

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.

VOLUME 39, NUMBER 6/7

JUNE/JULY 2009

New This Issue

- Yellow-breasted Chat Profile
- Exxon Osprey Platforms Tour
- Field Trips Write-ups
- Audubon Adventures



Summer Break/New YVAS Board

We have had an interesting year of programs at the YVAS monthly chapter meetings. Programs on topics from Wolves to White-tailed Prairie Dogs to Yellowstone Country have kept us entertained and informed about some of the ecological issues that surround us.

We will resume our regular chapter meeting schedule in September, and we look forward to another year of thoughtful and provocative speakers and programs.

Starting in August, we will also have many new additions to the YVAS Officers and Board of Directors. If you missed the introduction of these new officers/members, at

our final chapter meeting, here is the roster for next year's board.

Officers:

President: Ruth Vanderhorst
 Vice-President: Dick Moore
 Treasurer: George Mowat (continuing)

Secretary: Jeanne Olson Past
 – President: Kayhan Ostovar

Board Members:

Rita Harding, Monty Sullins, Deb Regele, and Nancy Wiggins are all new board members. Robert Lubbers will continue as a board member.

Inside this issue:

<i>This Month's Chapter Meeting</i>	1
<i>Meetings Schedule</i>	1
<i>Officers and Committees</i>	2
<i>Membership Forms</i>	7
<i>Field Trip Schedule</i>	8

YVAS Meetings

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

June: Board Meeting. Date to be determined

June/July/August: Summer Break. We will resume regular chapter meetings the third Monday in September. See August flyer for more details.



From the Editor

This flyer combines June and July, and the next flyer will come out in August. Last month, I mentioned that the board is planning a get together potluck for either August or September. We are in the process of putting together a committee to work on that. If you have suggestions or would like to work on that planning committee, please let me or any other board member know. And, look for further details in the August flyer.

I hope you have a great summer, whether you plan on travelling afar or whether you plan on staying close to home. I hope you see lots of interesting birds. Always feel free to send me material about your summer adventures. Material for the flyer needs to be sent to editor@yellowstoneaudubon.org I need material by the 15th of the month for inclusion in the next month's flyer.

—Jeanne Olson



Memorials

YVAS Chapter Members Extend Sincere Sympathy

To all family members of Mary Munsell, Billings, a member of the YVAS Chapter.

To all family members of Frances DeMeyer, Billings, mother of Bill DeMeyer, a former YVAS Board Member.

Memorials have been received by YVAS in honor of these friends of Audubon

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:

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

Board of Directors:

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

Website: Mark Gale, 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
 Greeters.....Phyllis Holt 252-7373
 Audrey Jurovich 656-2748
 Injured Raptors.....Robert Lubbers 245-2970
 Membership Secretary.....Ruth Vanderhorst, 245-5118, 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 800-332-6106

Sen. Jon Tester: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510
test-er.senate.gov 800-344-1513

Rep. Dennis Rehberg: U.S. House of Rep, Wash. D.C. 20515
house.gov.rehberg 202-225-3211

Yellow-breasted Chat

The Yellow-breasted Chat is the largest of our Warblers, at sevenish inches. The Chat is not slim like a Warbler; it is more plump like a Robin. It does not have the delicate Warbler bill but a heavy one. In fact, the Chat does not meet many standards of a Warbler, but it is classified as one, at least for now.

The Chat prefers dense growth of brush or brambles, not under a canopy of trees. It is skulky and secretive much of the time, but is quite a show-off during breeding season, when it can be seen in open singing loudly and displaying. The male Chat will launch from a high spot and drop slowly with wings flapping over his back, his tail jerking up and down and his legs dangling loosely at full length, the whole time uttering a long series of indescribable notes.

The Chat's song is probably one of its most distinguishing characteristics; it has been described as the alarm call of a wren, a series of nasal squeaks, a wolf whistle, a foghorn, and a chuckling high-pitched laugh. If you do not know that you are hearing a Chat, you may be fooled into thinking there are three or four different birds calling. They are verbal from their arrival in Spring until breeding season is over.

They are early migrants in fall, and are usually gone from our area by August. They migrate to Panama and Mexico, rarely staying north of the southern U.S. border.

A rough description of the Chat is olive grey on its crown, back and tail. It has a deep yellow on its breast, from under its chin to a white patch under its belly. It has a white stripe over the eye and around the eye as well, giving it a spectacle look. It has a short white mustache stripe, and its face has a masque-like appearance. The Chat is delightful to spot as he watches you from the thick brush. If he has his back to you, he may seem drab, but if he turns and shows you that yellow breast, it can look like a light shining.

A good place to see the and hear the Chat this time of year (and especially through June) is in any riparian area. A particularly fruitful spot is Schoenthal Island, off S. Billings Boulevard, south of the ACEC. Cross Wendell's Bridge and take the trail to the right to the end. The last two years on a bird census along that path, eight males have been found singing. When you hear the first Chat, count that as one, and proceed to where you hear the next Chat, count as two, etc. This is the first step to becoming a researcher on the nesting territory of the habitat used by the Yellow-breasted Chat. Enjoy this bird!

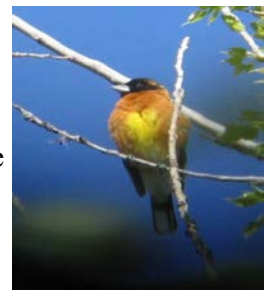
—Billie Hicks

Riverfront Park Bird Walk

A frosty morning greeted 12 birders at Billings Riverfront Park on Saturday, May 16th. The cool morning soon turned warm, and with trees and shrubs not fully leafed-out yet and only a gentle breeze, conditions were very good for locating and observing birds. The group spent about four hours walking on the south side of Lake Josephine and circling Cochran Pond, and, as a result, tallied 31 species of birds. Some areas in the park provided lots of activity, and many of the normally wary birds were very accommodating and cooperative, allowing ample time for viewing. The birds seemed to enjoy the warm spring weather as much as the birders. Highlights of the trip included watching Caspian Terns dive for fish in Lake Josephine, Black-headed Grosbeaks (a life bird for at least one of us) singing from high in trees and, at times, numerous Downy Woodpeckers, Yellow-breasted Chats and Common Yellowthroats trying their best to impress and attract mates.

—Dick Moore

(Male Black-headed Grosbeak)



Zortman/Bowdoin/CMR Field Trip

On April 24th—26th, eight of us travelled north to Zortman, Bowdoin NWR and CMR NWR for three wonderful days of birding in a temperamental Montana Spring. Following are some of our favorite observations/reflections.

Karen Ferguson, a first-time YVAS field trip participant has this to say: “What wonderful creatures those birds were. Here I was all bundled up, and there they were—hopping around on frosty ground, paddling in water that would produce hypothermia for us, sitting on open nests in snow/rain/wind/heat for 24 hours a day. Hats off to them!!”

This early spring field trip is a great way to view Montana’s early migrants, from hawks to shorebirds, and it doesn’t matter what the weather is, it is a great time with gobs of birds. And we experienced just about every weather event from rain/sleet on our way north, to a blizzard in the mountains (which made seeing the birds a bit difficult), to a sunny, mild day at Bowdoin, where sunshine made the color of the Redheads, Cinnamon Teal and Blue-winged Teal unbelievably vivid, to a bitter wind blowing us back home.

This year we saw Great-horned, Short-eared, and Long-eared Owls at Bowdoin. And these owls were the highlight of the trip for many of us. Rita Harding commented that “owls were everywhere—and close, close, close. It is very special and an uncanny feeling to stare right into the eyes of the owl.” And Ruth Vanderhorst adds that the “owls at Bowdoin were fantastic, beginning with the Great-horned Owl at the manager’s house and then especially the Long-eared pair on our walk and the Short-eared twosome. Seeing the female Long-eared on the nest just a few feet from the path and then to be on the trail when the male swooped us was just super.”

We also saw a large group of American White Pelicans flying and starting their nesting, with Double-crested Cormorants and Great Blue Herons, on islands in the large

lake. Other highlights were a Black-crowned Night Heron, Common Loon, and Black-necked Stilts. We saw about all of the ducks in reservoirs and ponds from Grass Range, north, The larger “wading” and prairie birds we saw included Greater Yellowlegs, a Willet, Marbled Godwits and Long-billed Curlews.

Early morning stops on the CMR refuge produced male Sage Grouse on a lek and Sharp-tailed Grouse flying overhead. Northern Harriers were everywhere, everyday.

It was not, however, all about the birds. The food at the local Zortman restaurant was great, and our wanderings through the Zortman cemetery, church, jail, and old gold mine shaft area provided a real sense of the historic community.

While visiting with the people in town, we were informed that during fire season and dry, hot spells on the prairies, a wide variety of birds take up residency in the mountains.

So we will add a **July fieldtrip to Zortman this summer, July 22-25 (Wednesday-Saturday)**. Accommodations at the cute Buckhorn Cabins are already set aside for YVAS for the nights of July 22-24. You may want to stay for a shorter or longer time. Contact Georgia at 967-6812 with questions or for more information.

If you would like to visit the area on your own and want to stay in town, contact the Buckhorn Store (Cabins) at Box 501, Zortman, MT 59546 or phone (406) 673-3162.

Thank you Georgia for leading us on such a special trip, where interesting bird sightings awaited us at every turn.

ACEC Earth Day Celebration

Our fickle spring weather took a break on Saturday, April 18th, just in time for the first ever Earth Day Celebration at the ACEC. Members from Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society (Lois and Jerry Dalton, Billie Hicks and Pat Larmoyeux) kicked off the event with an early morning bird walk through Norm Schoenthal Island and the ACEC ponds. A beautiful sunrise greeted more than 40 volunteers from the Billings community who came with shovels, gloves, and an energetic spirit to help with continued restoration of the land. People planted twenty mature Aspen trees, potted shrubs, weeded the nursery, and harvested snowberry clippings for future plantings. Volunteers were rewarded with a BBQ lunch and opportunities to tour the new field science lab and canoe on the ponds. Special thanks to Norm Schoenthal for organizing the work crews, Good Earth Market for providing organically produced organic burgers and turkey brats, City Brew for the coffee, and Stella’s Bakery for the bread.

—Paul Belanger (MT Audubon Director of Education)

Arapooish (Hardin Fishing Access) Field Trip

On Sunday, May 17th, Helen Carlson, Georgia Frazier, Lois Garseth, George Mowat, Jeanne Olson, and Deb and Steve Regele headed out on one of the first really warm days of spring. One of our first stops, on the Old Hardin Road, was one of our best. There were pools of water and Cottonwoods, and the area was awash in brilliantly colored birds and alive with bird song. Yellow-breasted Chats, Yellow Warblers, American Goldfinches and Bullocks Orioles were all flitting back and forth. We didn't know where to look first. And not to be outdone by birds of the yellow hues, a bright male Mountain Bluebird made his appearance. Brown Thrashers were competing with Eastern and Western Kingbirds, a House Wren (and of course the Chat), to see who could make the most noise. But the main highlight of this stop was a Northern Waterthrush bobbing along at water's edge. Georgia christened this stop Waterthrush Curve. It was hard to tear ourselves away.

On our way to Hardin we saw an immature Golden Eagle, a Red-tailed Hawk, several ducks and a few grassland sparrows. We lunched at Arapooish, where we were greeted by the first Grey Catbird of the year for many of us. Walking around the small lake, we saw Yellow Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, and a Tennessee Warbler (a life bird for me) all in the same area. A little further on, we added a Common Yellowthroat to our Warbler List. All together we ended up with 56 bird species for the day.

It was a wonderful day to be out bird watching, and George summed it up well: There are only so many Mays. If it's May, no matter what you may think you have to do at home, you need to leave it behind and get out birding.

—Jeanne Olson

Exxon Osprey Platforms Tour

On May 6th, Brad Hall, Robert Lubbers, George Mowat and Jeanne Olson from YVAS joined Ron Kehler and Tanner Callender, Environmental Coordinator for the Billings ExxonMobil Refinery, on a tour of the refinery's Osprey nest sites and platforms.

Exxon is concerned about Osprey nests built on the refinery grounds. Of particular concern is an active nest on a power pole in the tank storage area and nest-building activity on the turnaround flare tower. The refinery has anti-bird wires on the flare tower, but this does not seem to stop the birds from attempting to build nests.

Lou Hanebury, biologist from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service briefly joined us and explained the options the refinery had for removing a nest either before eggs

hatched or after young birds fledged. He brought some reflective tabs that are designed to deter birds and discussed ways the refinery could experiment with them to direct birds away from sensitive areas.

At the same time, platform towers the refinery has established to encourage Osprey to nest away from active areas are unused. Tanner explained that perhaps one of the platforms was built too close to the railroad and other heavy traffic areas. We then toured the refinery's natural area, near the Yellowstone River, where other Osprey nest platforms sit empty. There was speculation that this could be because of an active Bald Eagle nest close by.

(Empty Osprey nest at refinery)

(Bald Eagle near Exxon Natural Area)



about their Osprey nesting activities. We will also consider helping Exxon explore different ways they can use and develop their natural area for habitat as well as education.

As YVAS continues to monitor Osprey nest sites, we will stay in touch with Exxon

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



© Marie Read

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

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

Non-Profit Organization
PRST STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BILLINGS, MT
PERMIT NO. 27

ADDRESS SERVICES 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.

June 13th (Sat) Pryor Mountains. Meet at 7:00am at **Rocky Mountain College** for car-pooling or at 8:00am at **Bridger Rest Stop**. Sack Lunch. Leader: Barb Jaquith

June 20th (Sat) Billie Hicks's House. Meet at 6:30am at **Rocky Mountain College** for car-pooling or at 7:00am at **Billie's house**. Singing birds. This is a **Summer Fundraiser Brunch**. \$7.50 donation. **Reservations Required**. Call Billie at 962-3798.

July 11th (Sat) Red Lodge. Meet at 7:00am at **Rocky Mountain College** for car-pooling or at 8:00am at **Visitors Center in Red Lodge**. Sack Lunch. Leader: Barb Jaquith

July 22-25 (Wed-Sat) Zortman and surrounding areas. See page 4 of this month's flyer for more information. Contact Georgia Frazier at 967-6812

Aug 2 (Sun) Pompey's Pillar. Meet at 8:00am at **Rocky Mountain College** for car-pooling or at 9:00am at **Pompey's Pillar**. Sack Lunch. Leader: Georgia Frazier

Aug 8 (Sat) Shorebirds, Hawks and Prairie Birds. 8:00am. Sack Lunch. Leader: Mike Weber

Fieldtrip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467

