

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.

AUGUST 2025

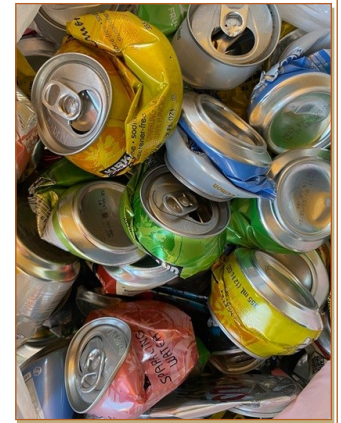
VOLUME 55, NUMBER 6

YVAS Recycling Program

Recycling aluminum is incredibly beneficial, requiring only 5% of the energy needed to produce new aluminum from the raw material bauxite. These energy savings translate into significant environmental advantages, including reduced greenhouse gas emissions and water pollution. In addition, aluminum is infinitely recyclable, meaning it can be recycled repeatedly without losing its properties.

For over 15 years, Larry Handsaker has volunteered to help the recycling of aluminum for YVAS with the additional benefit of donating the proceeds to the YVAS Education Fund. The money received from the recycling goes into the YVAS' Education Fund which supports a variety of projects – educational signs in public parks, Citizen Science Kits at the Billings Public Library and educational projects as requested.

YVAS is accepting ALUMINUM CANS ONLY for recycling. The aluminum beverage cans can be dropped off in secure bags at **918 Avenue C at the end of the driveway by the garage.** Aluminum cans, not aluminum foil, are the only items accepted. Try a magnet if you are uncertain about the metal in the can; it will not attach to aluminum. If you have several bags, contact Larry at larryhandsaker@gmail.com, and he will be happy to pick it up. See more recycling tips under "Chirps & Tweets."



Cans - Photo by Ginny Waples



Larry's backyard garden Photo by Kristin Neva

food broker initially, and eventually owning a specialty food store and bakery, Morgan's Market. Larry's wife Janice and several family members worked in the memorable endeavor that closed in 2003.

In recent years, Larry's attentions have turned to sustainable gardening. Now in mid-summer glory, his garden is abloom with 25 perennials and many annuals that keep him busy. Janice was the mastermind of this garden, and Larry is dedicated to taking care of it in her memory.

Violet bellflowers and deep pink phlox border the patio. The back corner is a

riot of goldenrod hiding a new beehive that is already producing honey. A grape arbor provides deep shade behind apple trees adorned with bird feeders.

A White-breasted Nuthatch followed our tour of the garden. Birds are happy in this backyard paradise with nine feeders and two water stations to choose from. Larry especially likes the young Blue Jays that visited earlier in the summer.



Larry Handsaker Photo by Kristin Neva

Submitted by Kristin

Our next YVAS program featuring Dr. Marco Restani on raptor identification will take place on Thursday, Sep 18th 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. Keep in touch with YVAS via our Website yvaudubon.org and [Facebook Page!](#)



Chirps and Tweets



Recycling Tips

- Recycle only bagged aluminum cans at Larry’s house 918 Avenue C .
- The Billings City Garbage collection is collecting cardboard for recycling once a month according to the guidelines posted on their [website](#). Call them at 406-657-8230 if you have questions.
- For those who want to recycle tin cans, plastic containers, paper and cardboard, a company called **Earth First Aid** in Billings offers this service for \$75 per quarter. They offer good bi-weekly service.



Female Osprey protecting her nest
Photo by Ginny Waples

Ospreys and More

- On July 17, Dr. Marco Restani announced a milestone in the Osprey Nest Monitoring Project: he banded the 1,000th nestling ! The monitoring project began banding in 2012, and the band numbers have enabled osprey monitors to identify the ospreys when they return to the Yellowstone River drainage nests, and when they are spotted by bird watchers in wintering grounds on the Gulf coast or further south.
- The Nest Monitor picnics to celebrate the end of the season will take place on Labor Day weekend: August 30 for the Billings group and August 31 for the Paradise Valley folks.
- YVAS Chapter Meetings will resume on Thursday, September 18th with a program about Raptor Identification delivered by Dr. Marco Restani. Currently, Marco is a Biologist at NorthWestern Energy in Montana responsible for the company’s avian protection program. He earned his Ph.D from Utah State and taught Wildlife Biology for 15 years. He has studied raptors for 35 years.

Montana Audubon Center Events

Learn more about these and other activities on our website: mtaudubon.org/center

Nature Nuts: Every Tuesday, 10 AM – A fun-filled “Toddler and Me” program perfect for young nature enthusiasts.

Morning Bird Stroll : August 9th, 8:30AM

Weekend Wonders Family Program: August 9th, 10:30AM

Evening Explorations: August 20th, 4:00-7:00PM

Bugs and Brews: August 15th, 9:00 PM - Midnight.



Advanced registration required & includes two drinks. Learn more & buy tickets: [Bugs & Brews](#)

Registration and more information is available on the website: mtaudubon.org/center.

Submitted by Emily Chilcoat

Montana Audubon News

Submitted by Lauren Smith

New Documentary on Black Swift Research

For over 10 years, Montana Audubon has been monitoring Black Swift populations across the western portion of the state. These birds can be a challenging species to observe and monitor. They are aerial insectivores that tend to feed at high altitudes, and they nest in remote, hard-to-access locations: behind glacial-fed waterfalls.

In this documentary, Montana Audubon’s Director of Conservation Christian Meny and Avian Specialist Bo Crees share the story of Black Swifts in Montana, and Montana Audubon’s effort to monitor them.

[Watch the full video on the Montana Audubon YouTube channel.](#)



Black Swift Photo by Braydon Luikart

YELLOWSTONE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY, BILLINGS, MONTANA

2025 FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

- ◆ Check the YVAudubon.org website, Facebook, and the Flyer for any schedule changes including times, cancellations, or impromptu trips. Contact Carolyn Jones at carolyn684@gmail.com to be included on the Bird Trip Notification List.
- ◆ 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
Aug 9	SAT	7AM Rocky/BST parking lot	Shore birds, Hawks, and Prairie Birds	Mike Weber
Aug 16	SAT	8AM Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus, near restrooms	Bridger Creek	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
Sep 12 - 14	FRI - SUN	Malta campground, Friday PM	Malta and Bowdoin NWR, RSVP please	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
Sep 20	SAT	8AM Red Lodge Town Pump	Hawk Watch (road condition permitting)	Marco Restani
Oct 5	SUN	Riverfront Park (to be confirmed)	The Big Sit	Carolyn Jones

The Big Sit: A Tailgate Party for Birders

Please mark your field trip calendars for a new experience on Sunday, October 5th. This event was introduced by the New Haven Bird Club in 1992, and since then has expanded around the world. 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. According to the official rules, you can leave the circle to get a closer look at a bird, however, birds spotted while outside of this circle cannot be counted.

Since this is a trial run, we won't be following all of the official Big Sit rules. For example, the time frame for the official event is Saturday, October 11th (midnight) to Sunday, October 12th (midnight). We only plan to observe and record species during daylight hours for one day. You can stay later if you wish! Check out this [Vermont Big Sit](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fv760mOJy3A&t=6s) on YouTube to get a feeling for the event. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fv760mOJy3A&t=6s>)

The location for our October 5th event will probably be in Riverfront Park near one of the shelters. Our circle will be marked. Participation will determine if we decide to do this officially next year.

Bring seating, binoculars, scopes, snacks and a lunch. This is a great way to meet other birders or learn from experienced birders. It's meant to be fun!!

Watch the September YVAS Flyer for final details and contact me to receive Bird Trip notifications by email: carolyn684@gmail.com.



Easthampton Mass Big Sit. Photo by Meghadeepa Maity

Submitted by Carolyn Jones

The Mountain Bluebirds of Phipps Park

Mountain Bluebirds face multiple threats to a successful breeding season, some of them human-caused. YVAS volunteers have been giving the birds a boost by maintaining and monitoring nesting boxes at Phipps Diamond X Park (Billings) since 1993, beginning with George Mowat, followed by Jim Wiggins, and more recently, Sue Weinreis and Carolyn Jones.

“The bluebird carries the sun on his back,” said Henry David Thoreau, and who doesn’t love the azure males and the more subtle loveliness of the females? It was the reason I agreed to substitute for Sue this season and hike up the trail with Carolyn to reach the mesa at Phipps where 13 nesting boxes are available for bluebird use. Monitoring involves checking the nest boxes periodically from March to July to determine occupancy and number of successfully fledged bluebirds.



Bluebird eggs Photo by Carolyn Jones



Carolyn Jones at Phipps Park Photo by Ginny Waples

The results are in. We found five of the 13 boxes were used by bluebirds to raise an estimated total of 15 fledglings. The fledgling count is determined by slipping a cell phone into the box to photograph the nest, determining the number of eggs & nestlings and then, at season’s end, subtracting the number of unhatched eggs and dead nestlings from the total. We found a few dead nestlings and one unhatched, compromised egg at the end of this season.

Nesting boxes are important for supporting Mountain Bluebird populations because cavity-nesting birds do not find an adequate supply of standing dead trees in an anthropogenic environment. Tree Swallows, also cavity nesters, compete with bluebirds for nesting sites and monitors always find a percentage of the boxes filled with swallow nests. Although swallows can be aggressive enough to out-compete bluebirds for a nesting site, bluebirds are at an advantage if they establish residency first. “Mountain Bluebirds were able to successfully defend [their nest boxes] 77 percent of the times against the swallows” when they laid eggs first, was the finding of a study by ornithologist Karen Wiebe. However, “Tree Swallows won between 65 and 70 percent of the times they were competing for a brand-new box.” Bluebirds tend to arrive earlier than swallows—by two weeks in the Saskatchewan study—but there is concern that climate change will mess with that timing.

This year there was an additional competitor. On April 11th we caught a pair of House Sparrows in the act of building a nest in one of the boxes. Cornell Lab’s NestWatch advises, “To avoid competition with House Sparrows nest boxes should not be placed within a quarter mile of buildings.” Because home construction near Phipps Park has recently increased dramatically, the threat from House Sparrows might be growing. House Sparrows, an invasive species not protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, will destroy eggs and nestlings and even kill the adults of competing species.

An additional threat to Phipps Park bluebirds included the American Kestrels we observed perched near the nesting area. About 9% of a kestrel’s diet consists of small birds.

For more information about YVAS Mountain Bluebird Nesting Habitat Project history: <https://yvaudubon.org/mountain-bluebird-nesting-habitat-project/>

To read about Karen Wiebe’s research on Mountain Bluebird/Tree Swallow competition: <https://www.audubon.org/news/who-wins-fight-between-bluebirds-and-swallows>

For more about the American Kestrel’s diet and hunting techniques: <https://avianreport.com/american-kestrel-diet-what-does-it-eat/>



Bluebird nestlings Photo by Carolyn Jones

Submitted by Ginny Waples

A Fruitful Birding Trip along the Stillwater



Lark Sparrow Photo by Rebecca Seago

On Saturday May 31st, after only one participant showed up at Itch-Kep-Pe Park in Columbus, Rebecca Seago and I took off for a day of birding along the Stillwater River. It was a beautiful day, and we saw different birds at every stop. Cliff Swallow fishing access was especially active with 5 Bullock’s Orioles, a Black-headed Grosbeak, and numerous Cliff Swallows tending their young in cliff nests above the river. Our count there was 26 species, including the photogenic Eastern Kingbird pictured below.

As we were driving in the Beehive area, a cinnamon bear cub peeked up by the road but thought better of crossing when he saw us! Still, it was a treat to see it.

Castle Rock fishing access, where we traditionally stop for lunch, was busier than usual with a camper in the Calliope hummingbird’s territory. We searched for the little fellow but never found it. We did spot 13 other species here including Cedar Waxwings, Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, a Warbling Vireo and 2 Eurasian Collared Doves.

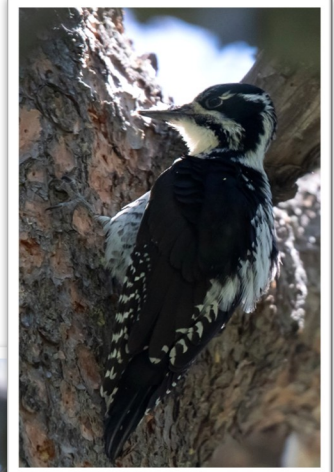


Eastern Kingbird Photo by Rebecca Seago

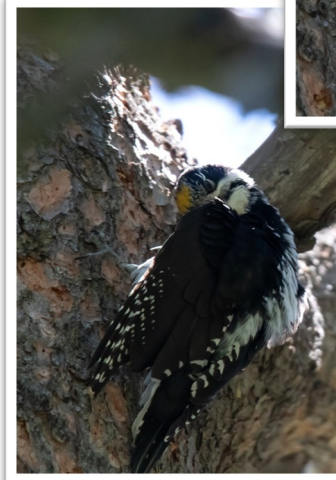
Our final stop at the Sioux Charlie trailhead gave us both a life bird. Rebecca spotted an American Three-toed Woodpecker and was able to photograph it. His bright yellow crown as he turned his head to preen revealed that he was an adult male.

Stillwater is an excellent day trip for birding. Think about joining us next year. If you have suggestions to increase field trip attendance, let me know!

Submitted by Carolyn Jones



American Three-toed Woodpecker Photos by Rebecca Seago



Tracy Enterline photographed this Long-billed Curlew on the May 17th Bridger Creek field trip. If you missed that trip, you have another chance on August 16th!

Nighthawk Survey

Common Nighthawk is a Species of Greatest Inventory Need in Montana, so Montana Audubon, with support from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and Tracy Aviary in Salt Lake City, is conducting a statewide survey to assess their breeding population status. On the evening of July 7, surveying conditions seemed perfect: clear skies, not much wind, and a nearly full moon, preferred by nighthawks for better hunting visibility.

Most routes consist of ten stops, one mile apart, but our predetermined Red Lodge course had only nine. At each one, Cara and I set our timers for six minutes and stepped out of the car, roaming off in different directions so that our results could be considered independent. The first stops featured Vesper and Savannah Sparrows, an Eastern Kingbird, and distant lowing cattle, but no nighthawks.

My first nighthawk showed up at the third stop, right around sunset, and their buzzy calls were heard at several later stops. I recorded each “peent” detection, and did my best assessing distance and direction, no small task with a moving, stubbornly invisible bird in increasing darkness.

Though Common Nighthawk was the target species, we also recorded “Incidentals” from a pull-down list provided on the Survey123 app. I was a bit disappointed to find that Savannah Sparrows were not on the list since they were scarce on the route I had covered for the Breeding Bird Survey a couple of weeks earlier, but I was pleased to find them in good numbers here. One species that was included was Wilson’s Snipe, which, as we confirmed later, we had both heard winnowing in the distance at a couple of stops.



Photo by Nick Myatt
odfw (7591220880)



Common Nighthawk near Bridger MT
Photo by Daria Huxley

By the time we got to Stop Six we were getting uncomfortably close to the end of the survey time window, from an hour before sunset to ninety minutes after. Without benefit of road signs, we found it challenging to keep to our route, relying on the app’s latitude and longitude readings. This was also the part of the route we missed on our earlier scouting trip as heavy rain that night turned the dirt roads into a treacherous gumbo slurry. Perhaps

inevitably, we took a wrong turn, continuing for a mile or so before correcting course. We did, however, encounter our first Common Poorwills along this accidentally traveled stretch. We found one more of these nighthawk cousins and official Incidentals, complete with pink eyeshine, back on the right dirt road before running into deep, water-filled pits in a low-lying creekside area. Cara, who was driving while I navigated with the app’s GPS coordinates, heroically skirted a few of these obstacles, but we reached a place where the road was completely flooded with no clear path forward.

Though we couldn’t reach our final two stops, we did find nighthawks and other birds of interest. We also discovered new-to-us corners of our own regional habitat. Our sighting logs were not identical, illustrating the wisdom of having two independent records from the same route. Having to retrace our steps back to Red Lodge in the dark, keeping an eye out for poorwills and the occasional rabbit, we didn’t arrive home in Billings until midnight.

Submitted by Bernard Quetchenbach

American Kestrel on Bridger Creek Rd
5/17/25 Photo by Tracy Enterline



YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: August 11, 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: Thursday, Sept 18, 2025. Programs are normally held on the third Monday of the month at the Mayflower Church on the corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive in Billings. However, due to scheduling conflicts, the September meeting will be held on Thursday. 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



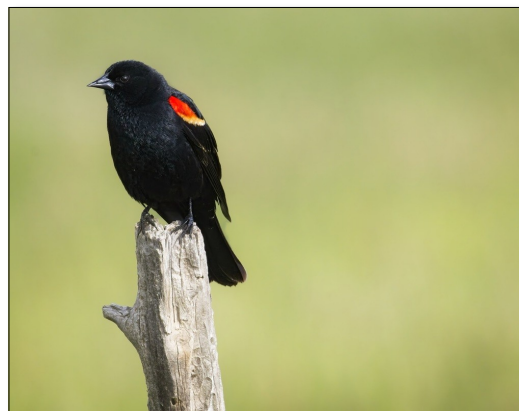
*** Membership Updates ***

August renewals: Mary & Bob Francis
Steve McConnell

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.

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



Eastern Kingbird above
Red-winged Blackbird to left

Photos by Tracy Enterline