

YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

- FROM THE PRAIRIES TO THE PEAKS.

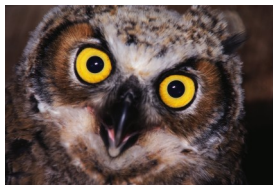
Mission: Building on the tradition of special interest in birds, Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society is organized to promote enjoyment and protection of the natural environment through education, activism, and conservation of bird habitat.

VOLUME 40, NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2010

New This Issue

- Long-tailed Duck Profile
- Christmas Bird Count Results
- Fieldtrip Write-up
- YVAS Conservation Grant
- Great Backyard Bird Count



A Working Yellowstone River Partnership: YVAS Audubon and YRCDC

Don Youngbauer, Chair of the **Yellowstone River Conservation District Council** will present a wide range of Yellowstone River issues to the chapter membership at our February 15th chapter meeting.

Ever since the council was founded in 1999, the YVAS chapter has been an integral player and sometimes a watch dog in a partnership with the council that identifies common river resource issues and how to maintain a healthy riverine eco-system. Don will tell us how partnerships influence the council and its activities to the benefit of everyone who values and uses the river.

The council was formed after the Yellowstone River flooding in 1996-97, which pushed river issues into public debate and highlighted the need for a public forum to develop a common vision and partnership for the Yellowstone. The council is composed of two representatives from the eleven Conservation Districts bordering the Yellowstone and is supported by a broad range of government agencies as well as NGOs and other stakeholders dedicated to the conservation of the river.

—Robert Lubbers



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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, Feb. 8th 6:30pm: Board Meeting

Monday, Feb. 15th 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting

We will be holding a YVAS fundraiser dinner before the general membership meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. Norma Devan has volunteered to host a potluck of favorite casseroles. Call her if you would like to contribute to dinner and/or for dinner reservations at 656-6488. Note: dinner starts at 5:45 so diners have enough time to turn in dishes to kitchen help by 6:30.



☞ We're on the web! www.yellowstoneaudubon.org

From the Board

The YVAS Board looks forward to a busy year in 2010. Here is a brief summary of some of our activities. We are continuing discussions with Montana Audubon to develop an Important Bird Area (IBA) in our area. We are in the very beginning stages of what will eventually be a large, ongoing project. Look for updates on our progress and how you can be involved. For more information about Important Bird Areas in the state, see the Montana Audubon website at mtaudubon.org. YVAS representatives to the MTAudubon Board (Jeanne Olson, Deb Regele and Rita Harding) recently returned from the January MTAudubon Board meeting where we received updates on activities of other state chapters, (a lot of involvement in IBAs) as well as future plans and fundraising activity for the state organization.

Several YVAS Board Officers have come to the end of their terms, and **we are looking for a Secretary and Vice-President to serve on the YVAS Board. If you are interested in either of these positions, please contact current YVAS Vice-President Dick Moore at 656-6241.** We have also been working to clarify some of our chapter's financial management. See below for our official policy on memorials.

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Memorial Policy

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society (YVAS) is appreciative of contributions from its membership and friends. YVAS recognizes that many persons or families wish to create memorials for loved ones. Memorial gifts to YVAS will be put in the McDonald-Norling Endowment Fund, which is used to advance the mission of YVAS:

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.

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:

President: Ruth Vanderhorst, 245-5118, acriv@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

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.....Jeanne Olson, editor@yellowstoneaudubon.org

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

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

Website:

Mark Gale, webmaster@yellowstoneaudubon.org

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.

The Long-tailed Duck

The Long-tailed Duck has been difficult to locate on recent YVAS winter field trips. So I decided to bring more attention to this duck, through words if not through binoculars.

Long-tailed Ducks breed in Arctic and Subarctic wetlands from the west coast of Alaska across most of northern Canada. They migrate relatively late in fall and early in spring, and it is during these migrations that they may be found as occasional visitors to Montana. Actual migration routes are largely unknown, but appear to be coastal in nature. Long-tailed Ducks usually winter along the Pacific coast from the Bering Sea to as far south as California and some birds may winter far out at sea in open-water ice leads.

This medium-sized diving sea duck is so named because of the male's two slim and very long central tail feathers. Males are 16–21 inches long, not counting the long tail feathers; females are smaller at 15–17 inches long. Long-tailed Ducks have the most complex molt of any species of waterfowl with three different plumages during the year, distinctly different in summer and winter. But they can always be identified by a short black bill with a pinkish ring near the tip. Both males and females have pattern-less black wings in all plumages.

Their winter diet is varied but chiefly animal matter, including bottom-dwelling crustaceans, clams, mussels, small fish, and snails. On breeding grounds, they eat larval insects, worms, and crustaceans, such as brine or fairy shrimp. They forage by diving and swimming underwater. Most feeding is in relatively shallow waters, but the Long-tailed Duck has been documented to dive more than 200 feet, deeper than any other duck. Of all diving ducks, the Long-tailed Duck spends the most time under water (up to 1.5 minutes/dive) relative to time on the surface.

Courtship begins by early winter, and most pair formation occurs during winter or early spring. Nests are built along the Arctic coasts and inland tundra on dry ground close to water. The nest is a depression lined with plant material and large amounts of down. The typical clutch is six to eight eggs; only one brood is raised each year. Ducklings leave the nest shortly after hatching and can swim and dive when quite small. They are tended by the female but feed themselves and can fly when 35–40 days old.

Because Long-tailed Ducks breed over a vast range and at low densities, there have been no comprehensive surveys of their abundance. Because they, like other sea ducks, inhabit offshore areas more than other waterfowl during winter, Long-tailed Ducks are also poorly monitored by mid-winter surveys for waterfowl. A crude estimate of the North American population is at least one million birds. Satellite telemetry studies are underway that will help iden-

tify where birds from a particular breeding area spend the winter as well as migratory behavior and pathways.

The Breeding Population and Habitat Survey shows that breeding populations of Long-tailed Ducks have declined about 80% since the survey was begun in 1957. However, that survey covers only a small portion of Alaska and northwestern Canada, a tiny part of their overall breeding range. Despite indications of long term declines, the Long-tailed Duck is the most abundant Arctic sea duck and is not yet considered a threatened or endangered species. The population seems to have stabilized since the early 1990s.

Long-tailed Ducks are vulnerable to oil spills and pollution by shipping vessels in northern seas. Large numbers are sometimes caught and killed in fishing nets. Other potential threats include extensive habitat alterations, increased industrialization, and development of traditional wintering grounds. Long-tailed Ducks are a small component of the sport harvest of waterfowl. However, they are a significant species in the subsistence harvest in some northern Native communities, and co-management of migratory birds with Native groups should help ensure a sustainable use of Long-tailed Ducks.

Hopefully, migrating Long-tailed Ducks can be observed more often in our area in the near future.

—Dick Moore



Annual Christmas Bird Count Results

Saturday, Dec. 19th 2009, 31 individual bird watchers (grouped into 12 teams) along with 16 bird feeder watchers participated in the Billings Christmas Bird Count. They saw a total of 60 species, which are listed (along with numbers recorded) below. The species with the greatest number of individual birds recorded were the European Starling and Canada Goose. The Canyon Wren seen at Pictograph Caves was the most unique sighting for the Billings area during winter.

Pied-billed Grebe (1)	Prairie Falcon (1)	Townsend's Solitaire (33)
Great Blue Heron (7)	Ring-necked Pheasant (35)	Canyon Wren (1)
Canada Goose (5166)	Sharp-tailed Grouse (2)	American Robin (337)
Wood Duck (4)	Wild Turkey (119)	Cedar Waxwing (40)
Green-winged Teal (4)	American Coot (6)	Northern Shrike (3)
Mallard (2124)	Rock Dove (1533)	European Starling (5391)
Gadwall (32)	Mourning Dove (28)	Yellow-rumped Warbler (3)
American Wigeon (13)	Eurasian Collared Dove (122)	American Tree Sparrow (2)
Ring-necked Duck (14)	Great Horned Owl (1)	Song Sparrow (9)
Common Goldeneye (882)	Belted Kingfisher (3)	Dark-eyed Junco (62)
Bufflehead (18)	Downy Woodpecker (20)	Brewer's Blackbird (6)
Common Merganser (54)	Hairy Woodpecker (2)	Brown-headed Cowbird (30)
Bald Eagle (58)	Northern Flicker (132)	House Finch (406)
Northern Harrier (1)	Blue Jay (10)	Red Crossbill (7)
Sharp-shinned Hawk (6)	Pinyon Jay (5)	American Goldfinch (1)
Cooper's Hawk (1)	Black-billed Magpie (135)	House Sparrow (1075)
Red-tailed Hawk (37)	American Crow (290)	Rusty Blackbird (14)
Rough-legged Hawk (15)	Common Raven (11)	Common Grackle (11)
Golden Eagle (11)	Black-capped Chickadee (205)	Unidentified Hawk Species (2)
American Kestrel (4)	Red-breasted Nuthatch (20)	
Merlin (1)	White-breasted Nuthatch (7)	

Outside of the official counting circle, Audrey and Bob Jurovich, Tom and Jeannette Davis, and Jeanette Tasey also counted from their homes. Bird species in addition to those listed above include 1 Eastern Screech Owl, 1 Red-winged Blackbird, 3 Common Redpolls, 16 Gray-crowned Rosy Finches, and 60 Pine Siskins.

Christmas Bird Count participants drove a total 285.5 miles and walked a total of 24.5 miles. After the birding day, they gathered at Helen Carlson's home to tally results and enjoy a hot soup and holiday treat dinner. Helen would like to thank Norma Devan and Pat Larmoyeux for their help with the dinner. YVAS would like to thank Helen Carlson and Billie Hicks for organizing the Christmas Bird Count and all the individuals who participated. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations, which in turn helps guide conservation action, locally, nationally, and globally.

You may enjoy the following website: www.mangoverde.com. This is an online guide with information as well as fantastic photos of birds around the world. The site also focuses on butterflies and dragonflies/damselflies of the world.



Audubon's Annual Bird Festival *Wings Across the Big Sky*

Join us! June 4 - 6, 2010 In Missoula

Montana Audubon is working with the Five Valleys and Bitterroot Audubon Chapters to plan another fantastic bird festival, June 4 - 6. We have 15 field trips planned for Saturday that range from the local Clark Fork River Grass Valley Important Bird Area, where Sora Rail and Lewis's Woodpecker may be observed, to a 750-acre working cattle ranch west of Frenchtown. All field trips have been planned so that everyone can make it back to enjoy lunch speaker, Kate Stone. Saturday evening will be filled with a social hour, banquet, silent auction, and fabulous raffle items. We will also host our dessert auction. Sunday has 15 exciting field trips that range from a beautiful drive up to Upsata Lake to longer field trips like the 6-mile hike through Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine forests. Information about conservation, habitat, and research projects will be shared. With 15 planned field trips on Saturday and Sunday there will be something to meet everyone's fitness level and birding interest. More information about field trips, speakers, lodging, registration and other highlights will be posted in early March at <http://mtaudubon.org/> Until then save the date and plan to be in Missoula in early June! *Group sizes will be limited so register early!*

YVAS Conservation Grant Awarded to Roberts School

YVAS awarded Roberts School a Conservation Grant of \$500 for their proposed project of building, installing and monitoring bird/bat houses in the Roberts Area. The proposal the school submitted states that "beginning in January 2010, students enrolled in fundamental vo-ag shop classes would be assigned a project involving the construction of bird and/or bat houses." Along with building and installing the houses, students would be required to participate in lectures lead by the science/biology teacher "regarding bird habitat and the need for bird habitat restoration as well as maintaining natural resources in Montana." YVAS also stressed the need that once the houses are built and installed, they need to be maintained/cleaned and monitored. We will invite the Roberts School students and teachers involved in this project to our May chapter meeting, when they can present their project and inform us of their progress.

YVAS will once again be offering conservation grants later in 2010, and the YVAS board continues to explore ways to successfully target interested schools/teachers/students.

News from National Audubon: John Flicker Stepping Down after 15 Years Service as Audubon President. Among many of Flicker's accomplishments as Audubon President was the support of Audubon Education Centers in communities around the country, such as our own Audubon Conservation Education Center. As Audubon begins a nationwide search for a new leader, Dr. Frank Gill, well-known current national Board Member and former Audubon Chief Scientist, will be serving as interim President. John Flicker will take some well deserved time off (birding!) but will return to work with Audubon in a new capacity to advance Audubon's vital mission.

New Year's Day Yellowtail Dam Afterbay Fieldtrip

Thirteen Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society members celebrated the New Year Holiday with the annual field trip to Yellowtail Dam Afterbay. The day was beautiful—cold but clear and sunny. And the birds were all out enjoying the sunshine, just as if they were celebrating the new year with us. Morning mist on the water and frozen waterfalls on the rock canyon made for a beautiful backdrop to the birds on the water. Late in the day, two Rough-legged Hawks were sparring with a Prairie Falcon. It seemed like they wanted to fill the sky with their soaring.

Birds seen include Northern Harrier (1), Northern Shrike (1), Barrow's Goldeneye (2), Common Goldeneye (140), Green-winged Teal (4), Mallard (~400), Common Merganser (15), Ring-necked Pheasant (2), Bufflehead (4), Red-tailed Hawk (4), Rough-legged Hawk (13), Canada Goose (~400), Lesser Scaup (34), Greater Scaup (1), Northern Flicker (2), American Wigeon (25), Gadwall (30), American Coot (12), Ring-necked Duck (235), Downy Woodpecker (2), American Robin (95), Song Sparrow (1), American Kestrel (1), Prairie Falcon (1), Golden Eagle (1), Bald Eagle (2), Rock Pigeon, 39) Black-billed Magpie (3), Common Raven (10), European Starling (54), and a juvenile swan species.

The trip was a wonderful kickoff for the 2010 birding year. Thanks to Brad Hall and George Mowat for leading this great trip.

—Rita Harding

[Note from the editor: you will notice that I have included the number of individuals for each species seen to highlight an initiative the YVAS board has begun to record both species seen as well as number of individuals seen during our field trips. YVAS board member Rita Harding has agreed to post this information (along with location) to a database kept by the Montana Natural Heritage Program, which is used by a variety of organizations to monitor bird activity, trends, etc. The information is also being used to update the P.D. Skaar's *Montana Bird Distribution* book. Moving towards more precise bird data collection is a good way to give our bird watching trips immediate and significant purpose. If you would like more information about this project and/or would like to become involved in recording your own bird data, contact Rita Harding or other YVAS Board members or Janet Ellis from Montana Audubon at jellis@mtaudubon.org.]

Thirteenth Annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) February 12-15 2010

This February take part in a family friendly, educational activity that (1) doesn't cost money, (2) makes a difference, and (3) is a lot of fun. The GBBC is a way for people of all ages and all levels of bird watching experience to engage in valuable citizen science. Your checklist will contribute necessary information for conservation when you enter your tally online. To participate in the GBBC is easy.

1. Visit www.birdcount.org for easy to follow instructions and to download a bird checklist for your area.
2. Count the birds you see, wherever you choose to count.
3. After at least 15 minutes of watching in one location, report your results online at www.birdcount.org. (you can of course count for more than 15 minutes)
4. You can repeat your count at the same place or visit other locations during the days of the GBBC. Submit new checklists for each new count.
5. View your results: online maps and lists are updated throughout the count, making it easy to see how your birds fit into the big picture.
6. There is also opportunity to post bird photos or a video about your GBBC experience. See www.birdcount.org for more information.

The GBBC is led by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, with support from Wild Birds Unlimited.

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



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
- \$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: 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

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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.

Feb. 20th (Sat) Winter Wanderers Progressive Eating and Birding Fieldtrip. Travel to 3 different homes—eat at each and bird between bites. Suggested for those birders who would like a winter break: 9:00am-Dark.

This trip is a fundraiser, with a suggested \$15 contribution. Reservations are required by Feb. 18th to Ruth Vanderhorst (where we will have breakfast). Call her at 245-5118.

Surprise!! We are including a new area for birding on this year's trip.

Fieldtrip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467

