

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.

SEPTEMBER 2025

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Raptor Identification

Birds of prey have figured prominently in mythology and heraldry for thousands of years, either foreshadowing the best of luck or portending the worst of omens. The size, strength, and behavior of these predatory birds captivates the imagination: they effortlessly soar the heights, seize quarry with dizzying speed, and haunt the most wild and remote places on earth.

Raptors are difficult birds to identify. By their nature they shun a close approach, so observers must rely on size and shape more than color for identification at distance. Variation in plumage patterns can range widely within some species, which seemingly multiplies the number of identification options because different species look alike. Sitting atop the food chain also means that raptors are fewer in number, which gives birders fewer opportunities to practice learning identification.

Montana is home to nearly 20 species of diurnal raptors. Some are yearlong residents, whereas others come and go with the seasons. Our largest raptors, the eagles, are an order of magnitude heavier than the smallest, the kestrels. Raptors occupy a diversity of cover types from the prairies to the peaks, being both secretive and rare to common and obvious. This presentation will review the general ecology of Montana raptors and will provide tips to improve identification of this impressive, yet vexing group of birds revered by cultures across the globe.

Marco Restani began studying Montana raptors in 1987 in the Centennial Valley, investigating red-tailed, ferruginous, and Swainson's hawks for a Master's Degree. He continued raptor research by following up with a PhD on bald eagles. He spent seven summers in Greenland trekking the tundra and climbing cliffs to peregrine falcon eyries and most recently collaborates on the YVAS Osprey Nest Monitoring Project.

Submitted by Marco Restani



Golden Eagle at Big Lake Photo by Ginny Waples



Peregrine Falcon in Greenland Photo by Marco Restani

Join us on Thursday, Sep 18th for our next YVAS program featuring Dr. Marco Restani on raptor identification. The program will be held 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!](#)

YVAS Osprey Nest Monitoring Project



This summer the YVAS Osprey Nest Monitoring Project completed its 17th season of monitoring and 14th season of research. Good thing we're still young! A late-March orientation primed new volunteers to project expectations and protocols and served as refresher training for returning monitors. Then over 40 volunteers dusted off their binoculars and spotting scopes in early April and headed to their assigned nests along the Yellowstone River, some observing ospreys into September. Over 130 potential nest sites were checked from Gardiner to Miles City. Banding continued in collaboration with Beartooth Electric Cooperative, NorthWestern Energy, and Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative.

We banded 94 nestlings from 39 nests, and eclipsed the 1000th osprey banded on the project. It only took 13 years, 6 days, 23 hours, and 15 minutes from first banded osprey to the 1000th banded. Again, good thing we're still young! Beginning in September, ospreys will leave the Yellowstone River and will migrate for several weeks to their wintering grounds along the southern Atlantic Coast, Gulf Coast, Central America, and even Puerto Rico. We anxiously await word of their arrival.

In the photo above, a NorthWestern Energy crew erects an artificial nest platform for Ospreys to get the breeding pair off a dangerous energized pole in May. The Ospreys quickly took to the platform and succeeded in fledging three young in August.

Photo and report submitted by Marco Restani.

FIELD TRIPS COMING UP

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.

Date	Day of Week	Meeting Place	Description	Leaders
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
Nov 1	SAT	8AM Rocky/BST parking lot	Yellowtail Dam Afterbay	Ron Kuhler

Montana Audubon Center Events

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

Nature Nuts: Back Sep 9th, every Tuesday, 10 AM – A fun-filled “Toddler and Me” program perfect for young nature enthusiasts.

Homeschool Science Sessions start Sept 9th

Morning Bird Stroll : September 13th, 8:30AM

Evening Under the Big Sky: Sep 13th, 5:30PM

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

Submitted by Emily Chilcoat



Important Birds and Even More Important Birds at Bear Canyon

Looking back on summer, one of the memorable days was June 21st, when ten of us hiked into Bear Canyon with Susan Hovde and Stan Heath in the lead. Bear Canyon is a verdant oasis on the arid west side of the Pryor Mountains and a Montana Audubon-designated “Important Bird Area.” We were on a quest for Important Birds.

Bear Canyon’s walls, varieties of flora, and clear running water support a diverse avian population. Mike Weber recorded about 40 species on eBird that day—all Important Birds, each in their own way. To make the day even better, there were some Very Important Birds to be found.

Reliable denizens of Bear Canyon include the Canyon Wren, a little bird who nests and forages in the crevices. The cliffs also provide nesting habitat for White-throated Swifts, which were easy to find flying about (swiftly, of course) in the canyon. The White-throateds are remarkable for being one of the world’s fastest birds. Peregrine Falcons are faster in a dive, but on a level playing field, put your money on the swifts.

A variety of vociferous birds enhanced the hike: Yellow-breasted Chats, Spotted Towhees, Yellow Warblers, and all the usual suspects. Warbling Vireos out warbled them all. Now, about those Very Important Birds...

Susan and Stan had been into Bear Canyon earlier in the season and knew where to search for a Black-throated Gray Warbler. *Birds of Montana* (c2016) says the warbler’s Wyoming range has been expanding northward-- “eleven records exist for [Montana].” Even with records of sightings since 2016, seeing this warbler would be exciting for any Montana birder. Susan and Stan led us to the bird who was moving about in the foliage of a tree and most got a brief look.



Virginia’s Warbler Photo by Susan Hovde

The quest for Very Important Birds continued, based on recent sightings of a Virginia’s Warbler in Bear Canyon by Susan and Stan. Described in the Montana Field Guide as an “accidental visitor to Southern Montana,” the Virginia’s Warbler has shown up in Bear Canyon in past years, although it typically breeds from Nevada to New Mexico. Susan Hovde’s photos of Virginia’s Warblers are available on eBird, dated June 2022, May and June 2023, and May and June 2025—all in Bear Canyon. Although we failed to see this lovely, shy warbler on June 21st, Susan returned to see and photograph one a few days later.

When we reached the fork in the canyon where YVAS field trippers often stop for lunch and then turn back, Susan asked who would like to forge onwards in search of an

American Three-toed Woodpecker? All of us! It required a little bushwhacking, but a half mile or so later we came to an area of burnt forest and there, pecking furiously at a burnt tree, was the promised woodpecker just where predicted! We had a prolonged view of the woodpecker--a lifer for me and a few others--and I can confirm that he truly had only three toes.

Fun fact: There are only three woodpecker species with three toes. The closely related Black-backed Woodpecker and the Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker complete the trio. Evolutionary loss of the fourth toe enables these woodpeckers to lean further back for a stronger attack on their target.

Submitted by Ginny Waples

Lifer Pie

Itch-Kep-Pe Park in Columbus was graced by three cars with four birders on a beautiful August day. Let's pile into Dusty Brown (Stan Heath's car) instead of driving the three through Bridger Creek Canyon. We were in search of the two woodpeckers that are typically there and not in other nearby parts of the state: the Lewis's and the Red Headed. We stopped in several places and there was quite a bit of active youth around. Young birds can be tricky as they are not as bright and crisp as their parents. After much discussion (and a few photos) it was determined that the striped chest of the sparrow on the ground was that of a young chipping sparrow, not quite like the clear chested parents that we are used to. We also saw some little yellow birds. They did not have the distinctive mask of the adults. They turned out to be a family of common yellowthroat.

Rebecca was on the lookout for a Redheaded woodpecker as it would be a LIFER for her and she was looking forward to a piece of "Lifer Pie". Before we found a woodpecker though, she spotted a warblerish bird hopping around in a marshy area. It was an unexpected Northern Waterthrush. It is a fun-to-see little bird that is often found on the ground near water (hence the name) but quite often hard to see. We all got some good looks at the guy as he hunted for bugs along the wet area.



Northern Waterthrush Photo by Susan Hovde

At the typical lunchtime break spot, we decided to do the upper creek once again as the Redheaded woodpecker is more often found

there. Turned out we made a good choice as we got out of Dusty at one point, Rebecca spotted her lifer flying off to hang out on a tree. It was an adult Redheaded woodpecker. Nearby was the true-to-form less colorful juvenile. It was a great day for pie.



Common Yellowthroat
Photo by Susan Hovde

Submitted by Susan Hovde

Fun Facts about Red-headed Woodpeckers

- The Red-headed Woodpecker was the "spark bird" of pathbreaking American ornithologist Alexander Wilson in the 1700's.
- Red-headed Woodpeckers are meanies! They may remove the eggs of other species from nests and nest boxes, destroy other birds' nests, and even enter duck nest boxes and puncture the duck eggs.
- Red-headed Woodpeckers store food and cover it with wood or bark. They hide insects and seeds in cracks in wood, under bark, in fence-posts, and under roof shingles. Grasshoppers are regularly stored alive wedged into crevices.

[From Cornell's All About Birds Website](#)



Red-headed Woodpecker Photo by Susan Hovde

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: Sept 8, 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 _____

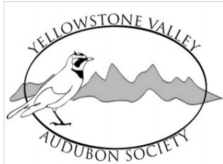
State _____ Zip _____

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



September renewals: Emily Chilcoat
Tyler Kerr
Ross & Ginny Waples
August reminders: 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 membership helps 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.



Big Lake fauna from Mike Weber's
Aug 9 trip: Baird's Sandpiper above,
American Badger to left

Photos by Ginny Waples