

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

- Kingfisher Profile
- Christmas Potluck Recap
- Fieldtrip Write-up
- YVAS Helping State Conservation Projects

Natural History and Ecology of Hawk & Eagle Migration in Western North America

What is it about raptors that captures our imagination and leads us to an ever increasing appreciation of these birds and their lives around us? Size, strength, even more, their incredible beauty—often solitary, often forbidding—create an aura no other birds have. That raptors are the supreme birds of prey is beyond question. But, there are other questions about raptors that need asking. Any bird watcher knows that!

Where do they over winter? What time of the season and day do they move? What triggers their migration? Where do raptors passing through Montana come from? Where are they going? And, how is climate change and oil and gas development impacting western raptor populations? (continued bottom of page 6)



Monday January 18th, at the YVAS general membership meeting, we will get a chance to hear about raptors from Steve Hoffman, Montana Audubon Executive Director. Hoffman has been answering questions about raptor migration for much of his distinguished career in wildlife biology.



How much do we really know and understand about raptor migration habits?

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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, Jan. 11th 6:30pm: Board Meeting

Monday, Jan. 18th 7:00pm: General Membership Meeting

We will be holding a YVAS fundraiser dinner before the general membership meeting. Dinner donation: \$6. Jeannette Davis has volunteered to cook a turkey: call her if you would like to bring food to complement a turkey and/or for dinner reservations at 656-7618. Note: dinners will now start at 5:45 so diners have enough time to turn in dishes to kitchen help by 6:30.



From the Editor

Welcome to the New Year. I hope 2010 brings you wonderful opportunities to get out and see lots of interesting birds.

You will find that this first flyer of 2010 looks back to thank those who made 2009 such a successful year for YVAS as well as looks forward to introduce upcoming events and trips. See the following article from our membership secretary about receiving your flyer electronically. As always, the YVAS membership would like to hear about your birding and conservation activities. Please send me material you would like to see published in upcoming flyers.

—Jeanne Olson



Electronic Flyers

We are now able to email the Yellowstone Valley Flyer to those who would prefer to get an electronic copy. We are just figuring out this method of delivery, and right now can support a moderate number of requests. As we gain more experience and are assured of how reliably we can deliver the flyer electronically, we can take on more requests. This may eventually reduce our expenses and our carbon footprint. If you would like to receive an electronic copy of the flyer, please let Membership Secretary Joel Bowers know (see his contact info below).

Also when you renew your membership, please give us your email address if you do not mind us communicating with you by email to sort out future membership and address questions. You will continue to receive the flyer via regular mail unless you specifically ask for an electronic copy.

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society Officers:

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

Belted Kingfisher

The first bird I learned to identify was the Belted Kingfisher; growing up in Wisconsin, how could it not be? My most vivid bird memory is the loud rattle-like chatter heard just before catching a glimpse of this picturesque bird as it disappeared into the woods along the water's edge. On rare occasions, I would be lucky enough to see this large-headed bird with the oversized beak perched on an open branch above the water "fishing."

Kingfishers are able to dive 20-30 feet from either an open branch or from a hovering position into the water after a minnow. They have actually been observed diving from as high as 50 feet. Since Kingfishers "fish" by sight, they do depend on open clear water.

The Belted Kingfisher is one of the few species of birds in which the female is more colorful than the male. They are 13" tall, have a stocky body, and a large head with a conspicuous ragged double-pointed crest. Both male and female have a nearly complete white collar across the hind neck and a single slate blue breast band. In addition, the female has a rusty-colored belly band that extends on the flanks.

Even though the Belted Kingfisher is one of the most widespread land birds in North America, it remains poorly studied. They inhabit very diverse aquatic habitats including both fresh and marine. Being the only North American kingfisher to migrate, they follow their food source and open water. Some may go as far as northern South America, but some may not migrate if the winter is a mild one. Their diet includes fish, crawfish, mollusks, aquatic insects, reptiles, amphibians, mice, young birds and occasionally berries. Kingfishers along the coastal regions also eat squid and oysters. The undigested remains of prey are regularly regurgitated as pellets and are found beneath fishing and roosting perches.

Belted Kingfishers are a solitary bird when not breeding and very territorial throughout the year. However, they are monogamous and mate for life with both parents taking part in the nest excavation, the incubation

of eggs, and the feeding of chicks. The nesting chamber is excavated at the end of a 3 to 8 foot (sometimes a 15 foot) tunnel about 2 inches in diameter. Taking up to 1 week to dig, the tunnel is dug horizontally, sometimes with an upwards slant, into the face of a steep stream bank or other embankment. Kingfishers prefer to nest near their fishing territory where they raise a single brood annually. They lay 5-8 white eggs 1.4" long in the bare chamber at the end of the tunnel.

At 34-35 days old the fledglings leave the nest and are taught the "art of fishing" by both parents. While the fledglings are perched on a bare branch, the parents drop dead fish into the water directly below them. After 10 days of retrieving dead fish, the young are able to catch "live" food at which time they are forced from the parent's territory. Human environments, such as sand and gravel pits, has enhanced opportunities for nesting sites and increased population growth.

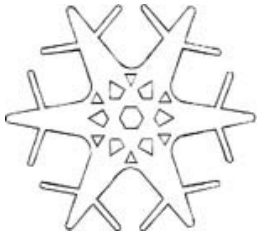
Today I still find myself fascinated by the Belted Kingfisher as he pops in and out of my life at unexpected moments. A few months ago while taking a lunch break at September Morn Lake on Lake Fork of Rock Creek just below Sundance Pass, our small group was entertained by a pair of kingfishers catching their lunch while we ate ours. Even at an elevation of 9,696 feet in the Beartooth Mountains, the Belted Kingfisher awes me.

References used: National Geographic's Field Guide to the Birds of North America, The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior, Montana Natural Heritage Center Web Site, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Web Site.

—Deb Regele

Heather Ristow, education director at the Audubon Conservation Education Center (ACEC), has recently started a blog for the ACEC. Check out her posting and add your own comments at www.acecbillings.blogspot.com

YVAS Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner



Sub-zero temperatures with light snow greeted nearly ninety YVAS members and friends for the chapter's annual potluck dinner on Monday, Dec. 7th. But no one really seemed to mind the wintry weather outside as good food and good company kept us warm and happy inside. The Christmas Potluck Dinner is a major YVAS fundraiser, and donations at the door, from the raffle, and from the silent auction totaled more than \$2000, which will be used to help support YVAS's growing number of conservation projects.

We would like to thank Helen Carlson, who organized the raffle, and Robert and Susan Lubbers, who organized the silent auction. We especially thank the many YVAS members who donated items, ranging from art to bird-related items to baked goods. Thank you also to members who solicited donations from community businesses, which include, Good Earth Market, Great Harvest, Walmart, Gainans, Montana Natural Foods, Billings Nursery, Sylvan Nursery, Poly Food Basket, Simply Wine, Wildbirds Unlimited, Scheels Sport Shop, Target, Granny's Attic, Height's Ace Hardware, Pug Mahons Irish Pub, Cabelas, Thomas Books, A Few Books More, and Don Tilsey's wine donation from Intermountain Distributing. If we have forgotten anyone, please accept our apologies.

We would also like to thank Bob Landis for his beautiful film on the bears and wildlife of Yellowstone National Park. A Monte Dolack print donated by Dave and Ruth Torrence was presented to Bob Landis to thank him for continuing to provide provocative and exceptional film programs. Bob confirmed he will be back next year.

Thank you to Lois Dalton and all who helped in the kitchen, Dick Moore and all who helped set up and clean up, and everyone else who helped make the 2009 Christmas Potluck Dinner a success.

Sandhill Crane Migration Focus of 40th Annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

The 40th annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration will be held March 18-21st, 2010 in Kearney, Nebraska. Organized by Audubon Nebraska and the Nebraska Bird Partnership, the conference gathers together nature enthusiasts from across the country to witness the migration of over half a million Sandhill Cranes and millions of waterfowl and other birds through central Nebraska. Events include guided field trips, workshops, a family fun room and daily visits to river blinds operated by Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary for up-close views of cranes roosting on the Platte River.

Local and national speakers will present information on a variety of wildlife and conservation topics. Main speakers are Scott Weidensaul, author of more than two dozen natural history books, including *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*, a Pulitzer Prize finalist; Mike Forsberg, nature photographer and author of *Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild*; Ron Klataske, executive director of Audubon of Kansas; and Chris Wood, eBird Project Leader, Cornell Lab of Ornithology. More than twenty local environmental organizations will have information booths and hands-on activities on Saturday.

The celebration is open to the general public. Registration materials can be found at www.nebraska.audubon.org. Or contact Audubon Nebraska to be put on the mailing list at Nebraska@audubon.org or 402/ 797-2301. Rowe Sanctuary has information about viewing the Sandhill Crane migration. Contact them at www.rowsanctuary.org or 308/ 468-5282

—Kevin Poague, Audubon Nebraska

Yellowtail Dam Afterbay Fieldtrip

Frost lay on the cars in the Rocky parking lot as our YVAS group gathered for the November field trip to the Yellowtail Dam Afterbay. The group included our leader, George Mowat, as well as Bernie Mowat, Helen Carlson, Jeanne Olson, Ruth Vanderhorst, Anne Cowan, Rita Harding, Steve and Deb Regele, Tana—a Rocky Mountain College student—, Larry French of Miles City, and me. As usual, the magic began in the parking lot where we were rewarded with the sighting of a Merlin Falcon high in a tree in the neighborhood.

Along the old highway to Hardin and through the Bighorn River corridor to the Afterbay, we spotted a number of birds, most exciting of which were an immature Golden Eagle, Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, and a Northern Harrier.

We arrived at the Afterbay near lunchtime in the rain, but neither waterfowl nor birdwatchers are put off by a bit of rain, so we ate our lunches and enjoyed the good company. The remainder of the afternoon, we were warmed by periods of blue skies and sunshine. The waters and shores of the Afterbay yielded many sights that were new to me, but among the best were the Hooded and Common Mergansers, the Common and Barrows Goldeneyes, the Bufflehead, and the numerous American Wigeons. However, the nine beautiful Snow Geese were the best gift this day.

After counting 40 species for the day, the group separated at Fort Smith for the drive home. This fine day came to a perfect end when a Short-eared Owl lifted off from a fence post and flew across the road in front of my car as the sun set.

—Nancy Traeger

The National Audubon Society will reopen its legendary Hog Island for four adult ornithology sessions and one teen bird studies session during the summer of 2010.

Dr. Steve Kress, Audubon's VP for Bird Conservation will direct the sessions. He will be joined by some of the country's top ornithologists who will serve as instructors, including Kenn Kaufman, Pete Dunne, and Scott Weidensaul. Additionally, there will be two totally new sessions offered in association with Elder Hostel (now Exploritas) http://www.exploritas.org/Programs/search_res.asp?Type=A&StateCode=ME where participants will assist Project Puffin biologists to census gulls, eiders and cormorants at several nearby seabird nesting islands. Participants in the September session will learn about land and seabirds through bird banding and presentations and assist with a habitat management project for endangered terns and storm-petrels at Eastern Egg Rock.

Known to thousands as the Audubon Camp in Maine, Hog Island was closed during the summer of 2009 to permit planning for the future. This process led to Project Puffin bringing back the popular ornithology programs for adults and teens. The adult programs are for both beginning and avid birders who would like to learn more about Maine birdlife and the biology of birds. The teen session is for 14-17 year olds with a keen interest in birds. This session is co-sponsored by the American Birding Association. Due to its varied habitats, Hog Island and vicinity are an ideal setting for the program, as more than 100 species frequent the area.

Participants live in authentic, turn of the century housing on the 330 acre spruce-covered island. Here, they will enjoy three home-cooked meals a day in an historic island farmhouse that overlooks Muscongus Bay. During the five-day sessions, small field groups will go on a variety of trips and boat cruises, and attend workshops and presentations on topics ranging from migration and the identification of warblers to the restoration of Atlantic Puffins and terns on nearby Eastern Egg Rock.

For more information on dates, sessions, costs, instructors, etc. visit www.projectpuffin.org To read testimonials and see photos from previous Hog Island programs, visit www.naturecompass.org/fohi.

Thank You

Thanks to all of you who have supported YVAS during this past calendar year with your memberships, attendance at meetings, participation in field trips, financial contributions and in so many other ways. A special thank you goes to all of you who have been performing the critical tasks of making the organization work well through your volunteer work. It is great to see so much talent and energy shared so generously for the good of the group. Have a very happy and productive New Year.

—YVAS President, Ruth Vanderhorst

YVAS Supports Conservation Projects

In 2007 Yellowstone Valley Audubon agreed to award \$500 toward a multi-million dollar North American Wetland Conservation Act grant. Late last fall the money was used to help purchase 16 loads of gravel to place along the shoreline of “Lake North of Espen” an unnamed shallow lake north of the Espen Waterfowl production area, a few miles northwest of Westby, MT. The gravel is used to enhance nesting sites for the Piping Plover. Below is a picture of the shoreline area where the gravel is placed along the water’s edge. Jim Hansen, Central Flyway Migratory Bird Coordinator, from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks says “It looks like a nice, scenic site amidst the rolling native grasslands.”



YVAS has also recently given \$500 to help the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service purchase a parcel of private land (187 acres) which is surrounded by the Charles M. Russell Wildlife refuge. This parcel of land has excellent riparian habitat and the purchase will permanently protect it.

For both of these projects, YVAS has joined together with many other conservation organizations to help preserve and enhance habitat for birds and wildlife in Montana.

(Hawks continued) Since 2006, Hoffman has been the Executive Director of Montana Audubon. After 10 years of government service with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Endangered Species Program, he founded *HawkWatch International* (HWI), a nonprofit organization dedicated to raptor research and conservation. He served as Executive Director of HWI for 12 years and then become State Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Pennsylvania before coming to Montana.

—Robert Lubbers

We have just completed the Christmas Bird Count in Billings, and now it is time to look ahead to the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), which will take place President’s Day weekend of February 12th-15th. Mark the date and look for more information in the February Flyer.

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
- \$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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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.

**Jan. 9th (Sat) 32nd Annual Eagle Midwinter Survey in Lower 48 States. 8:00am-5:00pm.
Yellowstone River: Billings to Columbus. Leader: Brad Hall No-host lunch.** (Note: this trip is a recent addition and was not included on the 2009-2010 field trip list)

Date Change:

Winter Wanderers Progressive Eating and Birding Fieldtrip. The date for this fundraiser fieldtrip will be finalized for later Feb. when schedules of hosts are finalized. Travel to 3 different homes—eat at each and bird between bites. See Feb. flyer for finalized date.

Fieldtrip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467

