

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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New This Issue

- Hawk and Eagle Profile
- Osprey Nesting Platforms Count
- Upcoming Events



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**Bird Population Declines and Invasive Species:
What's the Connection?**

Invasive species are one of the most significant causes of declining bird populations and of the alteration of native ecosystems.

Lisa Carnicon will give a brief overview of what invasive species are. She will offer examples of how they are affecting bird populations across the United States, and she will describe how a bill that is currently in the House of Representatives, HR 669, the Non-native Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act, will, if passed, address the monumental problem of invasive species.

Lisa has a B.A. in Environmental Policy & Analysis from Bowling Green State University. She has, as

a volunteer, yanked up invasive plants on Nature Conservancy preserves and has helped the New England Wildflower Society build its Invasive Plants Atlas of New England. Last April, the National Audubon Society sent her to Washington, D.C. to lobby for HR 669.



YVAS Meetings

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

Monday, Sept. 14th, 6:30pm: Board Meeting

Monday, Sept 21st, 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting

The YVAS fundraiser dinners before the general membership meetings have been suspended until further notice. We are looking for someone to take on the organization of these dinners. Contact Ruth Vanderhorst if you are interested in organizing or helping out with dinners.



From the Editor

The YVAS board met in August, and our new president, Ruth Vanderhorst, expressed her desire to get more members of our chapter more actively involved in the chapter. You will notice that we are suspending the fundraiser dinners before monthly chapter meetings until we can find volunteers willing to organize them. If you are interested, contact Ruth. We also need volunteers to lead or help lead YVAS field trips. If you would like to lead a local trip, or if you live outside the Billings area and would like to share your favorite bird watching spot, contact George and Bernie Mowat.

There are other ways you can help out your YVAS chapter: if you are not already, consider becoming a supporting chapter member of YVAS. Membership dues for supporting chapter members directly benefit YVAS. See the membership information on page 7. Also see the bottom of page 5 in this Flyer for other volunteer possibilities. And, of course, I am always looking for interesting articles/pictures for the Flyer, in particular bird profiles. Writing a profile is a great opportunity to highlight your favorite bird. Feel free to contact me for more information. 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.

—Jeanne Olson



Phelps Memorial Set for Wednesday Sept. 23rd at Two Moon Park

A commemoration of the effort by Jim Phelps to keep Two Moon Park forever a Natural Area will be held at Two Moon Park, Wednesday, September 23 at 2 p.m. A memorial plaque with a quote from Jim, mounted on a permanent stone monument, honors the care and concern Jim had for Two Moon and his efforts to protect Montana's natural habitat for future generations of Billings residents. The site includes the YVAS Memorial Bench and is located approximately a quarter of a mile on Mallard Loop Trail at Two Moon. For more information call Robert Lubbers, 245-2970.

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:

President: Ruth Vanderhorst, 245-5118, acr@bresnan.net

Vice-President: Dick Moore, 656-6241

Secretary: Jeanne Olson, 656-7278

Treasurer: George Mowat, 656-7467, gmowat@bresnan.net

Past-President: Kayhan Ostovar, 256-7481, kayhan@q.com

Board of Directors:

Rita Harding: 259-7586, mtroses22@bresnan.net

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

Deb Regele: 962-3115, dregele@juno.com

Monty Sullins: 656-5242, ssullins@bresnan.net

Nancy Wiggins: 651-0218, nancyhwiggins@hotmail.com

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 6:30p.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.....open

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

Hawks and Eagles by Jerry Dalton

Hawks and eagles will always be difficult for me to identify. Some people have the mistaken impression that I am a raptor identification expert. But I realize that “showing up is half of success,” and I keep trying and learning. I accept that I will not be able to identify many raptors that I see.

The best views of birds are often accidental. I will never forget the winter Golden Eagle near Grass Range that flew up from a road kill only at the last instant, giving a full windshield view of the humongous size of a flying eagle. Another time a Sharp-shinned Hawk stalked a House Finch outside my kitchen window. The Sharp-shin was atop a chain link fence covered by leafless Virginia creeper vines, and the Finch was below in the vines. The Sharp-shin flew from one side of the fence to the other, trying to flush the Finch or penetrate the vines and catch it. The Finch made its frantic way to the ground among the vines and hid among fallen leaves. If House Finches evolve an ability to burrow into the soil that was the day it started!

Possibly a lifetime event was the autumn equinox day I saw a kettle of hundreds of hawks wheeling high in the sky from my backyard in Billings. A midday weather front with wind and a shower passed through. By mid-afternoon it was nice, and I was reading and dozing in the backyard. That was before I had a digital camera, and I was out of film. I was so flabbergasted by the event, I failed to identify any specific species. If you have seen a kettle of hawks in Montana, please share your story with me because I haven't heard of any other such sightings.

My suggestion for better identification skills is to simply practice watching hawks. If you get a chance to spend time at a hawk migration observation station, that will give you the most birds to see along with some well practiced experts. I find the silhouette drawings of soaring hawks and eagles in Sibley Field Guides helpful. When you see a raptor that you can positively identify, study it as long as you can and compare that bird to field guide images. Suggestions for places to view hawks in winter and during migrations would be between Pompey's Pillar and Custer on the frontage road in the Yellowstone River bottom, and between Hardin and Fort Smith.

Another good opportunity is the YVAS hawk watch

field trip in September. Please join me for the field trip and one day hawk watch on Saturday, September 26 at Meteetsee Spires, about 6 or 8 miles south of Red Lodge on the Meteetsee Trail. Bring lunch and a lawn chair. We will leave Rocky Mountain College Parking Lot at 8:00am, and we will also make a stop on the East Bench Road near Red Lodge just off the highway to Belfry. Ferruginous Hawks are reliable there. (Wet roads will mean deep ruts in the slick mud on Meteetsee Trail and no trip.)

Resources and Further Opportunities for Hawk Watching:

Hawk Watch International, www.hawkwatch.org Thirteen U.S. hawk watch sites and Veracruz, Mexico where 4-6 MILLION raptors pass by in the fall (see the August 2009 Flyer, page 6 for information on the HawkWatch Vera Cruz Ecotour)

Raptor Festival at Bridger Bowl Ski area near Bozeman, first weekend in October each year, including visits to the observation site atop Bridger Mountain run by Hawk Watch International each year August 27-October 31

Roger's Pass eagle count annually in late March, also Hawk Watch International.

Montana Diurnal Raptor Survey, organized by MT Dept of Fish Wildlife & Parks, 46 routes each in a different latilong, conducted by biologists and volunteers during spring nesting season, done since 1976, shows steady population trends.



Questions and Some Answers About Osprey Along the Yellowstone River

Osprey, in years past and for reasons not yet fully understood, though casually seen along the Billings/Laurel reach of the Yellowstone River, were not considered a common bird sighting. Birds were seen but often not their nests. Supposition had it that apparently there was only one known, active Osprey nest in the Billings area, located south of Laurel on Highway 310, a mile and quarter south of the Yellowstone River on what is now called Osprey Outpost Road.

Approximately ten years ago, the YVAS Chapter with the generous assistance of then Montana Power Company, Exxon Refinery, Billings Water Department, and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks began a dedicated effort to make this area of the Yellowstone a more appealing habitat to try to re-introduce or assist Osprey to nest. At the time, career biologist Sam Milodragovich of Montana Power, using techniques successful in Western Montana, designed a platform—basically the 6' drum end of a power cable spool, mounted on a 35' pole—which strategically placed along or near the Yellowstone offered ready made nesting sites for the birds. Exxon put up three platforms with sticks prefixed to entice the birds, the Water Department put up two and Zoo Montana one. A few years ago, a platform was erected at Sundance by the Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks department. Then everybody including YVAS waited to see what would happen.

Earlier this spring, the YVAS Board decided it was time to undertake an area Osprey count to determine what did happen. The questions, did Osprey find the ready-made platforms interesting enough to nest? and how many platforms are being used? were the driving issues. Another was, how successful was this nesting season? How many birds, adult and young, are there? Also, YVAS members were asked to report any nests locations—active or not—on platforms or on power poles or snags; later in the year, mid-August, a count would be taken.

Wednesday Aug. 19, YVAS Board members Monty Sullins, George Mowat and Robert Lubbers took a first look with rather surprising if not curious initial findings. The most important one: Osprey are now permanent and successful "residents" of our reach of the Yellowstone. Of the nine platforms, one of two at the Billings Water Department, two of five at Exxon's refinery, and the platform at Sundance were occupied. The platform at the Zoo is not occupied but appears interesting to eagles and Red-tailed Hawks, and a platform at the Water Works has been taken over by geese! Right! Geese!

More interesting, in the area roughly from Highway 310 from Laurel to Silesia then back along the Yellowstone to the eastern boundary of Exxon's refinery, there are fourteen Osprey nests. Nine of those were occupied. These nests except for the two occupied platforms at Exxon, the one at the Water Works and the one at Sundance, are on power poles and include a population of ten juveniles and seven adult birds with one nest showing an adult feeding a nestling. (Note: accurate counts of all osprey, adults and fledglings, is approximate).

An unanswered--probably unanswerable--question, since Osprey tend to return to the same nesting area and quite often the same nest year after year, is how many birds are descendant from that "original" nest south of Laurel? And are they "populating" the eight occupied nests of the sixteen counted this year? Other questions remain: Do platforms work? Should there be an attempt to build more of them? Where should they go? Power poles near the river are inviting to Osprey, but the power companies understandably don't appreciate Osprey nests on their poles since the often huge nests can cause outages, resulting in forcible removal of the nests, to say nothing of the serious danger those pole nests are to the Osprey themselves! When erecting a platform, how can an Osprey be "enticed" to build on it rather than another power pole?

(continued next page)

Osprey (continued)

Then for purposes of accuracy, since Osprey arrive mid-April and leave around mid-September, how late in the "hatching" year is the optimum time to count? When is the best time to count? And how should the count be accurately conducted?

Our day out counting Osprey was a wonderful bird-watching trip that provided a bonus of other birds as well. Counters saw several flocks of Lark Sparrows and brilliant Goldfinches feeding on roadside sunflowers, a Swainson's Hawk, lots of Mourning Doves, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, a Kingfisher, and a pair of Sand Hill Cranes. And, of course, several examples of beautiful, effortless flight by several adult Osprey. Best of all, that "first" nest south of Laurel grows bigger every year! It had a successful hatch: 3 young with one adult standing by with food—a fish—to help stoke those fledglings for their long trip south in a few weeks.

Questions aside, the early findings of this first count were gratifying and provide much for the chapter to consider as it continues to monitor Osprey along the Yellowstone River.

—Robert Lubbers



Osprey on nest platform at Exxon Refinery, Billings.

Montana's Bird Distribution Program Needs Listings: Montana's bird distribution program needs documented observations of birds. Observations in this statewide bird-tracking project will be collected in the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks database. Submit observations online at <http://nhp.nris.state.mt.us/Tracker/> or mail to Montana Bird Distribution, Montana Audubon P.O.595, Helena, MT 59624.

Third Annual Yellowstone River Cleanup: Kayhan Ostovar will be organizing the Yellowstone River Cleanup, which will be held in September. He encourages you to "adopt a float," and he is looking for volunteers (teams or individuals) to help walk the riverbanks, collecting trash. He is also looking for volunteers with watercraft (drift boats, rafts, etc) to pick up that collected trash. Participants of the first two River Cleanups were successful in collecting and hauling away a lot of garbage. However, there is never any shortage of trash, so join Kayhan to make this year's River Cleanup a success. For the exact date and more information, contact Kayhan at kayhan@q.com or 256-7481.

**THE 9TH ANNUAL
MISSION VALLEY HAT PARTY
IS SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2009
AT THE OWL RESEARCH INSTITUTE!**
All Auduboners and friends are welcome!



The Hat Party begins at 4 p.m. with live music. Food service starts at 5:30. Live music continues until midnight, with three bands on the play schedule. And campfire music continues into the morning!

A \$15 donation gets you barbecue pig and smoked beef brisket, pasta and green salads, pies and pastries, beer and wine, and soft drinks. It guarantees you a site for overnight camping, for both trailers and tents. And it comes with a full twelve hours of great music. **Don't forget your hat!** The more creative, the better! Forgetting a hat will cost you \$5.

Address and Directions: Ninepipes Center, 35490 Ninepipes Lane; Charlo, MT 59824
Signs are posted at intersections near the Hat Party.

From Missoula and South: Take 93 N to mile marker 40.
Turn **LEFT** on Olsen Road and go 2 miles W.
Turn **RIGHT** at first four-way intersection (Ninepipe Road) and go 1 mile N.
Take first **LEFT** on Ninepipe Lane and go $\frac{1}{2}$ mile W.
The party is at first farm on **RIGHT**.

To get directions from other locations, and to learn more about the research institute and the party go to www.owlinstitute.org

Green Drinks at the Audubon Conservation Education Center

Join the Billings Green Drinks gathering at the Audubon Conservation Education Center (ACEC) on Tuesday, Sept 8th 5:00pm, to learn more about The Center (located off of S. Billings Blvd, south of I-90 and north of the Yellowstone River. Look for center sign on the west side of S. Billings Blvd.).

Green Drinks is an informal gathering of environmentally friendly individuals who join together to learn about events/projects, to network, and to enjoy one another's company. Green Drinks meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month at different locations, and anyone is welcome. For more information about Green Drinks, go to the home page at www.greendrinks.org From there you can find the site for Billings as well as other cities you may be interested in. To sign up for the local Green Drinks newsletter, email Nash at nemrich@highplainsarchitects.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
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.

Sept 10th (Thur) Meet at Riverfront Park at 5:00pm. Fall Migrants. Leader Mike Weber.

Sept 26th (Sat) Meeteetse Spires Hawk Watch. 8:00am at Rocky parking lot. Leader: Jerry Dalton. Bring a sack lunch and lawn chair. (Note: Meeteetse Spires is outside of Red Lodge)

Oct 3rd (Sat) Stillwater and Cooney Dam. 8:00am-6:00pm.
Bring a sack lunch.

Leader: Helen Carlson.

Fieldtrip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467

