

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 5

MAY 2009

New This Issue

- Burrowing Owl Profile
- Osprey Platforms
- Exxon Ponds Field Trip
- Audubon Photo Contest



The Wildness and Spirit of Yellowstone



There is no place on Earth like Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding lands many know as “Yellowstone Country.” *The Wildness and Spirit of Yellowstone* is a celebration of place, wildness and the Yellowstone community. This slide-show

presentation will stir those who know and love Yellowstone Country to re-commit to its future and motivate others to re-discover the beauty of living with wildness.

While unparalleled assets still abound throughout Yellowstone Country, there remain many threats. *The Wildness and Spirit of Yellowstone* tells the story of Yellowstone Country, emphasizing the importance of indicator species, such as grizzly bear, to the future integrity of the ecosystem and its communities.

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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, May 11th at 7 p.m. Board Meeting.

Monday, May 18th 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

This is such an exciting time of year. It seems that daily new birds arrive, and it is so fun to see who is new as we welcome our feather friends back. Last weekend I was in the Red Lodge/ Pryor Mountains area and spotted my first Long-billed Curlews, Burrowing Owl, and American White Pelicans for 2009. You will notice that we have a busy field trip calendar for the month of May. Hopefully, you will be able to take part in some of these Spring trips and see what else is new. As always, if you want to see your trip or your interesting bird sightings in the Flyer, let me know.

Other new happenings: the YVAS board would like to re-establish the August picnic potluck. This traditional YVAS social event has languished the past few years, and we would like to see it thrive once again. If you have stories about past summer potluck experiences; if you have suggestions about what would make this event successful; if you want to offer your help, please let me know. We are still working out the details, so look for further information in upcoming Flyers.

You will notice that page 5 of this month's Flyer has an article about a new YVAS conservation project: establishing and monitoring Osprey nest platforms. We are excited to begin working on this project. Know that we are always open to new projects that help forward our mission statement of "promoting enjoyment and protection of the natural environment through education, activism, and conservation of bird habitat." If you have any projects in your community you think we could and should be involved in, please let me or another YVAS member know.

As always, material for the flyer needs to be sent to editor@yellowstoneaudubon.org, and 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
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

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

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
tester.senate.gov 800-344-1513

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

Burrowing Owls

I decided to follow up on last month's article in the Flyer on owls and concentrate on an owl that remains elusive for me, the Burrowing Owl. This owl is so named because it nests and lives underground in burrows that have been dug by small mammals, like ground squirrels and prairie dogs.

The Burrowing Owl is one of the smallest owls in North America at 9-10 inches in height, a wingspan of 20-24 inches, and weighs approximately 5.5 -7.5 ounces. The ground-dwelling Burrowing Owl has a round head, no ear tufts, is covered in brown spotted feathers, has long legs, and also sports distinctive white "eyebrows" above bright yellow eyes. Unlike most owls, where the female is larger than the male, both sexes are similar in size.

Burrowing Owls are found in loose colonies in open, dry grasslands, agricultural, and range lands often associated with burrowing animals. The owls feed on a wide variety of prey, changing food habits as location and time of year determine availability. Beetles and grasshoppers comprise a large portion of their diet as do mice, voles, rats, gophers, and ground squirrels. Other prey include reptiles and amphibians, young cottontail rabbits, bats, and song birds. These owls are quite versatile in the ways they capture prey. They chase down grasshoppers and beetles on the ground, use their talons to catch large insects in the air, or hover in mid-air before swooping down on unsuspecting prey. They also watch from perches and then glide silently toward their target. Burrowing Owls are primarily active at dusk and dawn, but will hunt throughout day and night, especially when there are young to feed. The Burrowing Owl is known to collect mammal dung and put it in and around its burrow. The dung attracts beetles, which the owl then captures and eats.

No other owl is commonly seen on the ground and during the day; they can often be found perching near their burrow on mounds of dirt, fence posts, and trees—frequently on one foot. Flight is with irregular wing beats, and they will frequently make long glides, interspersed with rapid wing beats.

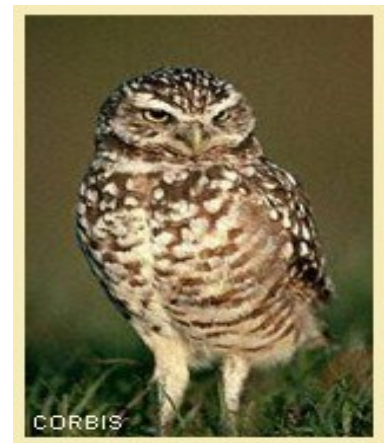
The nesting season begins in late March or April. Adults usually return to the same burrow or near old burrows each year. Burrowing Owls are usually monogamous, but occasionally a male will have two ma-

tes. Courtship displays include flashing white markings, cooing, bowing, scratching, and nipping. The male performs a repeated display flight, rising quickly to 100 feet, hovering for 5-10 seconds, and then dropping 50 feet. The female usually lays 6 to 9 (sometimes up to 12) white eggs that are incubated for 28 -30 days by the female only. The male brings food to the female during incubation and stands guard near the burrow during the day.

Burrowing Owls are very vocal and have a wide range of different calls. The main call is given only by adult males, usually when near the burrow to attract a female. A two-syllable "*who-who*" is given at the entrance of a promising burrow. This call is also associated with breeding and territory defense. Juveniles give a rattlesnake-like buzz when threatened in the burrow, and adults give a short, low-level "chuck" call to warn of approaching predators. This is usually accompanied by bobbing the head up and down. When an owl sees something approaching its home, it bobs up and down a few times to express excitement or distress, then dives into its burrow.

They have many natural enemies, including larger owls, hawks, falcons, foxes, badgers, skunks, ferrets, snakes and domestic cats and dogs. Current population estimates are not well known but trend data suggests significant declines across their range.

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The Wildness and Spirit of Yellowstone [continued]

Presenter Michael Leach, Executive Director of Yellowstone Country Guardians, has deep roots throughout the region and has worked as a naturalist, fly-fishing guide, and writer based out of Gardiner, Montana. His work as a Ranger Naturalist, and more recently as the Bear Education Ranger in Yellowstone National Park, has inspired his vision to start a Yellowstone based nonprofit. Yellowstone Country Guardians is a grassroots organization working on the ground through its education and outreach programs to foster a commitment from local communities to ensure that Yellowstone Country remains a place of hope and wildness for this and future generations.

Yellowstone Country Guardians
P.O. Box 171
Gardiner, Montana 59030
www.yellowstonecountryguardians.org

Michael Leach, Executive Director
406-224-2677
mleach@yellowstonecountryguardians.org

Exxon Ponds-Emerald Hills Fieldtrip

On April 18, thirteen birders, lead by Georgia Frazier, had a great day birding. Song Sparrow and Red-winged Blackbird songs greeted us as we started to the ponds. It was especially exciting to see a pair of Wood Ducks in a tree. Also seen on their nest in a tree across the river was a pair of Bald Eagles. A Great Blue Heron flew by, and waterfowl observed included Canada Geese, Mallards, a Gadwall, Common Mergansers, Northern Shovelers, two hiding Green-winged Teal, and a Redhead. There were two sightings of a Double-crested Cormorant, and some birders viewed a Sandhill Crane soaring high above.

The trip continued to the Emerald Hills, where we spotted a Black-billed Magpie, three Wild Turkeys, many Mountain Bluebirds, Pine Siskins, House Finches, and a Pinyon Jay.

Lake Elmo and Two Moon Park were our next destinations; unfortunately, we didn't see many birds at either location. However, we had a good walk with good conversation. It was a great day to be out watching birds.

—Rita Cetrone

Helen Carlson's 33rd Annual Bird Identification Class

This is a reminder about Helen Carlson's upcoming Bird Identification Class. Class Days are Thursdays, May 14th, May 21st and May 28th. Helen will take participants out into the field to find and identify a variety of birds. Classes are appropriate for all skill levels, from those just beginning to notice birds to more experienced bird watchers.

Call Helen at 248-8684 for more information, to find out times, etc.

Cost is \$25, and all proceeds go to Audubon Adventures: A program that helps teachers bring Audubon into their classrooms.



Burrowing Owls [continued]

The last estimate placed them at less than 10,000 breeding pairs. They are listed as endangered, threatened, or a species of special concern in most states because of their declining numbers. Despite their protected status, Burrowing Owls are threatened by agricultural, residential, and commercial development and efforts to eradicate prairie dogs, which live side by side with Burrowing Owls. Collisions with cars is a major source of mortality as well.

Burrowing Owls are migratory and are found in the central and eastern Montana in the spring and summer months. They are comparatively easy to see because they are active in daylight and are surprisingly bold and approachable. I hope this year is my year to finally glimpse a Burrowing Owl.

—Dick Moore



Osprey Platforms

YVAS is beginning a new project involved with Osprey nest platforms. At our last chapter meeting, YVAS President, Kayhan Ostovar, briefly introduced this project, commenting that many Osprey nests are removed by the power companies once nesting season is over. Allison Begley, from FWP, stated that most of these removals were legitimate due to safety concerns. YVAS would like to work cooperatively with the power companies and other organizations to establish additional Osprey nesting platforms, helping to offset those that are removed.

To do this, we first need to establish a database of existing Osprey platforms as well as information on where new platforms would be best sited. For this, YVAS **needs your help**.

If you know of existing Osprey platforms, please contact Robert Lubbers, giving him the specific location of the platform(s) so he does not reproduce individual sites. If you have recommendations for Osprey platform sites, contact Robert or Kayhan.

We also welcome volunteers to help build Osprey nesting platforms. If you would like to be involved, contact Kayhan. He has platform design information.

This is an ongoing, two-fold project. Along with identifying and establishing Osprey nesting platforms, we would also like to monitor them for fledging success rate. If you have information about fledging dates, contact Billie Hicks; she is going to put together a database on fledgling success rates and dates. If you would like to be a Os-

prey platform monitor, let any of the above board members know.

We would like this to be an ongoing YVAS conservation project, and we welcome any help you can provide as we initiate this project.

Contact information for the above mentioned board members follows:

Kayhan Ostovar: 258-7481,
kayhan@q-com

Robert Lubbers: 245-2970,
rslubbers@q-com

Billie Hicks: 962-3798,
lons_luv@hotmail.com

This is a reminder about the upcoming **Annual Bird Festival—*Wings Across the Big Sky*—to be held in Great Falls, June 5-7**. There are many scheduled field trips as well as education seminars. The evening of Saturday, June 6th includes a banquet and awards with special speaker Alan Newson and invited keynote speaker Senator John Tester. If you have not received a schedule brochure for the festival, you can download a copy at www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival or if you would like a brochure to be mailed to you, call 406-443-3949.

Update on the Great BackYard Bird Count

[A couple of months ago, the Flyer included an update on Montana information from the Great BackYard Bird Count (GBBC). Following is national information from National Audubon's and Cornell Lab of Ornithology's 2009 GBBC Summary.]

The most notable stories coming from this year's GBBC (held February 16-19) were significant increases in Pine Siskins and White-winged Crossbills, particularly over much of the eastern United States. Participants recorded 279,469 Pine Siskins (from 18,528 checklists), up from a previous high of 38,977 (from 4,069 checklists) in 2005. Participants recorded 4,824 White-winged Crossbills (from 589 checklists), up from their previous high of 2,854 (from 135 checklists) in 2007.

This year also saw a notable increase in the number of citizen scientists participating in the count. "Bird watchers shattered last year's record by submitting more than 93,600 checklists."

The GBBC saw continued declines in common birds, "especially grassland and shrubland species." Loggerhead Shrike numbers are down, and Northern Bobwhites and Eastern Meadowlarks, while up some from last year, are down from their 2004 numbers.

First time birds for the GBBC include two oceanic species—the Pink-footed Shearwater and Xantus's Murrelet, both recorded in California. Other first tim-

ers include Baird's Sandpiper, Black-billed Cuckoo, and Blackpoll Warbler. Two rare Mexican species appeared on GBBC checklists from Arizona for the first time: the first Sinaloa Wren ever found north of the border and a Blue Mockingbird.

All together, participants identified 619 species during the GBBC. The ten most frequently reported birds were the following:

1. Northern Cardinal
2. Mourning Dove
3. Dark-eyed Junco
4. American Goldfinch
5. Downy Woodpecker
6. Blue Jay
7. House Finch
8. Tufted Titmouse
9. American Crow
10. Black-capped Chickadee

Next year's GBBC is February 15-18, 2010

Information from 2009 Great Backyard Bird Count Summary,

for more information visit the Cornell Bird Information site:

Audubon Magazine Photo Contest

Audubon magazine is launching the 2009 Audubon Magazine Photography Awards: *Birds in Focus*, created to celebrate the beauty and diversity of birdlife through the art of photography and to honor the exceptional work of talented professional, amateur and youth photographers from all over the U.S. *Audubon* will be accepting submissions in three categories: Professional, Amateur, and Youth. Photographers are encouraged to reveal a new angle or perspective in their work. "Think creatively," advised *Audubon's* design director Kevin Fisher, one of the judges. "We welcome uncommon perspectives."

Other judges include renowned wildlife photographer Joel Sartore, a regular contributor to *Audubon* and *National Geographic*; Kim Hubbard, longtime *Audubon* photography editor and an accomplished photographer; and Steve Freligh, publisher of *Nature's Best Photography*.

The Award winners will be announced in December and will see their work showcased within the pages of both *Audubon* and *Nature's Best Photography* magazines, as well as on their respective websites. An impressive array of prizes will be awarded, including international trips as well as top-of-the-line photo and optic equipment from award sponsor, Nikon.

Submissions: Accepted May 15-July 15, 2009. Up to 10 images per entrant. For details visit

www.AudubonMagazinePhotoAwards.com

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
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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.

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

May 16th (Sat) *Riverfront Park. 8:00am. Half day. Leaders: George and Bernie Mowat*

May 17th (Sun) *Arapoosh (Hardin and Fishing Access North). 8:00am. Sack lunch. Leader: Georgia Frazier*

May 21st (Thurs) *Riverfront Park. 5:30pm. Leader: Mike Weber*

May 23rd (Sat) *Pompey's Pillar. 7:30am to early afternoon. Sack lunch optional. Leader: Ruth Vanderhorst*

May 26th (Tues) *Pictograph Cave. 5:30pm. Leader: Ruth Vanderhorst*

May 30th (Sat) *Stillwater and Woodbine Areas. 7:00am-5:00pm. Sack lunch. Leader: Ruth Vanderhorst*

Fieldtrip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467

