

*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.*

FEB 2025

VOLUME 55, NUMBER 1

## **The Yellowstone National Park Bird Program: Monitoring, Research, and Management in the World's First National Park**

Yellowstone National Park's landscape is home to approximately 150 breeding bird species and supports many other species during seasonal passage through the region. The Yellowstone Bird Program monitors a suite of species and bird communities in the park with some long-term data exceeding 90 years. Some of this data has identified species declines, the recovery of bald eagle and peregrine falcon from the negative effects of widespread DDT use, bird community responses to changes in the environment, and more. This talk will provide an overview of Yellowstone's Bird Program and highlight monitoring, research, and management for trumpeter swans, peregrine falcons, golden eagles, and willow songbird communities.



Trumpeter Swans running on take-off Photo by David Haines

David Haines is a wildlife biologist with more than 20 years of experience studying birds and is currently Yellowstone National Park's Bird Program lead. David has a bachelor's degree from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo in ecology and systematic biology, and a master's degree from the University of Montana in wildlife biology. He has been affiliated with Yellowstone's bird program since 2011, first as part of the Yellowstone Raptor Initiative, a five-year program established to collect baseline demographic data on previously overlooked species in Yellowstone. At the University of Montana, David studied the breeding ecology and resource selection of golden eagles across Yellowstone's northern range.



David Haines banding a Western Tanager

Join YVAS on February 17th to meet David Haines and learn more about the Yellowstone National Park's Bird Program.

*Submitted by Marco Restani*

YVAS programs are free and open to the public. They are held on the 3rd Monday of the month at the Mayflower Church on the corner of Poly and Rehberg Lane. A social with coffee and cookies begins at 6:30 PM; the program begins at 7:00 PM.



## Chirps and Tweets



- **Osprey Orientation Program:** Dr. Marco Restani will be presenting the 2025 Osprey Orientation program for new and returning Osprey nest monitors on Saturday, March 29th. It will be held in the Community Room on the first floor of the Billings Public Library at 1:00 p.m. The March Flyer will have additional information including the details for registering. Contact Deb at [debregele@gmail.com](mailto:debregele@gmail.com) or 406-780-0810, if you have any questions or are interested in becoming a nest monitor.
- **Aluminum Recycling News:** Thank you to all who donated aluminum this past fall. Larry reported getting donations from a number of people including new donors which is always encouraging. At Earth First Recycling's request, please separate the aluminum cans from the aluminum pans and foil by placing them in different bags before dropping them off at Larry's house. If you have several bags and are unable to drop them off, call Larry at 406-855-9832 and he will pick them up. You can also bring them to one of the Chapter Programs.
- **Birding Field Trips 2025:** Thanks to Carolyn Jones and the dedicated trip leaders we have a full year's schedule of birding trips. The list is included on Page 3 of this Flyer. Check the [yvaudubon.org](http://yvaudubon.org) website, or our [Facebook page](#) to stay current on upcoming trips.

## Montana Audubon Center Events

Learn more about these and other activities on our website: [mtaudubon.org/center](http://mtaudubon.org/center)

- **Nature Nuts: (Every Tuesday)** – A fun-filled “Toddler and Me” program perfect for young nature enthusiasts.
- **The Complete Snake:** Ecology, Diversity, Conservation, and Anatomy (Feb 8th)
- **Bear Aware with Montana FWP:** (Feb 12th)
- **Winter Birding Experiences:** Feathers in the Frost: (Feb 22nd) at the Yellowstone Wildlife Sanctuary in Red Lodge

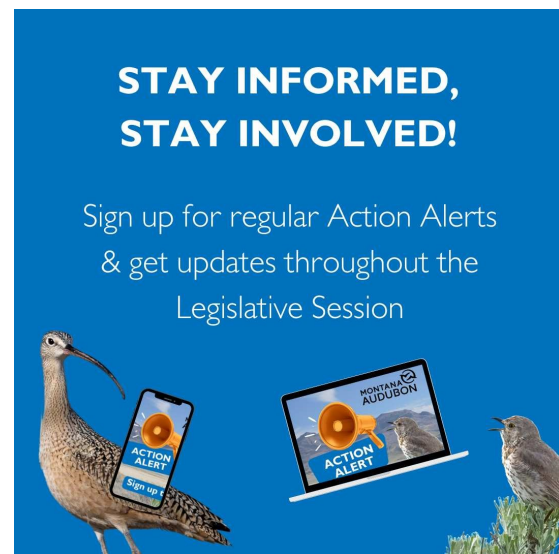
*Submitted by Emily Chilcoat  
Montana Audubon Center Director  
Office: (406) 294-5099*

## Montana Audubon News

The **Montana legislative session** is in full swing. Several bills are already headed to the floor that will affect migratory birds or could release exotic species. Sign up for Montana Audubon's Action Alert emails from Peter Dudley to stay informed and engaged. Throughout the session, you'll receive regular emails that share:

- Updates on priority bills
- Resources for testifying and reaching lawmakers
- Information to help you make an impact

To read the most recent Action Alert and to sign up, visit the Montana Audubon website: <https://mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/action-alert/>



**Audubon's Winter Climate Watch** program is back from January 15th to February 15th, 2025. Each survey includes 12 short point-counts, recording observations with three target species: Pygmy Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and White-breasted Nuthatch.

To learn more about the program, and for a step-by-step to signing up, visit the Montana Audubon website: <https://mtaudubon.org/winter-climate-watch-jan-15-2025/>

*Submitted by Lauren Smith  
Communications Specialist  
Montana Audubon  
[lauren@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lauren@mtaudubon.org)*

**2025 YVAS FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE**

Contact CAROLYN JONES at carolyn684@gmail.com to be included on the **Bird Trip Notification List**.

Alerts will be sent via email about any impromptu trips or changes.

Field trips depart by car from the Rocky Mountain College parking lot on Rimrock Road next to Billings Studio Theater (BST) at 8:00 AM unless noted in the specific trip information shown below.

**\*\*Please DO NOT bring pets\*\*** Passengers will share gas costs with drivers\*\*

Date	Day of Week	Meeting Place	Description	Leaders
3/30/2025	SUN	8AM Rocky/ BST parking lot	Big Lake, migrating swans, sandhills, etc.	Mike Weber
4/12/2025	SAT	7:30 Bridger Park, end of town	Pryor Mountains, search for sagebrush sparrows	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
4/26/2025	SAT	Phipps Park 8AM	BLUEBIRDS AND BLOOMS, steep hike to top, hiking poles recommended	Carolyn Jones & Sue Weinreis
5/4/2025	SUN	Two Moon Park 8 AM	Hike Two Moon Park	Mike Weber
5/10/2025	SAT	8AM Rocky/ BST parking lot	Broadview Ponds	Carolyn Jones
5/17/2025	SAT	Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus, near restrooms, 8 AM	Bridger Creek	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
5/27/2025	TUE	Parking area to the right at entrance, meet at 5 PM	Riverfront evening stroll, mosquito repellent advised	Cathy Breeding
5/31/2025	SAT	Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus, near restrooms, 8 AM	Stillwater River/Woodbine area	Carolyn Jones
6/7/2025	SAT	7:30 Rocky or 8AM Bundy fishing access	Pompey's Pillar and Bundy access	Carolyn Jones
6/10/2025	TUE	8:30 Red Lodge Town Pump	Red Lodge area	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
6/14/2025	SAT	8:30 Bridger Park at the end of town	Pryor Mountains, Sage creek	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
6/17/2025	TUE	Yellowstone WMA, Pompey's meet at Bundy Bridge FA, 8 AM	Yellowstone WMA near Pompey's Pillar	Megan O'Reilly
6/21/2025	SAT	7:30 Bridger Park end of town	Bear Canyon	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
6/28/2025	SAT	8 AM Love's Truck stop, Hwy 47 just off I-90 Hardin	Grant's Marsh, Hardin	Megan O'Reilly
8/9/2025	SAT	7AM Rocky/ BST parking lot	Shore birds, Hawks, and Prairie birds	Mike Weber
8/16/2025	SAT	Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus, near restrooms, 8 AM	Bridger Creek	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
9/12 to 9/14	FRI - SUN	Malta campground, Friday PM	Malta and Bowdoin NWR, RSVP please	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
9/20/2025	SAT	8 AM Red Lodge Town Pump	Hawk Watch (road condition permitting)	Marco Restani
11/1/2025	SAT	8AM Rocky/ BST parking lot	Yellowtail Dam Afterbay	Ron Kuhler
12/20/2025	SAT	Perkins for Breakfast, 7 AM	Christmas Bird Count 2025	Jerry Dalton
1/1/2026	THU	8AM Rocky/ BST parking lot	Annual New Year's Day Bird Trip, Afterbay	Ron Kuhler
1/4/2026	SUN	8AM Rocky/ BST parking lot	Mid-Winter Eagle Count	Mike Weber / Ron Kuhler

## Eagle Watch 2025

We set off on January 12 like a pack of wild birders excited to count eagles along the Yellowstone River from Billings to Columbus! (We were extra excited because the weather was much better this day than the previous weekend when it was originally planned and would have been no match for our 4-pack of Subarus.) Our first sighting was the tranquilly perched adult at Two Moon.



Bald Eagle Photo by Ginny Waples



Eagle watchers Photo by Ginny Waples

Great spotting by the team: Brian Henderson, Jerry Dalton, Ginny Waples, Carolyn Jones, John and Sue Weinreis, Catherine Frazer.

*Submitted by Brian Henderson*

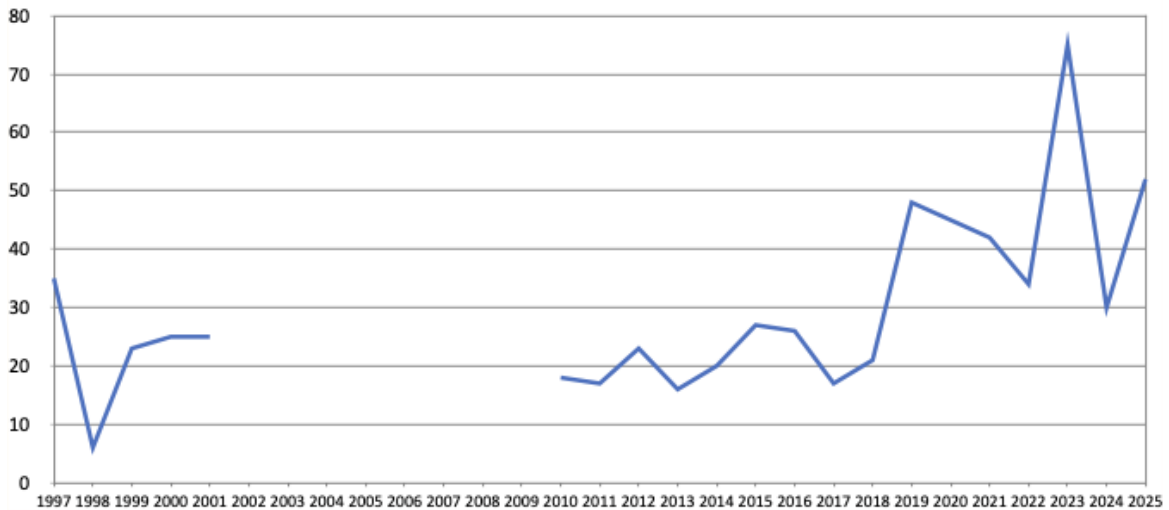


Spotting eagles on the Yellowstone Photo by Ginny Waples

The Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is a national effort since 1979, originally started by the National Wildlife Federation, now coordinated by the US Army Corps of Engineers in collaboration with the US Geological Survey. In addition to counting eagles, we also report weather conditions and the amount of ice covering the river.

This year's count of 52 Bald Eagles was the 2nd highest for this area. About one third of the eagles were immature.

### Historical Bald Eagle Count, Yellowstone River (Billings to Columbus)



Trends in Bald Eagle population on the Yellowstone Graph provided by Brian Henderson

## ABOUT THOSE HONKIN' BIG GOOSE NUMBERS...

Canada Geese topped the Christmas Bird Count charts again in 2024. This would be eight years in a row, except in 2023 the geese ceded first place to European Starlings. The 4,086 Canada Geese recorded on the 2024 Billings CBC represent about 30% of the total individual birds seen on December 14th.

There was a time when birders could go six years without ever counting a Canada Goose for the Christmas Bird Count. The last significant run of gooseless CBCs occurred from 1951-1956. Canada Geese began showing up in modest numbers for most CBCs after that, with occasional exceptions. The geese were no-shows in 1958-59, 1968-69, 1972, 1974, 1978, 1980, 1986, and 1987. After 1987, Canada Geese were never again logged as a “goose egg” in the Billings CBC. The place of Canada Geese in the rankings steadily rose until the 21st century, when they competed with European Starlings for Number One and came out on top more often than not. The largest number of Canada Geese recorded on a single Billings CBC day was in 2020, when tireless volunteer observers tallied 15,566 geese (far out-numbering 2,976 starlings)!

What is the story behind the numbers?

By the early twentieth century, Canada Goose numbers were in serious decline nationwide due to overhunting, egg collecting, and loss of wetlands to development. By the 1950s, the *Branta canadensis maxima* subspecies (aka Giant Canada Goose) was suspected of being extinct. When a flock was found in a Rochester, Minnesota park, the news was excitedly broadcast as an April 1963 press release by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<https://www.fws.gov/press-release/1963-04/giant-canada-geese-long-believed-extinct-re-discovered-minnesota>) which concluded presciently, “Dr. Hanson is credited with discovering that the giant goose is not only still around, but even appears to have a sizable population that is adapting to man’s changes of its environment.”

The growth of the Canada Goose population got a jumpstart in the mid-1960s when the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center at Jamestown, North Dakota started a “Canada goose production and restoration program.” Beginning with 64 breeding pairs of geese in 1965, more than 6,000 Giant Canada Geese were released in 26 counties in North Dakota by the end of 1981. By 2012, Ducks Unlimited estimated there to be over 5 million Canada Geese in North America, 3.8 million of which were the Giant Canada subspecies. DU attributes the success of the Giants to adaptive traits including larger clutches, ability to defend nests from predators, and the advantage of a longer nesting season in temperate regions than their more northerly-nesting relatives.



Canada Geese Photo by Ginny Waples

While Ducks Unlimited argues that Giant Canada Geese were always shorter-distance migrators, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife notes that young geese learn migration routes from their parents, so a year-round resident population becomes self-perpetuating. Not only an increase in resident geese numbers, but climate change, too, is a probable factor affecting winter bird observations, with mild winters enabling some species to forgo or delay migration. Also, Canada Geese have excelled at exploiting other human-caused environmental changes as they thrive, often into the winter, in parks, on lawns, and in grainfields—i.e. both urban and agricultural environments. City geese gain the added advantage of avoiding hunters and encountering fewer predators.

By the time of the Christmas Bird Count, most long-distance migratory geese are long gone. But that leaves us with plenty of Canada Geese to count.

## GOOSE NUMBERS, continued

For more on the history of Giant Canada Geese restoration in North Dakota:

<https://ornithologyexchange.org/forums/topic/7005-forrest-lee-father-geese-for-giant-and-aleutian-canada-geese/>

For more information about the growth in Canada Goose numbers in North America according to Ducks Unlimited: <https://www.ducks.org/conservation/waterfowl-research-science/understanding-waterfowl-story-of-the-giants>

For U.S. Fish & Wildlife estimates of 2001 Canada Goose numbers and tips on how to deal with urban geese: <https://www.fws.gov/story/2001-03/us-fish-and-wildlife-service-tackles-problem-urban-geese>

For more about resident vs. migratory Canada Geese by Cornell Ornithology Lab: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/canada-geese-resident-vs-migratory/>

*Submitted by Ginny Waples*

## 55 species, 13,355 birds, 33 field birders, 10 feeder watchers

The Billings Christmas Bird Count (CBC) that took place on Dec 14, 2024, resulted in these impressive numbers. Yes, your participation matters!

Thirteen species out of the 55 total were recorded by one field team. This year, seven different groups joined the effort. More birders find more birds!

The most notable bird was one Mountain Bluebird reported near Huntley, reported only one other time on the Billings CBC, in 1946. The following species were reported by one, two, or three groups or feeder watchers:

Cackling Goose, Wood Duck (25, the most ever), Gadwall, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Wild Turkey, Double-crested Cormorant (8, the most ever), Great Blue Heron, Golden Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, American Coot, Belted Kingfisher, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Shrike, Horned Lark, Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Cassin's Finch, Pine Siskin, and American Goldfinch.

Many eyes and ears find more birds. Yes, it did matter that you volunteered. Thank you, Thank you. Please plan to volunteer again on Saturday, December 20, 2025, for the next Billings Christmas Bird Count.

You can see all the results at <http://yvaudubon.org> and <http://audubon.org/CBC>.

*Submitted by Jerry Dalton*



Mountain Bluebird Photo by Will Crain

**YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

**Next Board of Directors Meeting: Feb 10, 2025** —The YVAS meeting of the Board of Directors will be held from 4pm to 6pm. Board of Directors meetings are held the second Monday of the month. Board meetings are open to all members.

**In-Person Program: Feb 17, 2025.** Programs will be held on the third Monday of the month at the Mayflower Church on the corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive in Billings. Doors open at 6:30 for coffee and cookies; the program begins at 7:00 pm.

**Board of Directors**

President: Steve McConnell 509-868-8277 smc571@msn.com  
Vice President: Vacant  
Secretary: Sue Weinreis 406-855-4181 granpeak47@gmail.com  
Treasurer: Pam Pipal 406-245-4517 ppipal@charter.net

**Board Members**

Kris Decker (541) 514-8711 krisdecker4@gmail.com  
Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449 carolyn684@gmail.com  
Kristin Neva 406-672-8912 ksneva@gmail.com  
Deb Regele 406-780-0810 debregele@gmail.com  
Bruce Waage 406-698-3126 bruce.waage@outlook.com  
Ginny Waples 406-850-1056 waplesv@gmail.com

**Committees and Assignments**

Christmas Bird Count: Jerry Dalton 406-656-3656  
jerrydalton96@gmail.com  
Facebook: Ginny Waples 406-850-1056  
waplesv@gmail.com  
Field Trip Chair: Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449  
carolyn684@gmail.com  
Flyer Editor: Kristin Neva 406-672-8912  
yvasflyer@gmail.com

**(Committees, continued)**

Injured Raptors: Montana Raptor Conservation Center  
406-585-1211  
Injured Waterfowl: WJH Bird Resources 406-652-7175  
wjhbird@yahoo.com  
Membership Data: Deb Regele 406-780-0810  
debregele@gmail.com  
Mt Bluebird Habitat Project: Carolyn Jones 406-670-4449  
carolyn684@gmail.com, and  
Sue Weinreis 406-855-4181  
granpeak47@gmail.com  
Osprey Nest Monitor Coord: Deb Regele 406-780-0810  
debregele@gmail.com  
Osprey Research Coord: Marco Restani 460-425-2608  
restani@stcloudstate.edu  
Program Committee: YVAS Board of Directors  
Publicity: YVAS Board of Directors  
Recycling (aluminum): Larry Handsaker 406-855-9832 or  
918 Ave C, Billings  
Website: Deb Regele 406-780-0810 debregele@gmail.com

**Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society**  
Application for New & Renewal Membership



*Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our federal tax ID number is 51-0206955.*

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 family Chapter benefits.  
Make check payable to **Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society** for \$25. If applying for a new or renewing student membership, make check for \$15 and indicate academic affiliation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you want to receive the YVAS Flyer electronically?  
\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

Send this application and your check to:

Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 1075  
Billings, MT 59103-1075



**YELLOWSTONE VALLEY  
AUDUBON FLYER**  
P.O. Box 1075  
Billings, MT 59103-1075

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**Yellowstone River Photo by Steve McConnell**

### **\*\*\* Membership Updates \*\*\***

In an effort to keep our members advised of their membership status, members within the renewal period will be printed at the back of each Flyer. A renewal reminder will also be sent by email or USPS. YVAS now has a 60-day grace period for renewals.

Your memberships help to provide for speakers at YVAS monthly meetings, the YVAS newsletter the Flyer, bird studies and conservation efforts. YVAS is affiliated with the National Audubon Society. We do not share your membership information including your address, phone or email address with any other organization.



February renewal: Barbara Garrett, John & Carol McNeal, Larry Newell & Marlene Pirtz, Sarah Stockburger, Roger & Patricia Williams.

January renewals: Dan Erikson, Vern Schneider, Mike Weber.

December renewals: Mary Fitzpatrick, Rita Harding, Ron Kuhler, Deb Mattern, David & Nancy Myers, Sherlene Robison-O'Dea, Gene Wade.

If you have any questions regarding your membership, please contact the Membership Administrator at [YVAS.membership.data@gmail.com](mailto:YVAS.membership.data@gmail.com) or 406-780-0810.