



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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Birds in the Greater Yellowstone

The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) is one of the premier wildlife photography destinations in the world. Shawn Stewart, born and raised on the north edge of the GYE in Livingston, has been fortunate enough to be working as a wildlife biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in this special place for over 50 years. Over that time, he has been involved in research projects on both black and grizzly bears, bighorn sheep, mule deer, white-tails, mountain lions, and elk, along with sage, dusky and ruffed grouse.

From greater short-horned lizards to grizzly bears and from hummingbirds to eagles Shawn has been capturing images of wildlife in the GYE since he first picked up a camera as a teenager. His photos have been published in Montana Outdoors and Wyoming Wildlife, as well as Orion and Ursus magazines. In 2013 his photo of a Northern Flicker won the grand



Bald Eagle carrying nesting material Photo by Shawn Stewart



Rufous Hummingbird Photo by Shawn Stewart

prize in the Wyoming Wildlife annual photo contest. He has contributed numerous photos to various technical bulletins and books.

Submitted by Marco Restani

Join us on Monday, April 20th for our next YVAS program featuring Shawn Stewart's photos. Free and open to the public, the presentation 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.

Meet Your YVAS Board of Directors

Board Member: Ginny Waples

Where are you from and what is/was your profession?

I grew up in Oregon and Washington. Soon after graduating from the University of Washington, I moved to Montana, got a job at the MSU-Billings Library, and learned how to be a librarian.

What bird hooked you into birding?

What really got me hooked was not a specific bird, but a person. I met Trenay Hart because she played cello in a group in which I played violin. When I took her up on the offer to go on a local birding walk, I was amazed at what she was seeing and hearing--including birds I had somehow never noticed. As starters, Trenay taught me to identify the calls of a Gray Catbird and a Common Yellowthroat, and I think of Trenay whenever I hear them.

What is your favorite Montana bird species?

I can't choose, but I do like to spend a lot of time observing ospreys.

What is a conservation topic you are most excited about right now?

Climate change, loss of habitat, and scientific illiteracy are all big issues.

What is your funniest, most interesting, or favorite piece of Wildlife/Bird Trivia?

Wilson's Phalaropes have an appealing lifestyle. After female phalaropes lay eggs, they leave the male to raise the young by himself, while the female looks for other males to mate with. Their migration includes stopovers during which they gorge themselves, sometimes to the point where they are too fat to fly.

What do you like best about YVAS?

YVAS offers many opportunities to learn more about the natural world around us. Field trips, the Osprey Nest Monitoring Project, and the Mid-winter Eagle Count are among my favorites. I am so grateful for the experienced, knowledgeable people who have patiently shared their expertise. You don't have to be a master birder to get involved. Somehow, I have found myself involved to the extent that I have recently agreed to take over the Osprey Nest Monitor Coordinator position from Deb Regele.

Where is your favorite spot to go birding?

Any excuse to go to the Pryors or Beartooths works for me. However, what I really love about birding is that, as a practice in being aware of the birds around us, it can be done anywhere.



Ginny Waples at Hole in the Wall, Missouri River

Submitted by Sue Weinreis

YVAS FIELD TRIPS FULL 2026 SCHEDULE IS ON THE [WEBSITE](#)

Date	Day	Meeting Place & Time	Description	Leaders
Mar 29	SUN	8 AM Rocky Mt College/ BST parking lot	Big Lake, migrating swans, sandhills, etc.	Mike Weber
April 11	SAT	7:30 AM Bridger park on US-310, end of town, with statue of Jim Bridger	Pryor Mountains search for the Sagebrush Sparrow	Stan Heath and Susan Hovde
April 25	SAT	8 AM Phipps Park	Bluebirds and Blooms. Steep hike at start, hiking poles recommended	Carolyn Jones
May 9	SAT	8 AM Rocky Mt College/ BST parking lot	Broadview Ponds area. (See June 2024 Flyer for likely birds and inspiration.)	Carolyn Jones and Bill Morgan
May 17	SUN	8 AM Two Moon Park lower parking lot	Hike Two Moon trails	Mike Weber
May 26	TUE	5 PM Parking area at the entrance to Riverfront Park	Riverfront evening stroll, bring mosquito repellent	Cathy Breeding
May 30	SAT	8 AM Itch-Kep-Pe Park, Columbus, near restrooms	Stillwater River/Woodbine area	Carolyn Jones

Earth Day is Saturday, April 18th

Come to **ZooMontana** and visit the Yellowstone Valley Audubon table and many other community groups on Earth Day! We will have games, displays and information about birds and conservation.



Montana Audubon Center Events

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

Nature Nuts: Every Tues., 10-11 am (Children ages 1-4 with accompanying adult.) Register in advance.

Morning Bird Stroll: Saturday, Apr 11th-8:30 am to 10:00am. Great for beginning birders!

Weekend Wonders Family Program- Sat, Feb Apr 11th, 10:30 am - 12 pm

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

From Montana Audubon: Wings Across the Big Sky Festival



Registration is open for the Wings Across the Big Sky Festival on the website here: <https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings-across-the-big-sky/>

Field trips will visit locations in Glacier National Park, the greater Kalispell area, state parks, and private properties under conservation easements not normally accessible to the public. Special trips will focus on birds, native plants and bird photography, or bike & bird Going to the Sun Road!

*Submitted by Lauren Smith
Montana Audubon*

News from MT FWP Region 5

Did you know Lake Elmo has an Action Trackchair that you can reserve free of charge?!

FWP is enhancing the inclusive and welcoming environment for all at Lake Elmo with the new Action Trackchair, an all-terrain wheelchair designed to empower individuals of all abilities to explore the state park. To reserve the Action Trackchair, contact Lake Elmo State Park manager at 406-422-2277 or the Region 5 front office at 406-247-2940.

Anyone with a disability that limits them from using the primary Lake Elmo trail system can use the Trackchair or one of the power wheelchairs that are available for paved walkways. Users need to be accompanied by a non-disabled person when using the chairs.



Submitted by Megan O'Reilly

Bear Smart for Bird Lovers

Submitted by Susan Hovde

It is that time of the year again. With sadness I take down my feeders as the beginning of “Bear Season” is upon us. To a birder “Bear Season” has a different meaning than it does to a hunter. It is the time of year (Mid-March) when the bears wake up and turn the bird feeders of those of us in bear country into bear feeders. While the National Audubon Society has recommendations (basically don’t do it) on feeding birds in bear country that you can read here: *Why Bird Feed Can Be a ‘Gateway Food’ for Bears* <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/why-bird-feed-can-be-gateway-food-bears>, I am coming from a more local place, a more heartfelt place. Many of you have come to see birds in our yard, and several have also seen bears in our yard. It is hard for bird lovers to take down the feeders as we know that we need the birds more than they need us. In the spring, summer and fall the birds have plenty of natural food sources and just feed at our place because of convenience, habit, and well, it is there. It is the same for the bears. Once they get a mouthful of the bird food and all the easy calories they will be back.

I have been working with Bear Smart Beartooth for about a year now and our mission is to “Protect yourself, Protect the bears.” As we all know, a bear that keeps coming back to the house is not accomplishing either part of that mission.

So, what will I do instead of feeding the birds? I will give them shelter. Birdhouses everywhere, anecdotally I have discovered more nesting birds in my yard than when I fed throughout the summer. I will have more water features, yes bears may drink from the water I provide, but they are not coming to the yard for the water. I will plant flowers, flowers, and more flowers. I need to be careful of planting fruit and berry producing plants, as we really are in a bear corridor.

If you see signs of bear in the area, do not feed birds at all. However, if you are in a low bear frequency area you can

do some things to lessen the chance of having a bear in your yard. This includes bringing the feeders in at night when the bear are more active. If you are not good at bringing in your feeders (all it takes is once to condition a bear), try the backpacker trick of 10’ high and 10’ out from any trees or branches. This can be achieved with a pulley system (think reel-in clothes lines). Make sure you keep it clean under your feeders too. Trays attached to the feeders themselves will put less attractants on the ground and keep your ground free of easy meals. A brush pile under the feeders is protection for ground feeding birds and makes it not worth it for the bears to go through. The high clothesline trick is not foolproof and there are several



Bird feeders suspended from a pulley system
Photo by Susan Hovde

videos online of bears shimmying out on the wire to the feeder till it collapses.

If you have questions, you can contact your local Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks wildlife specialists (they are here to help) or me at Bearsmartbeartooth@gmail.com.

Bottom line of Bear Aware is we want you “to protect yourself and protect the Bears.” We all can enjoy the birds; it just is different in Bear country.



Black Rosy-Finch in photo at left breeds in the high Beartooths, and Grey-crowned Rosy-Finch posing at far right is on its way to nest on high mountain peaks in Canada and Alaska. But on March 10th south of Red Lodge, Susan Hovde snapped them feeding together and posted to [Montana Birding](#).



Tropical Birding

Four Billings-based birders, Jeff Dunham, Brenda Dunham, Teresa Erickson and Pat Sweeney just returned from a great archeology/birding trip to Belize and Guatemala. Brenda submitted 30 checklists and noted 172 species in her trip report, of which 63 were new species.

One of the many highlights included seeing the endangered Yellow-headed Amazon in Belize and 3 individual Orange-breasted Falcons near the Mayan temples at Tikal in Guatemala.

Submitted by Jeff Dunham



Ringed Kingfisher - one of 4 kingfisher species we observed and the largest in the Americas
Photo by Jeff Dunham



Red-capped Manakin Photo by Jeff Dunham



Red-lored Amazon Photo by Jeff Dunham



Black Hawk-eagle Photo by Jeff Dunham

BLUEBIRD NEST MONITOR VOLUNTEER NEEDED!



Carolyn Jones at Phipps Park in 2025
Photo by Ginny Waples

Yellowstone Valley Audubon's Blue Bird Watch Project is looking for 1 or 2 people who love hiking, bird watching, and wildflowers to help with the project from March through June or early July. Successful candidates need to be able to climb the Phipps Park trail to the top at least once every couple of weeks. You will get to peek into the nest boxes and record egg laying, number of eggs, fledgling numbers and dates. A plus is getting to watch for other birds, seeing the beautiful wildflowers as they bloom during the season and getting good exercise. There is a little record keeping involved but not much. The nest clean out can be done late summer or early fall.

For more information or if you are interested, please email me at carolyn684@gmail.com.

Submitted by Carolyn Jones

RECYCLE TO REFOREST

We can't thank Larry Handsaker enough for his volunteer work with recycling on the behalf of Yellowstone Valley Audubon. For many years he has devoted countless hours and much of his garage space to aluminum can recycling. His efforts have encouraged conservation habits in our community, and the proceeds of the aluminum can sales were generously donated to YVAS. But the recycling program he carried out is closing down this Spring.

Fortunately, the Parks and Rec Dept has a program with the City of Billings to recycle aluminum cans for planting trees in the Billings parks. They accept *only aluminum beverage cans*.

Recycle to Reforest drop-off sites are available at Stewart Park, Veterans Park, and Clevenger Park, all identified on the map below.

Submitted by Ginny Waples and Kristin Neva



The Reforest bin in Stewart Park is on Central Ave by the bus terminal and batting cages.



Arizona Days

Submitted by Sue Weinreis

Thirty-five years ago, the late, great Helen Carlson captivated me with tales of birding in SE Arizona – Patagonia, Sonoita, Ramsey Canyon, the San Pedro – and since then, I periodically venture down to explore one of the best birding spots in the US.

We found the perfect spot in Hereford, AZ, an adobe VRBO in the desert with five acres, halfway between the Huachuca Mountains and Bisbee. Today I'm basking in the early morning Arizona sun on my front patio, waiting impatiently for the earliest of the early birds to arrive at my feeders.

My first visitors are six Gambel's Quail, racing in from the desert scrub to our feeding area, their little head-bobbles bobbling along.

Next are the Woodpeckers Three: Ladder-backed, Gila, and Northern Flicker. The Flicker lives in the big Saguaro Cactus, the Gila in the big oak in the back, and the Ladder-backed...I'm not sure where the Ladder-backed dwells, but close by. Early every morning, while we are enjoying our coffee and reading, the quiet suddenly explodes with the Flicker's pounding on our metal chimney.

Three varieties of dove appear: Mourning, Eurasian Collared, and White-Winged, with his eternal question, "Who Cooks for You?" A tiny Mourning Dove mama is sitting on two eggs in a nest on the ground by our back patio. At first, she spooked and flew off whenever I walked by on my way out to the hen house. (Yes, the owners of our VRBO left us with ten hens a laying. More about THAT later!) Now the little mama just stays put, looking as weary as any human mother-to-be. I sympathize; can't wait for the "Feed me!" stage.

I share the front patio with nesting Cactus Wrens, Curve-Billed Thrashers, and a House Sparrow. I am amused to see their cagy maneuvers as they disappear in and out of the three Italian Cypress trees. Many other Cactus Wrens and Curve-Billed Thrashers are nesting in several of the Mesquite trees on the five-acre parcel.

We have several pairs of Northern Cardinals and Pyrrhuloxia, but it is not that easy to tell the difference. They are so extravagant with their big crests and brilliant red/yellow/orange colors!

Biggest bird of all, and most entertaining, is the Greater Roadrunner. We mostly see him racing along the edge fence between the backyard and the open desert scrub, but yesterday he found the front yard feeders and terrorized the other birds by perching in the tree and monopolizing them. Beep-Beep!

Down here, ALL the birds, great and small, utilize the hummingbird feeders. I am just as likely to see the Gila Woodpecker, finches, or sparrows imbibing, as the Anna's, Black-chinned, or Broad-billed Hummingbirds.

Yes, I have become the Chicken Lady! You can find me chopping lettuce for my girls, weighing the comparative merits of dried Black Soldier Fly Grubs with the Beetle, Cricket, and Dried Shrimp Combo, (Grubs for the win! They are deliciously toasty and crunchy) or mucking out the hen house. (Really gross!)

We are inundated with eggs, averaging 9 per day, so we have been eating a lot of omelets, angel food cakes, and quiche. Out of desperation, we have taken to stalking people (Hi! I'm Sue. I have free eggs.) John bought me a magazine called "Backyard Chickens" and I have been researching how to keep hens happily occupied, rather than fighting, and eating each others' feathers. The Girls now have a large stump to stand on, watermelon for a snack, and I'm debating buying them a kiddie pool.

Alas, we will be leaving Bird-topia and returning to Montana soon, just in time to catch the YVAS Bird Field Trips! I'll see you there.



Greater Roadrunner Photo by Sandrine Biziaux-Scherson, Audubon Photography Awards

We Don't Think Birds are Trivial, but Bird Trivia Makes You Think

Submitted by Ginny Waples

Twenty teams formed at Thirsty Street on the evening of March 4th for a friendly battle of wits, with the "Sandhill Cranks" achieving the highest score. Thank you to all who showed up and made it such a fun event. Thirsty Street provided the venue, Bill Morgan volunteered to emcee, and Kris Decker, Kristin Neva, and Ginny Waples were the scorekeepers.

If you missed out, try this sample from our Bird Trivia night questions and then turn upside down to see how you did.

1. Osprey are found on all continents except one. Name that continent.
2. On the day of the 2025 Billings-area Christmas Bird Count, which species of bird had the highest count?
 - A. Mallard B. Common Goldeneye C. European Starling D. Canada Goose
3. According to Inuit tradition, which bird taught humans to hunt, fish, clothe and shelter themselves?
4. What is the only true lark species native to N. America? This bird is commonly found in our area.
5. What is the first bird shown attacking someone on screen in Alfred Hitchcock's movie "The Birds"?
 - A. Crow B. Gull C. Woodpecker D. Goose
6. Name the poet who wrote "Hope is the thing with feathers..."
7. What bird uses projectile vomit as a defense mechanism when threatened?
8. Last summer, the Yellowstone Valley Osprey Project reached a milestone number of nestlings banded over a 17-year period. About how many osprey nestlings have been banded by Marco Restani?
 - A. 200 B. 500 C. 1,000 D. 2,000
9. True or False: Birds' knees bend in the opposite direction from human knees.
10. Which of these Montana high schools does not have a bird for their mascot?
 - A. Belfry B. Billings Skyview C. Broadus D. Lewistown



Bird trivia teams at Thirsty Street Photo by Ginny Waples

ANSWERS TO BIRD TRIVIA:

1. Antarctica
2. D (4,034 Canada Geese were counted)
3. Raven
4. Horned Lark (the bird on the YVAS logo)
5. B (gull)
6. Emily Dickinson
7. Turkey Vulture. (The vomit can be projected up to 10 feet.)
8. 1,000
9. False. (What looks to us like their knees are actually their ankle joints.)
10. A (the Belfry Bats)

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: Monday, April 13, 2026 —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: Monday, April 20, 2026. Programs are held on the third Monday of the month at the Mayflower Church on the corner of Rehberg Lane and Poly Drive in Billings. YVAS programs are free and open to the public. 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: Ginny Waples waplesv@gmail.com
Osprey Research Coordinator: Marco Restani restani@stcloudstate.edu
Program Committee: YVAS Board of Directors
Publicity: YVAS Board of Directors
Recycling (aluminum): Recycle to Reforest Containers in Stewart, Veterans, and Clevenger Parks
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 (YVAS). I understand I will be supporting local Chapter activities and receiving the YVAS newsletter. I will enjoy full family Chapter benefits.

- YVAS is affiliated with the National Audubon Society, but membership payments and benefits are independent.
• YVAS cooperates with the Montana Audubon Center in some projects, but membership is separate.

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 _____

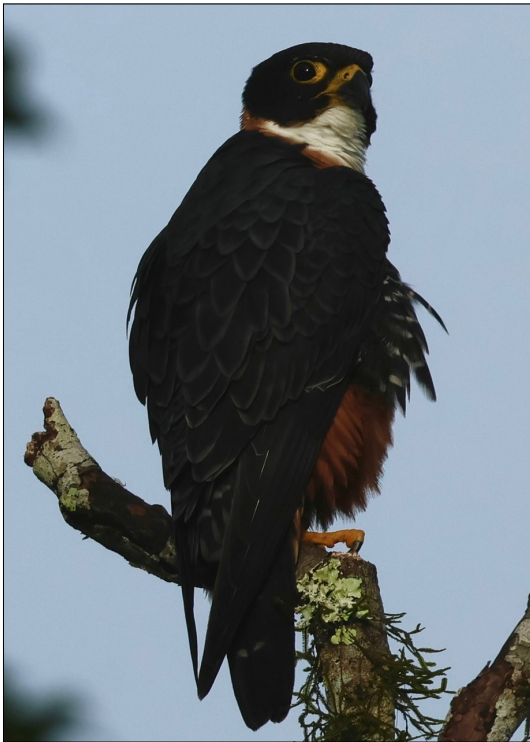
Do you want to receive the YVAS Flyer electronically?
___ YES ___ NO

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



If you attended Scott Newbold's November presentation to YVAS, you learned about the Peregrine Fund's efforts to restore the severely threatened population of Orange-breasted Falcons in Central America. Who would guess that any one of us would be lucky enough to see this bird in the wild? Jeff Dunham photographed this Orange-breasted Falcon in Guatemala just a few weeks ago.



Membership Updates

March reminders: Jim & Peggy Good, Claudia Janecek, Kathie & Steve Shandera

April renewals: Kathy Stokes, Chris Miller, Angus & Margie Fulton

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