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.

OCT 2026 **VOLUME 56, NUMBER 8**

Implementing the Eagle Protection and Offset Program (EPOP) at NorthWestern Energy



Golden Eagle perched on a power pole that has been retrofitted to be avian safe.

A recent study found that the main anthropogenic causes of Golden Eagle mortality in the western US were shooting, collision, electrocution, poisoning, and trapping. This "take" of Golden Eagles can either be intentional (e.g., shooting) or incidental from otherwise lawful activities (e.g., collisions with wind turbines). Incidental take of Golden Eagles violates the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The US Fish and Wildlife Service can issue incidental take permits to industry to protect against prosecution as long as compensatory mitigation to offset eagle mortality is implemented.

Currently, the most common mitigation offsetting eagle incidental take is power pole retrofitting to reduce electrocutions. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has approved a mitigation bank for eagle incidental take developed by Burns & McDonnell, an engineering firm headquartered in Kansas City. NorthWestern Energy has partnered with Burns & McDonnell to provide the power pole retrofits needed to fulfill mitigation for eagle incidental take. NorthWestern provided the first power pole credits in 2022. This presentation will review the development and implementation of EPOP.

Marco Restani directs the avian protection program at NorthWestern Energy. He has studied raptors in Montana for 40 years. Prior to his time at NorthWestern Energy, he was a wildlife ecology professor. Marco attended the University of Montana (BS), Montana State (MS), and Utah State (PhD).

Submitted by Marco Restani



A NorthWestern Energy crew replaces a power pole dangerous to birds with a new pole that is avian safe.

Join us on Monday, Oct 19, to learn more about the development and implementation of the eagle protection and offset program. YVAS programs are free and open to the public, at the Mayflower Church on Poly and Rehberg Lane. A social with coffee and cookies begins at 6:30 and the program begins at 7 PM.

VISIT THE YVAS WEBSITE YVAUDUBON.ORG OR FACEBOOK.COM/YVAUDUBON

YVAS Events Coming Up!

Programs

Monday, Oct 19: Dr. Marco Restani, Wildlife Biologist, NorthWestern Energy, will speak on the 'Eagle Protection and Offset Program' implemented by NorthWestern Energy to aid eagle conservation.

Monday, Nov 16: Bruce Kania, CEO, Floating Islands International, will speak about pond habitat and the company's patented systems to reduce methane emissions, support aquatic life, and provide a low-cost, nature-based solution to water management.

Birding Field Trips

Sunday, Nov 1, Yellowtail Dam Afterbay. Meet up at Rocky at 8:00 AM. Ron Kuhler will lead. Raptors, over-wintering songbirds, and a wide variety of waterfowl are to be found at this time of year since the Afterbay does not freeze over and fall migration is still underway for some birds.

Saturday, Dec 19, Christmas Bird Count 2026. Jerry Dalton will coordinate teams of bird watchers for this annual survey and count of Billings birds. See more about the event on our website: https://yvaudubon.org/christmas-bird-count-2/

Friday, Jan 1, Annual New Year's Day Bird Trip Yellowtail Dam Afterbay. The New Year's check on the Afterbay reservoir always holds the potential for surprises and it's a great way to start the year.

Sunday, Jan 10, Mid-Winter Eagle Count along the Yellowstone River
Participants will look for eagles at designated stops from Billings Heights to Columbus, part of a national effort conducted annually by YVAS since 1997. Observers counted 46 Bald Eagles and 3 Golden Eagles along the route last year.



Bald Eagle Photo by Ginny Waples

Montana Audubon Center Calendar

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

Explore your Environment: K-8 Educator Workshop (Project Learning Tree Workshop) Sat, Oct 3, 9:00am – 4:00pm

Transform your local outdoor spaces into dynamic learning environments! Designed for teachers, daycare providers, homeschool parents, and nonformal educators working with youth in grades K–8, this interactive professional development workshop demonstrates how to utilize schoolyards, neighborhood playgrounds, and local parks to teach place-based environmental education. Cost: $60 Registration Required: https://square.link/u/eJqWeaZ2

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

Morning Bird Stroll: Sat, Oct 10, 8:30 - 10 am
Enjoy a stroll by the river and learn a few birds on the way. Great for beginning birders!

Bat-stravaganza: Thu, Oct 22. In collaboration with MT FWP. More details to be announced.

Submitted by Emily Chilcoat
Montana Audubon Center Director

Trivia from 15 Summers of Banding

As the season of osprey nest monitoring wears on from spring into summer, the Project Coordinator sends humorous or motivational messages (make me proud…no slacking!) to the troops via the online 'Osprey Google Groups.' We received this one in July.

- Number of ospreys banded: 1091 (1090 nestlings and one adult rescued from twine)
- Number of nest visits: 475 (that's 950 up-and-downs in the bucket; I am a human yoyo)
- Number of mornings when banding took place: 176
- Number of squeezes of a pop-rivet gun to attach color bands: well over 3000
- Approximate cost of 1050 color bands: $8000
- Counties where most nestlings were banded: Park (391) and Yellowstone (321)
- First nest banded: Holmgren (Nest 326)
- Average number of nestlings banded per nest: 2.3
- Time from 1st banded nestling to 1000th banded nestling: 13 years, 6 days, 23 hours, and 15 minutes
- Most nestlings banded in a day: 25
- Number of 4-nestling broods banded: 11
- Number of nestlings entangled: most (5 in 2020), fewest (0 in 2023 and 2026)
- Funniest item found in a nest: plastic roses (courtship offering? stolen from a cemetery?)
- Strangest things found in a nest: 2 nestlings and 3 eggs
- Grossest item found in a nest: underwear (yep, bottoms, ick)
- Number of companies providing in-kind use of bucket trucks: 7
- Number of times we got the truck stuck: 5
- Number of different linemen who helped me band: 71!
- What they drink: Bud Light, Coors Light, "dark stuff", Michelob Ultra, Miller Lite, PBR, Voodoo Ranger
- Tensest moment: an irate citizen reported me to law enforcement and then she showed up at the nest with a pistol

Trivia posted by Marco Restani in the "OGG"



Lineman and nestling Photo by M. Restani



Fledging!

The 40 volunteer nest monitors for the Yellowstone River Osprey Project have watched nests vacate for the season and are turning in their data and observations. One of the season's highlights for observers comes when the young make their first flights. Fledging is usually accomplished 50-55 days after an osprey hatches. Observers might also discover that ospreys are individuals and don't always follow the script.

A page from the diary of an osprey observer…

August 18: Nest appeared empty when I arrived. After 30 minutes, I assumed the nestling had fledged and joyfully prepared to leave. I looked up one last time & saw a large nestling flapping around in the nest! Clearly, F's [female's] arrival was causing the excitement, but then I saw that she was sans fish. N [nestling] quit flapping and lay low in the nest.

F rose and hovered over N for 30 seconds, clearly saying, "Get off your butt, you lazy osprey!" I saw N flapping from the bottom of the nest with one feather pointed skyward - GASP! Was that miscreant giving his mother the WINGER?

F flew off, but immediately returned and hovered again over the N, to no avail. F then flew off, washing her wings of the whole situation.

N settled down. But then I started to worry. Maybe N WANTED to fly but COULDN'T! That's when I called Marco [Marco Restani, biologist] about a possible entanglement.

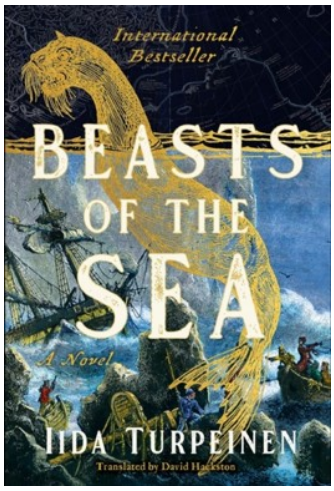
August 20: Marco called. He arrived to an empty nest and N standing in a tree.

FLEDGE DATE: August 19.

Sue Weinreis, Nest Monitor

Fledging Osprey Photo and Intro by Ginny Waples

Russian Discoveries in North America



When my sister offered to loan her hardcover read midway through our sibling trip to Finland, I hesitated, reluctant to lug another weight in my backpack. But once I started **Beasts of the Sea**, a historical novel by Iida Turpeinen, I was hooked. The main story line of the book is the discovery and extinction of the Steller's Sea Cow, a giant plant-eating mammal related to manatees, that peacefully grazed kelp in Arctic waters until otter hunters found they were a tasty meal and killed them off in just 27 years. The only complete skeleton of this extinct animal resides in the Natural History Museum of Helsinki. The unwinding of the story concerns the extraordinary life of Steller, the naturalist, who, while shipwrecked in 1741 on Bering Island, managed to study the new species for science, and the other people in the following centuries who safeguarded the full skeleton that was found on the island in 1860. The concept of human-caused extinction is an underlying theme of the book.

The historical backdrop of this novel is Russian expansion and exploration under the Czars, when Russia grew eastward to the Pacific and staffed its navy with Scandinavian navigators and boat builders. Part of this time (1809 to 1917), Finland was under Russian rule.

Georg Wilhelm Steller, a German biologist and physician, was hired onto the sea voyage portion of the Second Kamchatka Expedition (1741-2) led by the Dane, Vitus Bering. The Czar Peter wanted to know where the furthermost northeastern part of Siberia ended and where North America began.



Steller's Jay Photo by Phillip Stosberg ML 660130214

So, what does this have to do with birds? Months into the voyage and plagued by fog and bad weather, Bering was about to abandon the effort to find North America and return home when land was sighted. A party of the crew disembarked to fill casks with fresh water on Kayak Island for just 10 hours and Steller accompanied them. In these 10 hours he collected and identified 144 plants and found an American blue jay that looked a bit like an illustration (The Blew Jay) in Mark Catesby's publication, "Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands," which he had seen in the St Petersburg Academy as a student. He shot the blue jay, so he had time to study it.

Because this new crested blue bird shared anatomical traits with the eastern American bird, Steller wrote in his journal: *"This bird proved to me that we were really in America."* Steller's Jay or *Cyanocitta stelleri*, entered the scientific literature as the name of this striking bird that is common in western Montana. Steller's Albatross, Steller's Eider, and Steller's Sculpin were other birds observed and described by him on this voyage that ended in shipwreck on one of the Commander Islands. Steller and some of the crew survived terrible hardship over 10 months of winter and Bering died, but in the spring, they built a boat to sail home. The extensive notes and observations made on the voyage and shipwreck island were sent to St. Petersburg and have been compiled and published. Steller stayed in Siberia until he died of a fever at the age of 37.



Mark Catesby's The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands (Vol. I, Plate 15)

Submitted by Kristin Neva

References:

Franklin, J. L. (2023). Steller's Sea eagle: Who was Georg Wilhelm Steller? *Hektoen International, 15* (2). hekint.org

Haigh, A. (2018, April 24). *The people behind the birds named for people: Georg Wilhelm Steller*. All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology. https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/the-people-behind-the-birds-named-for-people-georg-wilhelm-steller/

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: **Monday, Oct 12, 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, Oct 19, 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 pm for coffee and cookies; the program begins at 7:00 pm.

Board of Directors

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Vice President: Open
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Treasurer: Pam Pipal ppipal@charter.net

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Committees and Assignments

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Facebook: Ginny Waples waplesv@gmail.com
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(Committees, continued)

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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 _____

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State _____ Zip _____

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Do you want to receive the YVAS Flyer electronically?

___ YES ___ NO

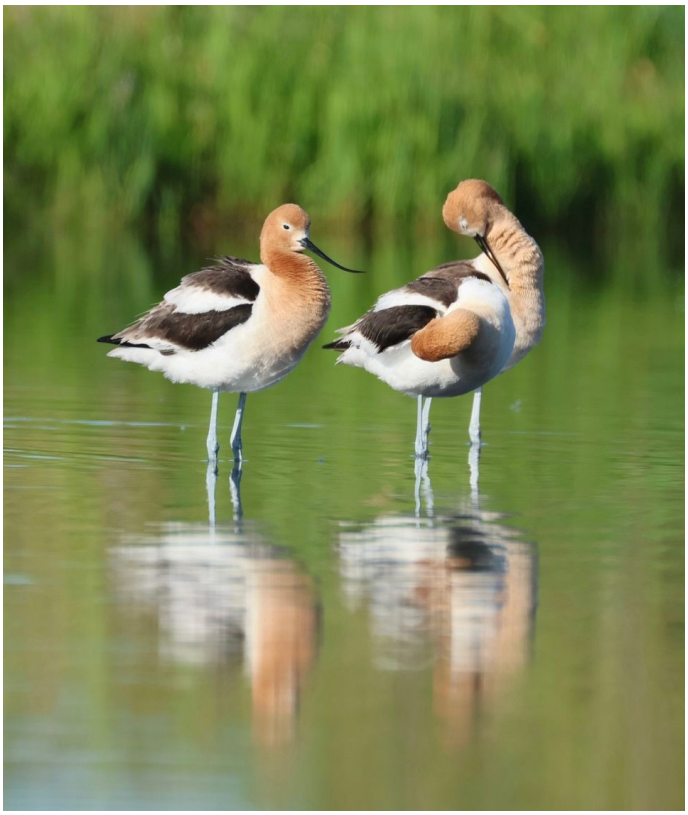
Send this application and your check to:

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

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



American Avocet pair Photo by Jeff Dunham

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 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.

August reminder: Mary and Bob Francis

September renewal: Emily Chilcoat, Lynn Halderman, Lou & Bridget Hanebury, Laurie Neuman, Kim Small & Jamey Schaub, Gail Speck, Borden Thomas

October renewal: Mary Davis, Deb Drain, Beth Horn, Steve Linder, Robin Manfredi, Mary Ellen Schlosser, Raylene Wall