



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.

MAY 2025

VOLUME 55, NUMBER 4

Showcase of Three Montana Wildlife Photographers

Bozeman photographer Bruce Pitcher has been creating beautiful images of the Gallatin Valley and surrounding areas for nearly 50 years. He obtained a degree in Still Photography from Montana State University. His work has been published in National Wildlife, Wyoming Wildlife, Utah Fish and Game, Professional Photographers of America, Big Sky Journal, as well as numerous other magazines and books.

For Lewistown photographer Lois Sheldon, photography is now an avocation rather than the vocation it was for 30 years as a portrait photographer. Today, photography offers her the thrill of closely observing the natural world, birds in particular, and lets her share the experience with friends and family. She finds that seeking an expressive image of an often-elusive subject teaches patience, quiets the mind, and (sometimes) rewards her with an image that provides insight into the lives of Montana birds.

Red Lodge photographer Merv Coleman has been shooting a variety of subjects for 45 years, from wildlife to landscapes to little dancers to school pictures to family and high school portraits. He loves driving the Beartooth Scenic Highway as well as going to Yellowstone National Park or surrounding areas for photographic outings. Although he has also enjoyed taking photographs across the country and abroad, he is always reminded on the next trip into the local mountains of how lucky he is to have all of this in his backyard.

Join YVAS on May 19th to meet these celebrated artists and enjoy a presentation of their photographs.



Bohemian Waxwing Photo by Merv Coleman

Submitted by Marco Restani



Sandhill Crane with colts Photo by Merv Coleman



Trumpeter Swans take off Photo by Merv Coleman

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

Nighthawk & Poorwill Surveys!

The arrival of warm summer nights in Montana also brings two expertly camouflaged and bat-like fliers to Montana's grasslands: Common Poorwills and Common Nighthawks. We are looking for volunteers to survey these cryptic, data-deficient species across the state.



Common Nighthawk Photo by Daria Huxley

Thanks to support from the Tracy Aviary, **Montana Audubon** is collaborating with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to gather data on the population and location of these birds. Common Poorwills are a Species of Greatest Inventory Need and a Potential Species of Concern in Montana. Common Nighthawks lack statewide population and distribution data and are declining across their range nationally. Collecting data on these species will allow scientists and conservationists to more accurately assess the conservation status and needs of Poorwills and Nighthawks, which would not be possible without citizen scientists like you!

Survey Details

Each survey is conducted along a driving route, and consists of 10 points, at least one mile apart. Common Poorwill routes have a set of predetermined coordinates, while Common Nighthawk routes have a general starting area, and the exact points are chosen by the volunteers surveying the route. Routes are focused on areas that lack population and location data.

Survey Period & Timing

- June 1 to August 10
- Surveys start 60 minutes before sunset, and must be completed by 90 minutes after sunset
- Surveys can either be completed one time during the survey period with a team of two people surveying at once, or two times on different nights along the same route by one surveyor.

Visit the Citizen Science website to see the survey location map and to learn more about these surveys:

[Nightjar Surveys](#)

In-person & Virtual Training Options

We'll go over everything you need to know, including species identification, how to sign up for a survey site, survey protocol, and data collection.

Mark your calendars to join us at one of our upcoming training sessions:

- **May 9** | 6 p.m. | In-person @ Montana Audubon Center in Billings
- **May 14** | 7 p.m. | Zoom (recording will be available)
- **June 27** | 7 p.m. | In-person @ Montana WILD Center Auditorium in Helena

Interested In Participating?

Fill out the interest form online or email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org.

*Submitted by Gwynne Rohde
Big Sky Watershed Corps Member
Montana Audubon*



Chirps and Tweets



Osprey Nest Monitoring has started:

The Osprey Google Group came alive with vivid descriptions of osprey behavior in the early days of April.

In Paradise Valley, the Dutton saga had nothing on the aerial dogfights that disputed territory between a pair of ospreys and a pair of eagles who were determined to claim nest 154. After six days of hostilities monitored by Tim and Joan Cayen, the ospreys held the nest.

The osprey monitors were also riveted by the interactions Ginny Waples reported of a chick fight among 3 female ospreys over the dude 55/E in a Billings area nest.



Female ospreys fight over the nest or the mate?
Photo by Ginny Waples

MAY - JUNE 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
May 4	SUN	Two Moon Park 8 AM	Hike Two Moon Park	Mike Weber
May 10	SAT	8AM Rocky/ BST parking lot	Broadview Ponds	Carolyn Jones
May 17	SAT	Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus, near restrooms, 8 AM	Bridger Creek	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
May 27	TUE	Parking area to the right at entrance, meet at 5 PM	Riverfront evening stroll, mosquito repellent advised	Cathy Breeding
May 31	SAT	Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus, near restrooms, 8 AM	Stillwater River/Woodbine area	Carolyn Jones
June 7	SAT	7:30 Rocky or 8AM Bundy fishing access	Pompey's Pillar and Bundy access	Carolyn Jones
June 10	TUE	8:30 Red Lodge Town Pump	Red Lodge area	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
June 14	SAT	8:30 Bridger park at end of town	Pryor Mountains, Sage creek	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
June 17	TUE	Yellowstone WMA, Pompeys meet at Bundy Bridge FA , 8 AM	Yellowstone WMA near Pompeys Pillar	Megan O'Reilly
June 21	SAT	7:30 Bridger Park end of town	Bear Canyon	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
June 28	SAT	8 AM Love's Truck stop, Hwy 47 just off 190 Hardin	Grant's Marsh, Hardin	Megan O'Reilly

YVAS at Zoo Montana's Party for the Planet April 19th



Ginny Waples and Kris Decker get in a little birding at the ZooMontana Party for the Planet



Carolyn Jones, Kris Decker and Kristin Neva at the ZooMontana Earth Day event

BIG LAKE: THE YVAS FIELD TRIP SEASON OPENER

If you looked out your window on Sunday morning, March 30th, and then pulled the covers back over your head instead of gearing up for the scheduled field trip to Big Lake, that was totally understandable. Sensible, even.



Photo by Ron Kuhler

Some optimistic birders did make it as far as Rocky Mountain College that morning. After a discussion in the parking lot about the road conditions (poor) and the visibility (poor and getting poorer) and then checking the weather report for next Sunday (good!), this hardy crew voted to reschedule the trip to Big Lake for April 6th.



Northern Harriers in tandem Photo by Will Crain



Molt gumbo Photo by Ginny Waples

Is there a better way to celebrate 406 Day than a YVAS field trip to Big Lake?

An intrepid choice of back roads rewarded us with lots of Bald Eagles and two Golden's hanging out over a prairie dog town, two Ferruginous Hawks,



Big Lake birders Photo by Kristin Neva

Northern Harriers on the hunt, a profusion of Western Meadowlarks, and Horned Larks...and that's before we reached Big Lake. At the lake we enjoyed a variety of waterfowl, a satisfying number of Trumpeter Swans, a good supply of Double-Crested Cormorants on their nesting island, and a token flock of American White Pelicans, as well as a smattering of other birds. Although it wasn't good timing for shorebirds, it was perfect for spying on Killdeer courtship.

It was a good start to the season of YVAS field trips to come.

Submitted by Ginny Waples

Over Twenty Years of Success: The Phipps Park Mountain Bluebird Project, 1993-2025



An unwanted pair of House Sparrows starting a nest in a bluebird box. Photo by Ginny Waples



Pair of Mountain Bluebirds Photo by Ginny Waples

1993: When Curtis Phipps donated the Diamond X Ranch to the City of Billings, it had in place a number of established Mountain Bluebird nesting boxes. YVAS took over maintenance and monitoring of the boxes, led by George Mowat and others.

Over the years, the boxes have been destroyed by vandals, weather, and fire, but always replaced and rebuilt by volunteers of YVAS.

2017: Nancy & Jim Wiggins took over management of the project for YVAS. At this time, there were ten established boxes, of which approximately one fourth had successful fledging. During this period, three more boxes were added for a total of thirteen boxes.

2019: Carolyn Jones and Sue Weinreis began monitoring these boxes. The first year, only one box contained a bluebird nest, and all six nestlings perished. Carolyn and Sue persisted through the 2024 season, with ever-increasing numbers of fledged bluebirds.

2023: YVAS volunteers began leading spring bird and flower hikes along the Phipps Bluebird Trail in an effort to promote interest and appreciation for bluebirds and prairie habitat.

2025: Carolyn Jones and Ginny Waples will be monitoring the Phipps Park boxes in 2025. They have already been hard at work, repairing, cleaning, and checking for likely inhabitants of the blue variety.

Submitted by Sue Weinreis



Room with a view Photo by Ginny Waples



Checking bluebird nesting boxes Photo by Ginny Waples

Dover Ponds Walk

With a focus on Yellowstone River Parks Association's newly acquired Natural Area of John H. Dover Park, specifically the ponds and the surrounding lowland areas, YRPA's Director Carolyn Sevier gave YVAS a firsthand look at this area. Volunteers from the Twine Recycling Site/Project and the YVAS Board walked the perimeter and meandered through the area to get a better understanding of this marshy area as we plan for a bird blind(s) and informative signs with YRPA.

It will be a minimum of two years before the Natural Area is opened to the public. In the meantime, this will allow us time to review the various types of bird blinds, which are surprisingly numerous! Styles vary depending on the planned purpose or usage for the bird blind, the location, the climate, species of birds and the available budget.



Surveying birds and topography Photo Kristin Neva



Dover Ponds Views Photo by Deb Regele

The location and method of construction and installation will also take some research.

While our main focus was not on birding, Northern Shovelers, Green-winged Teals, Buffleheads, American Robins, Killdeers, Bald Eagles, Red-winged Blackbirds, Great Blue Herons, Unkn Grebes, Widgeons, Canada Geese, Sandhill Cranes and Mallards were a few of the birds noted on the walk as well as a jackrabbit and a muskrat.

YVAS will be using the remaining funds in the YVAS' Twine Recycling Fund to fund these projects. (See the September 2024 Flyer.) Since this project will slowly evolve over the next couple of years, I will update the membership as developments occur.

Submitted by Deb Regele

Exciting News!

The Board of Directors has decided to try something this fall called THE BIG SIT. It was established in 1992 by the New Haven Connecticut Bird Club and has expanded around the world. Officially, the Big Sit takes place on the second Sunday in October (just before Columbus Day). Our Chapter is considering doing a "practice" Big Sit a little earlier, perhaps the last Sunday in September.

The premise is to see how many species can be spotted from a circle of no more than 17 feet in diameter in 24 hours. (midnight to midnight). We picture it as a chance to be with others interested in birds, to socialize, picnic, and generally have fun birding while learning from experienced birders. You could bring a chair, a cooler, scope and binoculars. It would be open to all ages, so bring the kids. You can come for as little time or as long as you would like, but you would have to sign up and commit to your time.

Stay tuned for more information as our plans develop. Watch the Flyers!

Submitted by Carolyn Jones

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: May 12, 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: May 19, 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: Open
Vice President: Open
Secretary: Sue Weinreis granpeak47@gmail.com
Treasurer: Pam Pipal ppipal@charter.net

Board Members

Kris Decker krisdecker4@gmail.com
Carolyn Jones carolyn684@gmail.com
Kristin Neva ksneva@gmail.com
Deb Regele debregele@gmail.com
Bruce Waage bruce.waage@outlook.com
Ginny Waples waplesv@gmail.com

Committees and Assignments

Christmas Bird Count: Jerry Dalton jerrydalton96@gmail.com
Facebook: Ginny Waples waplesv@gmail.com
Field Trip Chair: Carolyn Jones carolyn684@gmail.com
Flyer Editor: Kristin Neva yvasflyer@gmail.com

(Committees, continued)

Injured Raptors: Montana Raptor Conservation Center
406-585-1211
Membership Data Admin: Kris Decker
YVAS.membership.data@gmail.com
Mt Bluebird Habitat Project: Carolyn Jones
carolyn684@gmail.com, and
Sue Weinreis granpeak47@gmail.com
Osprey Nest Monitor Coordinator:
Deb Regele debregele@gmail.com
Osprey Research Coordinator:
Marco Restani restani@stcloudstate.edu
Program Committee: YVAS Board of Directors
Publicity: YVAS Board of Directors
Recycling (aluminum):
Larry Handsaker larryhandsaker@gmail.com;
drop off at 918 Ave C, Billings
Website: Deb Regele 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.

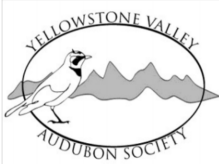
Please enroll me as a supporting member of Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society. I understand I will be supporting local Chapter activities and receiving the local newsletter. I will enjoy full family Chapter benefits.
Make check payable to **Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society** for \$25. If applying for 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



Photo by Will Crain of Red Crossbills polishing off 5 seed barrels per week in his backyard.

*** 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.



May renewals: Jeff DiBenedetto, David & Sandy Kennedy, June Luptak, Marco Restani.

April renewals: Pat & Scott Vandell, Chris Miller, Jim & Virginia Court.

March renewal: Nicholas Wright.

If you have any questions regarding your membership, please contact the Membership Administrator at YVAS.membership.data@gmail.com.