

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 40, NUMBER 8

AUGUST 2010

FROM THE ARCHIVES

New in this issue

- From the Archives
- Field Trip Notes
- Wings Across the Big Sky
- The Nature Conservancy's Matador Ranch



1953: LOCAL AUDUBON SOCIETY FORMED

One hundred fifty people attended the first meeting to organize the 'Billings Audubon Society' at the Eastern Normal College on Tuesday, April 21, 1953. Organized by Professor William Hoheisel, forty-seven of those present became charter members and they elected Carson E. Bechtel, President; Theodore A. Topper, Vice President; Miss Winifred Stull, Secretary; Dr. Raymond E. Smalley, Treasurer. This was a very committed group of pioneers. Careful records were kept from the start by Theodora Smith, describing field trips and observations along Airport Road, Alkali Creek, Huntley and Laurel. The photos from field trips in the 1950's could pass for today, except for the vintage Chevrolets and Fords. Lecturers and films were popular at monthly meetings. The first Christmas bird count on December 29, 1953, accounting for a reported 2500 birds, was recorded in detail. Whooping Cranes were seen in May 1972 at the Wildlife Refuge at Medicine Lake, when the Billings Gazette reported that there were

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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, August 16th 6:00pm: Board Meeting at ACEC

Monday, September 13th 6:00pm: Board Meeting

Monday, September 20th 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting



You can find us on the Web at www.yellowstoneaudubon.org.



“only 30 of the big birds left in the United States.” Some things haven’t changed. It appears from materials in the YVAS archives at Parmly Billings Library that the first Bulletin of the organization was issued in October, 1970, by Billie Hicks, who was then President and served 5 terms; postage was 6 cents! Helen Carlson took over the leadership in 1976 and it has been passed down since then. As the Billings Audubon Society grew to represent more members throughout the area, the Board of Directors proposed changing the chapter’s name to the ‘Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society’ in September 1974. From there, YVAS has grown to what we are today,

ATTENTION OSPREY NEST OBSERVERS!! Those members who volunteered to observe assigned Osprey nests, please conduct the mid-to-latter August nest surveys to count the fledging young before they leave the nests. If you need help in identifying young birds from adults or have any other questions, please contact me. Turn in the completed data sheets to me after the August survey. **Monty Sullins 656-5242 or 861-2442.**



Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:

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

Vice-President: Dick Moore, 656-6241

Secretary: Mary Schvetz, (720) 935-2504
mary.schvetz@rocky.edu

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

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

Board of Directors:

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

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Steve Regele: 962-3115, sregele@juno.com

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Nan-

Montana’s Congressional Delegation:

Sen. Max Baucus: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510

website: <http://baucus.senate.gov>

email: max@baucus.senate.gov

Billings: 657-6790 Wash. D.C.: 1-800-332-6160

Sen. Jon Tester: U.S. Senate, Wash. D.C. 20510

website: <http://tester.senate.gov>

email: senator@tester.senate.gov

Billings: 252-0550 Wash. D.C.: 1-866-554-4403

Rep. Dennis Rehberg: U.S. House of Rep. Wash. D.C.

20515 website: www.rehberg.house.gov

email: denny.rehberg@mail.house.gov

Billings: 256-1019 Wash. D.C.: 202-225-3211

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.....Nancy Wiggins, nancyhwiggins@hotmail.com

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

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

Membership Secretary.....Joel M. Bowers, 534-3672,
cell: 591-5635, jmba@jmba.com

Program Chair:.....Robert Lubbers 245-2970

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

Website: Tom Lyman, Tomglyman@gmail.com

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

- Board Meetings held second Monday of each month at 6:30pm. Board Meetings are open to entire membership.
- General Chapter Meetings are held third Monday of each month at 7:00pm. All meeting are open to the public.

FIELD TRIP NOTES

PRYOR MOUNTAINS



BLUE GROSBEAK Photo by Starr Stevens

Sixteen souls braved the cold winds of the Pryor Mountains on June 12th under the guidance of our expert leader Barb Jacquith. Over 60 species were observed including the now famous breeding blue grosbeak, who posed atop wire and bush for all to see, and a very short-lived appearance of bobolink near the big grain elevators in Bridger. The Bridger pond produced wood ducks among others. The Peewee entertained us at the creek crossing just out the Pryor Mountain Road. And the red-tailed hawk made his regular appearance on the cliffs. The reservation road to the campgrounds was impassible and there was no lurching in the warm sun while watching the hummers this year. We took the west side road down to Warren ponds. The mountain plovers eluded our best efforts but the prairie falcon made a pleasing appearance. Some of the group braved the rough road up Bear Canyon, failed at attempts to see the blue-gray gnatcatcher, but got the pinion jay by ear. Starr Stevens

(My apologies to all who wished to attend the Pryor Mountains field trip on June 12. I was to meet the group at the Rocky parking lot at 7am and direct the group to meet at the Bridger Rest Stop and join Field Trip Leader, Barbara Jacquith. Unfortunately, I remembered my duty as I was leaving the house to lead a different trip at 8:15 am. I am very sorry for any inconveniences or problems anyone encountered due to my laxness. I am especially sorry to have created a problem for Barb Jacquith as well. I will do better. Ruth Vanderhorst)

BLUE GROSBEAK

The Blue Grosbeak is an uncommon bird found in shrubby habitats across the United States. Named for its two most obvious field marks—the deep blue color and the thick, powerful bill—the Blue Grosbeak has the heavy brown wingbars that set it apart from similar species. Found in summer throughout most of the southern two-thirds of the United States, the breeding range has been moving northward for more than 25 years, which may explain why we are finding it in the Pryor Mountains. Its favored habitats are thickets, hedgerows, orchards, and overgrown fields with small shrubs. The song is reminiscent of Indigo Buntings but is ‘buzzier’, lacks the paired phrases, and has a warbling, rhythmic pattern. The population is stable or increasing. The Brown-headed Cowbird commonly lays its own eggs in Blue Grosbeak nests; specific effects on populations are not documented. (Excerpted from Cornell Labs and *Birder’s Digest*)

PICTOGRAPH CAVE STATE PARK

Perfect sunny, dry weather with moderate temperatures greeted the 14 birders who attended the Pictograph Cave field trip on June 8. The 5:30 p.m. hour seems an agreeable time for many persons to gather for a short trip. It was especially good to see at least 3 first timers on field trips. They were active in spotting birds and trying to learn about them.

The drive to Pictograph Cave is lovely and often several bird species are seen along the roads. This year, American Magpies, Mourning Doves, Western Meadowlarks and a lonely Red-tailed hawk were seen before entering the Park. The group enjoyed the many Yellow Warblers, several Yellow-Breasted Chats, Bullock's Orioles, House Wrens, Spotted Towhees, White-throated Swifts, N. Flickers, and a Rock Wren, Kestrel and other birds.

It is of interest that 4 days later, a group found 3 Rock Wrens and 3 Lazuli Buntings on the grounds during a morning walk. It is important to look for birds at various times of day. This park is close to Billings and is easy to walk around on developed trails.
Ruth Vanderhorst

A new, sandstone-hued interpretative center rises at the foot of rim-rocks where Pictograph Cave has drawn human beings for over 3,000 years. The Pictograph, Middle and Ghost cave complex was home to generations of prehistoric hunters. Over 30,000 artifacts have been identified from the park. A short paved trail allows visitors to view rock paintings, known as pictographs, that are still visible in Pictograph Cave, the largest of the three.

SUMMER TRAVEL OF GEORGE AND BERNIE MOWAT

We traveled across Idaho, stopping at the Nature Conservancy's Silver

Creek Preserve a short ways south of US 20 about 7 miles east of its junction with Idaho Rte 75. The preserve is on a beautiful trout stream and the

countryside was lush on June 9th when we visited it. Western Tanagers were abundant and seemed to be everywhere. We think they were migrating through since their bird list said that they were occasional at that time of year. Eastern and Western Kingbirds were also much in evidence. One rather sobering situation there is that the Nature Conservancy is fighting an infestation of a New Zealand snail, whose eggs presumably arrived on waders used by a trout fisherman.

At Burns, Oregon we birded east of town where the highlights were at least four Wilson's Snipe and a flock of about 40 White-faced Ibis flying overhead. And then on June 13th near Bend, Oregon we visited the Cabin Lake Ranger Station about 10 miles north of the town of Fort Rock. From a couple of observation blinds we watched White-headed Woodpeckers, Cassin's Finches, and a Western Tanager fly in to drink from the small springs. Lewis's Woodpecker were nesting nearby. And closer in to Bend, we observed many Pygmy Nuthatches



WESTERN
TANANGER Photo by
George Mowat

WINGS ACROSS THE BIG SKY

Montana Audubon's 2010 Missoula bird festival, *Wings Across the Big Sky*, co-hosted by Bitterroot Audubon and Five Valleys Audubon was simply wonderful both indoors and out. I will attempt to highlight only a few of the events of the weekend as there were just too many to try to capture in this overview.

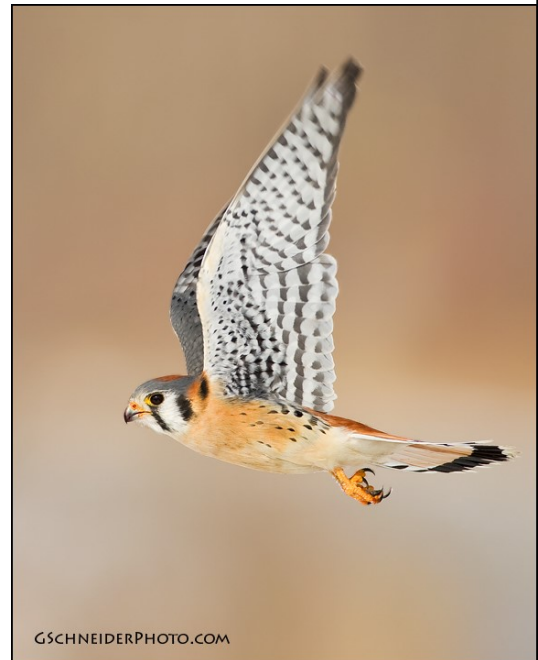
Friday evening's program featured Kate Davis, the Director of Raptors of the Rockies, and several of her live birds of prey including a Golden Eagle (Nigel), Northern Pygmy Owl (iPod), Barred Owl (Graham), and a Peregrine Falcon (Sibley). Kate and her feathery friends have made over 12,000 appearances for educational purposes in the last 22 years or so. This program was wonderful, entertaining, educational, and very upbeat.

Dr. Erick Greene, Professor of Biology and Ecology at the University of Montana, enlightened the audience of his ongoing research and the meaning of bird communication during Saturday's fascinating luncheon program. The variety of songs is very complex but by slowing the song speed down, it was easier for the audience to comprehend these complexities. This was followed by a variety of afternoon workshops (or mini lectures) to attend.

Saturday evening we were honored to have Dr. Steve Running speak on the latest climate research relevant to Montana. Dr. Running was one of many scientists receiving the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize while serving on the board of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). He is a Regents Professor of Ecology in the college of Forestry and Conservation at University of Montana. His presentation was very insightful and well done.

Both Saturday and Sunday offered a nice variety of birding trips from which to choose with very successful birding reports from all groups at the end of the day. On Sunday a group, including a few YVAS birders, did tackle the hike up to a mountain lake just south of Missoula. After walking and birding and talking for most of the morning, we finally made our way to the "lunching" spot, Glen Lake, only to find the lake totally frozen! For me, it was quite unexpected but with the spring weather we have experience this year, I should not have been so surprised!

This was my first year at the annual Montana birding festival. Montana Audubon teams up with one or more local Audubon Chapters in Montana to host this special event. For those who have never attended and would like to, next year's birding festival will be in Glasgow, MT in June. So mark your calendars now! Deb Regele



AMERICAN KESTREL

The Nature Conservancy's **MATADOR RANCH**

This May several YVAS members (Helen Carlson, Jim Wiggins, Jennifer Lyman, Chuck Carlson and Kayhan Ostovar), visited The Nature Conservancy's Matador Ranch just south of Malta. Barbara Cozzens, Northern Montana Prairies Program Director, was our host at the ranch for the weekend, along with John Carlson, Glasgow BLM, and Dan Casey from the American Bird Conservancy. Each evening we heard from researchers and other biologists about their efforts in the region. Learning about the decline of some of the grassland birds and birding were the main items on each day's agenda. We also got a full tour of the ranch and surrounding public lands including the Charles M. Russell and the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuges. We saw many grassland bird species including sage and sharp tail grouse and surprisingly six species of warblers all flitting around a small wetland on the ranch.

The Matador Ranch is on track to be a center for scientific research on grassland conservation. The ranch has already played a key role in tracking imperiled Long-billed Curlews.

The 60,000 acre Matador ranch property was acquired by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in 2000 because it includes some of the last remnants of northern mixed grass prairies in North America. Recent Breeding Bird data indicates that grassland birds are declining faster and more severely than any other bird group in North America. The loss is clearly tied to the disappearance of grasslands where these birds breed. We now have only 2% of our native grasslands left and much of this land is in Montana.

A recent research project on long billed curlews on the ranch has found that Montana curlews winter in southern California and Mexico. With solar powered satellite telemetry tags on a few birds this past winter researchers learned that the birds make the return 1250 mile trip in just 27 hours. Identification of winter grounds and key stopover points during migration is important for comprehensive conservation plans for many migratory species.

As one of the largest ranches in the area, TNC is working to show that conservation and ranching can be a successful partnership. One of the greatest threats to the native grasslands in Montana is due to modern day "sod busting" or conversion for agricultural purposes. Ironically, in an environmental Catch 22 the biggest threat to our native grasslands is currently from the conversion of grazing land into organic wheat fields.

TNC realizes that the key to protecting grasslands is to keep cattle ranchers in business and discourage them from selling or leasing land for agricultural purposes.

In order to help ranchers survive in a business where economies of scale are ever more important, TNC pioneered a new idea of a Grassbank, where neighboring ranchers are allowed to purchase grazing rights on the Matador Ranch. The fee structure varies based on a series of conservation measures that the ranchers choose to implement on their own properties, thus leveraging the total conservation impact of the TNC grassland conservation program. Since the ranchers involved in the Matador grazing program have prairie dogs, sage grouse or grassland birds on their own ranches wildlife and birds in the region benefit directly from their efforts.

If you would like to learn more about the TNC Matador Ranch or donate to their conservation efforts please contact Barbara Cozzens by phone, 406-673-3344, or by mail 4883 Ranch Road, Dodson, MT 59524.

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. If your label has a date on the top, you are a National Audubon Member. If your label has YVAS and a 2 digit year and month, you are a Supporting Chapter Member (or both). For examples, if your address label reads [YVAS JAN 10*] this means your renewal is due by January of 2010. If there is a [*] symbol, it indicates an expired local membership. 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 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.
5. 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, please make sure you leave a note for the membership secretary indicating your academic affiliation.

—Joel Bowers, Membership Secretary



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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



YELLOWSTONE VALLEY FLYER

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

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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.

- Aug 7 (Sat) SHOREBIRDS, HAWKS & PRAIRIE BIRDS. 8 a.m. Sack lunch. Mike Weber, leader.
- Aug 26--29 (Thur—Sun) WESTBY AND NORTHEAST MONTANA. Observe migrating birds including warblers found in Northeast Montana. Helen Carlson, leader. Call Helen at 248-8684 for information. Make your own reservations for two nights at the Sherwood Inn in Plentywood, MT 406- 765-2810 and one night at the Maltana Motel in Malta 406-654-2610
- Sept 4 (Sat) CLARK'S FORK AND PRYOR MOUNTAINS. Meet at 8 a.m. at Rockvale (parking lot at southwest end of Rockvale farthest from Billings and closest to Red Lodge). Bring Sack Lunch and water. Billie Hicks, leader. Reservations required. Phone Billie at 962-3798 by Sept. 2nd. Red Lodge members and guests are encouraged to attend.
- Sept 9 (Thur) MEET AT RIVERFRONT PARK (Picnic Pavilion to the right of the entrance) at 5 p.m. Fall Migrants. Mike Weber, leader.

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

