

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.

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New This Issue

- Sandhill Crane Fieldtrip and Profile
- YVAS Annual Report
- Montana Audubon Bird Festival
- Freezeout Lake Field-trip
- Breeding Bird Survey Volunteers Needed

What IS happening at the Hailstone-Halfbreed Wildlife Refuge? Hear Lou Hanebury of USFWS explain what it means!

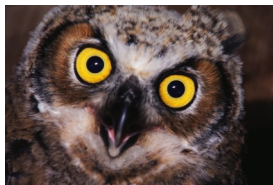
Last fall when the YVAS Chapter began its Osprey Project, Lou Hanebury, wildlife biologist and director of the Billings US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Office, became interested and wanted to know what we were going to do since, among its many responsibilities, USFWS keeps a constant and sharp eye on all issues surrounding birds. Osprey and other migratory bird species are all "protected" under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

rounding Mountain Plover, Sage Grouse, Bald and Golden Eagles, Prairie Dog habitat, and other issues related to endangered species as they affect our bird watching activities.

In addition, Mr. Hanebury will fill in details on the recently announced desalinization reclamation of the Hailstone-Halfbreed National Wildlife Refuge wetland project, a well known Chapter birding area northwest of Billings.

Mr. Hanebury, the USFWS's only wildlife biologist serving eastern Montana, has been in Billings since 1992.

—Robert Lubbers



Lou Hanebury, who is also a YVAS chapter member, advises us on our Osprey project, helps the chapter to properly handle injured raptors in its Bird Ambulance Program, and has worked on the Chapter's Christmas Bird Count.

Please join us on Monday, May 17th when Lou Hanebury will present the YVAS chapter program on issues sur-

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YVAS Meetings

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

Wednesday, May 12th 6:30pm: Board Meeting (3016 Brentwood)

Monday, May 17th 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 pork roast. To contribute to dinner and/or for dinner reservations call Jeannette at 656-7618.

Note: dinner starts at 5:45 so diners have enough time to turn in dishes to kitchen help by 6:30.



Our Webpage is currently under construction.

From the Editor

In anticipation of my moving out of state (to Oregon), I am giving up the editorship of the YVAS flyer. Next month's flyer, for June/July, will be my last. However, I am leaving the flyer in very good hands. Nancy Wiggins, a YVAS board member, will be taking over the flyer starting with the August issue. I will introduce Nancy, along with new board members/officers, next month.

Other Changes: our website is currently under construction. Our webmaster resigned, and we are now looking for someone to take on the duties of getting our webpage reestablished as well as updating/monitoring it. If you would be interested in this position, please contact Ruth Vanderhorst (information below). Also, our editor email address has been taken out of service, so until we can get it re-established, please send any information you have for the editor to Nancy Wiggins (contact information below). As always, we would love to hear about your bird sightings, field trips, etc.



—editor, Jeanne Olson

On a recent fieldtrip to the Exxon Ponds (east of the Exxon-Mobil refinery), trip leader, Ron Kuhler, SHE manager at the refinery, drew our attention to some blinds that had previously been built by boy scouts. The blinds need to be placed more advantageously for bird watching opportunities. If you would be interested in helping place these blinds as well as advising on the placement of Wood Duck nest boxes, please contact Ron Kuhler at ron.j.kuhler@exxonmobil.com or 406 657-5336.

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.....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

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

Website: Under Construction

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.

Sandhill Crane Migration Field Trip and Profile

Facing some of the same obstacles as the migrating birds, four of us caravanned through a spring blizzard, as only seen in April in Wyoming, and soldiered on to Nebraska where the winds never stopped, with the ultimate destination of Kearney and the Platte River for the Sandhill Crane migration on April 1. Unfortunately, in Wyoming, we passed an Osprey nest on a power pole that was festooned with bailing twine.

Our first stop was in Mullen, NB, where we visited a Sharptail Grouse lek to see displaying Prairie Chickens. Armed with a guide, we were able to get into an old horse trailer at 5am, that had been stationed in a field as a blind, well before the grouse were to arrive: and arrive they did about 7:30, males dancing and posturing with their tails up, displaying their dramatic yellow and purple feathers and making cooing sounds to attract the females. We apparently didn't disturb them because they continued uninterrupted until 10:30am. We were equally lucky that morning to find a traditional booming ground of the Greater Prairie Chicken, another disappearing part of our heritage, where we observed more color, courtship displays and dancing. Wild Turkeys shared the stage with the chickens.

We continued on to Kearney, where the Sandhill Crane migration was still in full force everywhere. We had the opportunity to watch some 350,000 birds, all talking at once, return from the surrounding cornfields and dance down in the area of the Rowe Audubon Sanctuary on the river at sunset; early morning found the cranes returning to the cornfields on some schedule, in some order, that is know only to them. Eighty percent of the world's sandhill population converges here in Nebraska between late February and Early April, and fossils dating back nine million years have been discovered.

Just when you think that life can't get any better, we followed rumors of Whooping Crane sightings to a small pond in a wetlands south of Kearney; there we got to observe the pair with a spotting scope at a distance, while they dined in the safety of the cornfield. In all, we tallied 58 species, signing off with a salute to a Bald Eagle in South Dakota; we would do it again in a heart beat.....

—Nancy Wiggins

What Makes a Sandhill Crane?

The scientific name for the Sandhill Crane is *Grus canadensis*. There are 15 species of cranes in the world; the two found in North America are the endan-

gered Whooping Crane and the most abundant crane in the world, the sandhill. Sandhill Cranes average between 3 to 4 feet tall, have a wing span of 6-7 feet, weigh up to 12 pounds, and can have a life span of more than 25 years. Adult cranes have a red crown, which is a featherless patch of skin used for communication – the bigger and redder the patch, the more excited the crane is. Sandhills eat meat and plants; their diet doesn't normally include fish. Their elongated trachea is how cranes make their unique vocalizations. Cranes are unable to roost in trees because the toe on the backside of their legs is too small to grip the branch. They are monogamous, mating between the ages of 2-6 years old. Cranes and travel 30-50 miles an hour and can fly 10,000 or more miles to migrate to the same nesting grounds in Siberia and North America each year, where they hatch two eggs.

Photograph by James Wiggins

The family stays together through spring migration of the next year. When migrating, the birds 'kettle' or circle on warm thermals to reach heights of 3-5 thousand feet. There are subspecies of sandhills located in Florida, Mississippi, and Cuba that don't migrate.



Abstracted with permission from [The Private Life of Sandhill Cranes](#), Keanna Leonard and Caryl McHarney, Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, Copyright 2009.

ANNUAL REPORT: YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

The year July 2009—May 2010 has passed quickly. Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society has had an active year and the Board has been very busy with numerous projects. Chapter members as well as Board members have carried out several important projects during the year. This report will highlight some of that work.

—Exciting and informative programs at the monthly Chapter meetings thanks to Robert Lubbers.

—Conservation Grant awarded to Roberts School to teach students to build and erect bird houses.

—Support for grants sought by Mt. Dept. of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to upgrade nesting areas in northeastern Montana and to purchase property adjacent to Big Lake.

—A Memorandum of Agreement with MT. Audubon regarding the Audubon Conservation Education Center. Representation on the Center's Advisory Council (Dick Moore). Financial and volunteer support for the Center.

—Financial support for the purchase of some of the last privately owned Missouri River frontage in the CMR by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

—Osprey project launched that identified all the nests from Big Timber east along the Yellowstone River. Identification of usage, fledgling counts, hazards, mapping, etc. are a part of this ongoing project. Helping with the replacement of a hazardous nest was accomplished. Monty Sullins provides excellent leadership.

—Preliminary study of the possibility of an Important Bird Area somewhere along the Yellowstone River. More exploration will ensue this summer.

—The Chapter joined other organizations and individuals in bringing a lawsuit against the Custer National Forest regarding the Travel Management Plan for the Pryors. That action came in conjunction with the Pryor Coalition following unsuccessful appeals of the Travel Plan.

—The development of a Financial Plan for the Board to use in budgeting and planning.

—Active participation on the Mt. Audubon Board. (Deb Regele, Jeanne Olson and Rita Harding)

—Beginning efforts to record and enter bird sightings in the state tracking system to provide an improved data base. Rita Harding is getting us started on this.

—Ten excellent editions of the Yellowstone Flyer. (Jeanne Olson)

—Representation on several local and regional Conservation groups. (Robert Lubbers)

—Field trips throughout the year managed and organized by George and Bernie Mowat. Two fundraiser trips: Thanks to Tom and Jeannette Davis, Ruth Vanderhorst and Anne Cowan, and Billie Hicks.

—Christmas Bird Count (Helen Carlson and Billie Hicks and many others), Birdathon (Billie), Bird Classes (Helen), Audubon Adventures (Jeannette Davis), recycling cans (Tom Davis).

—Membership: Joel Bowers stepped up to provide outstanding work as Membership Secretary. Chapter membership has increased.

—Fundraising: in addition to the activities mentioned above YVAS raised funds from Chapter memberships, Christmas Potluck and Silent Auction, dinners before Chapter meetings, t-shirt sales, and donations.

Very likely, some activity or project has been missed in this listing. If so, it was inadvertent.

We have been honored to work with so many fine officers, directors and members. Your voluntary efforts are much appreciated. We will miss the excellent work provided by Treasurer George Mowat and Secretary Jeanne Olson on the Board. We will also very much miss Jeanne's editorship of the Flyer. We thank both these people for their great generosity. We thank all you who maintain membership in Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society.

—Ruth Vanderhorst, YVAS Board President

**Montana Audubon's Annual Bird Festival:
Wings Across the Big Sky
June 4 - 6, 2010 In Missoula**

This is a reminder of the upcoming Montana Audubon Annual Bird Festival. The brochures outlining the field trips, events, and registration for the festival have been mailed. You can also access this brochure and registration material at <http://mtaudubon.org/> *Fieldtrip group size will be limited so register early!*

Request for Birding Tour Leaders

This year, as part of the Silent Auction fundraiser at the Bird Festival in Missoula (June 4-6), we wish to offer numerous opportunities to bid on the services of experienced Audubon field trip leaders and expert birders for personal birding tours. Successful bidders will be able to choose tours in various parts of the state and target specific bird species they want to see. Experienced trip leaders are now being asked to donate half-day or full-day tours. For further information or to offer your birding skills, please contact Jerry Dimberger at 542-7043 or Montana Audubon at (406) 443-3949.

Guidelines for Tour Leaders for Festival Silent Auction Tours:

- A. All guides must be experienced trip leaders.
- B. Customized tours shall be offered only at the Silent Auction during the Festival.
- C. The tour will be for a half-day, full-day, or in a few cases overnight.
- D. The tour guide does not provide the successful bidder's food or transportation.
- E. Generally tours will be offered for one full vehicle load, but the tour guide should stipulate the number of participants allowed.
- F. The guide must request a minimum bid.
- G. If more than one birding location option is offered by the guide, the successful bidder can choose his/her preferred birding locale.
- H. The guide and the bidder jointly determine the date for the trip.
- I. The bid form for each tour shall include: 1) Name of the guide, 2) Brief description of the trip (location, habitats, target birds, trip length and best time of year), and 3) Guide contact information (phone number, email address, etc.)

Audubon Conservation Education Center Event for May

Picturing Nature: A Journey Through Scientific Illustration & Photography

On Saturday May 22 from 1:30 - 3 pm, the Audubon Conservation Education Center will host artist Ralph Scott. He will present the history of scientific/biological illustration starting in the 1400's through the 20th century. Ralph will focus upon those artists, illustrators, and photographers which have influenced his work. Ralph will show examples of his illustrations over the past 30 years.

Ralph Scott's original illustrations will be on display at the ACEC. After the program attendees will meet Ralph Scott and have the opportunity to purchase signed copies of the book *Field Guide to Grasshoppers and Katydid and Crickets of the United States*.

For more information, contact Heather Ristow, Education Director at (406) 294-5099 or hristow@mtaudubon.org

Freezeout Lake Field Trip for Migrating Snow Geese

The images that have been animating my retinas are emblazoned on my brain. Shimmering skeins of white. Ever-shifting, scintillating strands, looking for all the world like luminous script that continually re-writes itself in the sky over Freezeout Lake and its vicinity. The font: Snow Goose, punctuated with Ross's Goose. What we've seen thus far: scintillating, titillating, undulating skeins interspersed with honking hordes appearing from the horizon, then overhead, then landing on the lake. A mass of flapping phalanxes extending as far as the eye could see. The aerial activity was not clearly discernible as flapping until the geese drew nearer and their black wingtips became visible. The whole distant, shimmering horde turned at once and disappeared before a cloud bank. How cryptic a mass of white-and-black can be.

Joel (Bowers) and I were looking straight up, through binoculars. George's voice over the radio: "We believe there are some Ross's in there. They're noticeably smaller than the others." He would later point out examples of Ross's Geese in a field, where individuals were closer, easier to see. He also indicated that they have shorter, stubbier bills. I radioed the other car, containing Bernie and George Mowat and Helen Carlson: "Book says they're 5.3 pounds each. How many pounds are on the water?" There were thousands of individuals on the water and thousands in the air. Easily more than twenty thousand total. Mike Schwitters, local expert, later reported 35,000 geese this weekend.

The glimmering goose colony on its migratory layover was the highlight of this Easter weekend excursion, but certainly not its only enthralling feature. One other such feature was a Franklin's Gull in his breeding foppery. A life bird for me. I thought that, were I a female of his species, I would be hopelessly in love until I read the following in The Birder's Handbook: "Displays: Courtship: female begs for food, male regurgitates..." (Ehrlich, Paul, et. al. 1988. *The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. Simon & Schuster, New York).

The third day—Easter—our tiny caravan drove south along the beautiful Rocky Mountain Front, then west and north to Arlee, all to see a Carolina Wren, well out of its usual range. It seemed we were off on a lark. This was Joel's and my first involvement in true *twitcher* behavior, our first time traipsing about in a stranger's private yard to see a bird. It was worth it. We saw the Carolina Wren and met some wonderful people.

En route home, just west of Harlowton, we saw six times as many Sandhill Cranes as we had seen in the same area two days prior, two pairs engaged in interesting (mating?) behavior. The entire trip brought joy after joy.

—Lisa Carnicom

Breeding Bird Survey Observers Needed - 2010

The Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) established in 1966 now provides some of the best long term data of bird population trends and distribution in North America. The survey of the BBS routes is dependent on volunteer birders to conduct the surveys. Observers conduct three minute point counts every half mile on a 25 mile long route established on existing roads. The survey for each route is conducted once each breeding season, most typically during June. Volunteer observers must be able to readily identify birds typically found within the habitat of a BBS route by sight and song/call. Observers who can survey a route for several consecutive years increase the statistical quality of the survey.

Montana has 65 Breeding Bird Survey routes and observers are needed to fill currently vacant routes. The following routes were previously surveyed by Yellowstone Valley Audubon member Georgia Frazier who recently moved out of state. Routes needing an observer in the Billings area:

Route 53031: FLATWILLOW, MONTANA

Route 53032: INGOMAR, MONTANA

Route 53033: FORSYTH, MONTANA

Information on the BBS including location and species lists for vacant routes can be found at: <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>

You are encouraged to become part of the largest bird survey effort in N.A. and provide a valuable contribution to bird conservation. For information and to apply for an open route, please contact:

Dan Sullivan, MT BBS Coordinator 406-443-4229 (h) dsullivan01@bresnan.net

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.

- May 8th (Saturday) Lake Basin. 8:00am. Sack Lunch. Leader: Mike Weber.**
- May 15th (Saturday) Meet at Riverfront Park at 8:00am. Half Day. Leaders: George and Bernie Mowat.**
- May 20th (Thursday) Meet at Riverfront Park at 5:30pm. Leader: Mike Weber**

Note: the following two fieldtrips have had their days changed from the year schedule to prevent conflict with crowds on Memorial Day weekend on Stillwater River.

- May 22 (Saturday) Stillwater and Woodbine Areas. 7:00am-5:00pm. Sack lunch. Leader: Ruth Vanderhorst**
- May 29th (Saturday) Pompey's Pillar. 7:00am-early afternoon. Sack lunch optional. Leader: Ruth Vanderhorst**
- June 8 (Tuesday) Meet at Pictograph Caves at 5:30pm Leader: Ruth Vanderhorst**

Fieldtrip Chairs: George and Bernie Mowat, 656-7467

