% of the species studied have moved northward as winter temperatures increase. The birds are telling us that climate change is here now, and we must act now to address it. See [www.BirdsandClimate.org](http://www.BirdsandClimate.org) to get more information about this report, to take a fun quiz to test your knowledge, to report your own climate change observations and to find out what you can do to take action and spread the word.

## Progressive Eating and Birding Field Trip

On Feb, 28<sup>th</sup>, 13 of us joined Ruth Vanderhorst and Anne Cowan for breakfast in their home on the Winter Wanderers Progressive Eating and Birding Fieldtrip. Breakfast was blueberry pancakes, sausage, and fruit compote. Birds, unfortunately, were not as plentiful as the food, but we did see House Sparrows and House Finches.

After leaving Ruth and Anne, we travelled west to Laurel, making several stops along the Yellowstone River. We saw Bald Eagles, both adults and immatures, as well as several Rough-legged Hawks, a Red-tailed Hawk and Northern Flickers.

We arrived at our next stop—the home of Tom and Jeannette Davis (west of Billings)—in time for a lunch of three different soups, crusty bread, fruits, and vegetable trays. Walking about their property after lunch, we saw a Downy Woodpecker, American Robins, Dark-eyed Juncos and a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Heading back to Billings, some of us went one way and saw a Wild Turkey and a flock of Eurasian Colared-Doves. Some of us went another way and saw Ring-necked Pheasants and Starlings. Some of us went straight to town for the next course: Dessert.

We all reconvened at Helen Carlson's home for vari-

ous pies, chocolate goodies and coffee. There we saw resident Mallards, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Black-capped Chickadees.

We had a beautiful day: there was fresh snow on the ground, sunny skies and no wind. The conversation was lively, and, all together, we saw 23 bird species.

This trip was a fundraiser, and all money raised goes to our YVAS chapter. Thank you participants.

And special thanks go to Ruth and Anne, Tom and Jeannette, and Helen.

—Jeanne Olson



## Seventh Annual Dubois Grouse Days—Dubois, Idaho

### *Fostering Partnerships for Grouse Conservation*

The 7th annual Dubois Grouse Days, held in Dubois Idaho is a two-day event to celebrate the shrub-steppe ecosystem and the unique animals which call it home. Grouse Days will be held April 17th & 18th, 2009.

Dubois is a small ranching community in the Upper Snake River Plain, and Grouse Days is designed to promote education and conservation of our western rangeland heritage.

There will be guided tours to grouse breeding grounds to view Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse courtship. There will also be tours to the Clark County Civil Defense Cave, the Nature Conservancy's Crooked Creek Ranch as well as other local highlights. Grouse Days will also include a banquet, arts and crafts booths, kid activities and art contest, presentations by biologists and ranchers, a raffle and silent auction.

For more information check the website: [www.grouse-days.org](http://www.grouse-days.org) or contact Curtis or Nikki Keetch at [ckeetch71@hotmail.com](mailto:ckeetch71@hotmail.com) or 208-374-5179.

### Membership Information

1. As many of you know, we offer membership in YVAS as Supporting Chapter Members for \$20.00 per year. We do this to help pay the costs of membership. Although the National Audubon Society gives complimentary membership in our chapter as a benefit, no dues come to us. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to join our chapter as Supporting Chapter Members. Use the bottom application form on the right to join as Supporting Chapter Members or to renew your chapter member.
2. An application for *initial* membership in the National Audubon Society is also printed in each YVAS Flyer (see application 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, along with the fee, to the address provided. Our chapter will then receive payment for recruiting a new member.
3. Please note the address label on your issue of the Yellowstone Valley Flyer. The date your membership *expires* is listed on the top right line of the label. Please renew chapter memberships when due using the form in the Flyer. Renewal of NAS membership is NOT handled by the chapter. You should renew directly with the NAS.
4. Moving??? Please let us know as early as possible since the Post Office does not forward the Flyer. They send it back to us for a fee of up to \$2.00. So, please let us know when you plan to move. Include your old address as well as your new address so we can track you. You may write, call, or email the information.
5. Do you receive more than one copy of the Flyer? If so, it is unintentional. Please let us know so we can prevent that from happening.
6. If you have questions or problems related to membership, let me know either by phone or email: 245-5118 or acrv@bresnan.net.

—Ruth Vanderhorst, Membership Secretary



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National Audubon Society

Recruitment Code: C9ZN500Z

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
- \$15 Initial membership for Senior and Students

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: C9ZN500Z

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.

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



YELLOWSTONE VALLEY FLYER

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## 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.*

**April 18th** (Sat): Exxon Ponds and Emerald Hills. 8:00am-5:00pm. One mile walk. Sack lunch. We often see Bald Eagles and Great Blue Herons besides lots of ducks and probably the first Mountain Bluebirds. Leader: Georgia Frazier

**April 24th-26th** (Fri-Sun): CMR NWR and Bowdoin NWR. Nights in Zortman. Featuring early migrants, Short-eared Owl, and Sage Grouse. Those wishing to participate should contact Georgia Frazier [gjfrazier@netscape.com](mailto:gjfrazier@netscape.com) or 967-6812 for information. If carpooling, make sure to share cost of gasoline with your driver.

**May 9th** (Sat) Lake Basin. 8:00am Sack lunch. Leader; Mike Weber

**Fieldtrip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467**

