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.

DEC 2026- JAN 2027 **VOL 56, NUMBER 10**

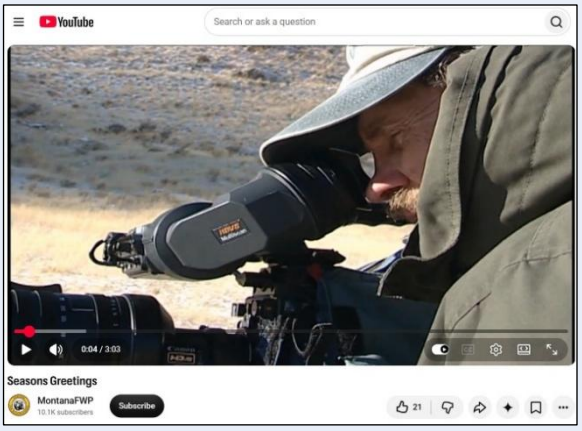
Dec 21st Program: Beloved Videographer and Storyteller Bob Landis

For many years Bob Landis has shared his experiences filming wildlife in Denali and Yellowstone annually at Yellowstone Valley Audubon meetings. The tradition continues this year when Bob will be showing incomparable scenes and sharing great stories of wildlife, their surroundings and habits. A veteran wildlife filmmaker, he captures outstanding scenes and wild images from Yellowstone National Park, Alaska and elsewhere. His extraordinary work and films are highly valued by PBS and National Geographic and viewers like us.

Bob has produced with national broadcasters and with his partner over 20 wildlife documentaries. At various showings he has been asked, "What is your favorite show." To each he has replied, I have no one favorite but there are aspects of each that I would rate as a favorite sequence. For example, the Nature program IN THE VALLEY OF THE WOLVES wins the prize for most creative music/script.

Bob will show clips of his "favorites" (and a few that are not) at the Audubon meeting December 21 in the sanctuary room of the Mayflower Church. The presentation will begin at 7:00pm.

Submitted by Carolyn Jones



Link to 3 min 2012 YouTube: '**Seasons Greetings**'

Jan 18th Program: Two Photographers Look at the Birds Around Us



Upland Sandpiper Photo by Rebecca Seago

If you have been on a YVAS birding field trip in recent years, you probably know Rebecca Seago as the one viewing birds with a camera instead of binoculars, the one who finds a cool bird most others miss. If you replaced pandemic-era doom-scrolling with Montana Birding Facebook page scrolling, you may have been struck by Leslie Mutchler's photographic observations in and around Billings. Memorably, this included a Great Blue Heron chasing a Great Egret at a Montana Audubon Center pond, and an orphaned juvenile Wood Duck hanging out with the Mallards at Lake Josephine.

Enjoy Rebecca's and Leslie's reflections on birding and photography on Page 2, and then join us at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, January 18th at Mayflower Church (Rehberg & Poly, Billings) where they will share their photographs at our monthly program. As usual, the program is free, open to the public, and is preceded by coffee and cookies beginning at 6:30.

Submitted by Ginny Waples

January 18th YVAS Program: Two Photographers Look at the Birds Around Us

(Continued from the front page)



Yellow Warbler Photo by Rebecca Seago

Rebecca Seago:

I stumbled into birding and bird photography over several decades. I learned to appreciate the outdoors from my family while camping and hiking in the Big Horns and visiting national parks throughout the western United States. In college, I took my small point-and-shoot camera on back roads to unwind. When I moved to the Mission Valley in northwest Montana for a teaching job, those backroad drives took me past the many glacial kettle holes and reservoirs of the local wildlife refuges. These water features serve as habitat for a wide variety of waterfowl and shorebirds, so my photography naturally shifted largely to birds, and led to a growing knowledge of those birds.

Now, a decade later, I divide my birding time between chasing lifers that may or may not ever lead to a decent photograph (though I certainly try) and just enjoying time with my camera and a particularly cooperative bird even if it's one I've seen a hundred times. Several years ago, I began sharing my photography on Facebook, Instagram, and a SmugMug photography page under Rebecca Seago Photography.

Birding and bird photography have become a welcome escape from the busyness of the workday and also a source of friendships with many local birders. While I enjoy exploring new locations around the state, the prairies surrounding Molt, as well as Billings hotspots like Shiloh Conservation Area and Riverfront Park, have become my birding backyard for a work schedule that lends itself to primarily evening birding.

Leslie Mutchler:

I started taking pictures of birds around seven years ago. In 2019, I hung a feeder in the back yard and started taking pictures out the window. I had not really paid much attention before that but quickly became fascinated by zooming in on the birds. Then COVID hit and everybody needed to isolate. I started looking for places to birdwatch outside my yard and found out about Big Lake by doing an internet search. From there I bought a Recreation map and started exploring the backroads. After watching the movie *The Big Year* my sister and I began a contest with each other to see who could see the most bird species in Montana.



Burrowing Owl Photo by Leslie Mutchler

Along the way I have met many birders who have become friends. I enjoy traveling the whole state but have a special love for Big Lake and the surrounding area. I accidentally discovered Burrowing Owls one day when I saw a head sticking out of a prairie dog mound. They have become my favorite bird, and I have had so many great sightings of them. My favorite part of birding is when I get a great shot, even of a common bird. I can spend a whole day looking for birds, and never talking to a human, and be perfectly happy. It is how I unwind.

Submitted by Ginny Waples

YVAS Events Coming Up!

Programs:

Monday, Dec 21: Bob Landis is back! Our cherished wildlife filmmaker will show clips of his favorites and maybe some bloopers at the Audubon meeting December 21 in the sanctuary room of the Mayflower Church. The presentation will begin at 7:00pm.

Monday, Jan 18: Two Photographers Look at the Birds Around Us. Leslie Mutchler and Rebecca Seago will share their photos of Montana birds. Enjoy coffee and cookies at 6:30 and stay for an inspiring photographic slide show.

Birding Field Trips:

Saturday, Dec 19, Christmas Bird Count 2026. Jerry Dalton will coordinate teams of bird watchers for this annual survey and count of Billings birds. Contact him if you have questions or want to join a team. Phone: 406 656-3656, or email jerrydalton96@gmail.com.

Friday, Jan 1: Annual New Year's Day Bird Trip to the Yellowtail Dam Afterbay Meet at 8 AM in the Rocky/ BST parking lot. Ron Kuhler will lead.

Friday, Jan 8: ***DATE CHANGE FROM JAN 10! The*** Mid-Winter Eagle Count along the Yellowstone River will be led by Mike Weber and Ron Kuhler. Meet at 8 AM in the Rocky/ BST parking lot.

Four Waves of Fall Bird Migration*

Timeframe	Bird Groups	Key Montana Species	Flight Strategy & Habitat
Late August – Early September	Aerial Insectivores & Nectar Feeders	Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds, Barn Swallows, Common Nighthawks, Yellow Warblers, Willow Flycatchers	Birds feed heavily on late-summer insects along cottonwood river corridors before making long nocturnal flights toward Central and South America.
Mid-September – Early October	Diurnal Raptors & Short-Distance Songbirds	Golden Eagles, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, Ospreys, Mountain Bluebirds, White-crowned Sparrows	Hawks and eagles ride daytime mountain updrafts along the Rocky Mountain Front and Bridger Range, while bluebirds and sparrows strip late berries.
Late September – October	Cranes, Shorebirds & Dabbling Ducks	Sandhill Cranes, Baird's Sandpipers, Northern Pintails, Mallards, American Wigeons, Green-winged Teal	Massive flocks stage in prairie potholes and refuges to fatten up on spilled grain and aquatic tubers.
November	Diving Ducks, Swans & Arctic Winter Arrivals	Tundra Swans, Snow Geese, Common Goldeneyes, Rough-legged Hawks, Snowy Owls, Bohemian Waxwings	Large waterfowl flee freezing northern waters, while hardy Arctic nesters arrive in Montana to spend the winter in open rivers and grasslands.

*The Montana Field Guide, the Montana FWP Shorebirds Guide, and the BirdCast Montana Migration Dashboard, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, among others.

Submitted by Kristin Neva

Pop up Birding Trip to Cooney Dam 11-8-2026

By Mike Weber

For a number of years, YVAS had an annual fall birding trip to Cooney Dam. It was on those trips that I discovered the sea sometimes spits out waterfowl such as scoters that splash down on the waters of Cooney Reservoir. The White-winged Scoter was a lifer for me at Cooney, and it is still, to this day, the only White-winged Scoter I have seen. I was lucky enough to see Surf Scoters on the Pacific coast with the colorful males in breeding plumage, but Cooney has been my one and only Montana Surf Scoter sighting.

This trip was inspired by Susan Hovde and Stan Heath's frequent birding trips to Cooney and their reports of rare birds. Two summers ago, they recorded the incredibly rare Little Gull, which breeds in Russia and, on occasion, has bred along Hudson Bay. The next day I went to search for this pint-sized gull but was skunked.

For a trip with short notice, 12 birders showed up, including one who rode her mountain bike from her home nine miles from Cooney. It started out slow at Marshall Cove Campground with American Coots and Eared Grebes bobbing on the choppy waves. A Ring-billed Gull quartered into the wind above. We watched a Song Sparrow feeding just above the waterline next to a tangled thicket of sedge and willows. A single whistled note indicated a nearby Townsend's Solitaire. A sleeping Great Horned Owl posed high in a tree, oblivious to the audience of star-struck birders below her.



Great Horned Owl Photo by Susan Hovde

Next, we headed to Fisherman's Point but got distracted by some American Robins and Bohemian Waxwings clinging to the branches of juniper trees and feeding on the clusters of blue-grey berries. Fisherman's Point is the southernmost arm of the reservoir and is fed by Willow Creek, which I was told has its origin on Red Lodge Mountain. This arm was rife with waterfowl, with at least 100 or more scattered up and down the narrow stretch of water. It was here that two rarities were observed. First was a couple of snoozing Surf Scoters.



Surf Scoter Photo by Susan Hovde

They are a large duck with a big bill; the males have a multicolored bill, and the females and immatures have a dark bill with two white marks on a dark head. We surmised we had a pair of females. The next unusual visitor was a pair of Long-tailed Ducks. This duck, for me, is beyond description with its diverse variety of plumages—each one I've seen is beautiful and precious like a snowflake. And this bird is as rare as a snowflake in July. Both the scoter and the Long-tailed Duck breed in the Arctic and winter on the coasts.

A few minutes before my group arrived at Fisherman's Point, it was reported that two Trumpeter Swans and a Tundra Swan were observed flying overhead. We also saw a flock of 11 Red-breasted Mergansers, which are another hard bird to find in Montana. It was my first for the year. They also breed in Canada and Alaska and can occasionally be seen during fall and spring migration.

Next, we drove to an overlook of the westernmost arm of the reservoir, which is fed by Red Lodge Creek, and counted more waterfowl species. All the distant loons turned out to be Common Loons, and we added Pied-billed and Horned Grebes. A Bald Eagle was partially hidden by the shimmering golden leaves of a cottonwood, and a male American Kestrel was perched upon the top of a dead snag. The dainty, winter-plumaged Bonaparte's Gulls mixed with flocks of Ring-billed Gulls.

(Pop Up Trip Continued)

After lunching, half of the birders left for home and the rest gathered at Red Lodge Campground, where birding was quiet. Ron Kuhler went exploring and found a late-migrant American Pipit. He guided the rest of us to see this songbird picking along the shoreline. Peak migration for these ocher-colored birds is mid-September through early October, and they can be seen by the hundreds as they are attracted to waterways and can be approached fairly closely.



Male Surf Scoter Painting by Mike Weber

Here is the list of the 43 bird species I observed on the trip:

Canada Goose
Trumpeter Swan
Tundra Swan
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Surf Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
Eared Grebe
American Coot
Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Common Loon
Double-crested Cormorant
Bald Eagle
Great Horned Owl
Northern Flicker
American Kestrel
Black-billed Magpie
Common Raven
Black-capped Chickadee
European Starling
Townsend's Solitaire
American Robin
Bohemian Waxwing
American Pipit
American Tree Sparrow
Song Sparrow





Help Our Chapter Soar: Join the YVAS Board!

We are looking for a few members dedicated to keeping local birding and conservation thriving. Consider deepening your impact by joining the **YVAS Board of Directors.**

Our Board drives everything we achieve, from field trips and the Christmas Bird Count to local conservation initiatives. We are seeking members for general board seats who bring fresh perspectives, diverse skills, and a shared love for our Montana public lands. You don't need to be an ornithology expert. What matters most is an interest in our mission, a willingness to share your ideas and talents, and a desire to help our organization.

What is Involved?

- **Time Commitment:** Attend our monthly Board meetings and help steer chapter decisions.
- **Collaboration:** Work with other members and organizations to further our mission to promote enjoyment and protection of the natural environment through education, activism, and conservation of bird habitat.
- **Impact:** Help keep our membership connected through community outreach.

Ready to learn more or nominate a fellow member? Please reach out to our Secretary, Sue Weinreis, at granpeak47@gmail.com or any of our Chapter Board Members! Their contact information is in this Flyer.

We would love to talk to you, and there is no obligation to commit by simply expressing interest. Let's keep our community soaring together!

Submitted by Sue Weinreis

Bird Trip Notification List

To have better communication about our birding trips and other items of interest, the Board would like to encourage more people to join our ***Bird Trip Notification List*.**



November birding at Cooney Photo by Kristin Neva

This is where we will announce "pop up" birding trips, like the recent one to Cooney Reservoir, that didn't make it into the official calendar as well as cancellations. Anyone with an email can sign up. Just email Carolyn Jones at Carolyn684@gmail.com and tell me your name and email.

If you don't have email, watch our website (yvaudubon.com) or Facebook page (Yellowstone Valley Audubon) for updates.

Since you are reading this, you must love birds, so come join us for birding. We have some good trips planned.

Submitted by Carolyn Jones

YVAS MEETINGS & PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Next Board of Directors Meeting: **Monday, Dec 14, 2026 —**The YVAS meeting of the Board of Directors will be held from 4pm to 6pm. Board of Directors meetings are held on the second Monday of the month. Board meetings are open to all members.

In-Person Program: **Monday, Dec 21, 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 but this program in the sanctuary has no 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

Bernard Quetchenbach bquetchenbach@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

(Committees, continued)

Flyer Editor: Kristin Neva yvasflyer@gmail.com

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 and Angus Fulton
carolyn684@gmail.com
angusfulton@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 _____

Phone _____

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



American Pipit on the Cooney shoreline Photo by Susan Hovde

Membership Updates

October renewals: Mary Davis

November renewals: All paid up!

December renewals: Mary Fitzpatrick, Leslie Marty, Gail McGlothlin, Deborah McGrath, Jerry Moore, David & Nancy Myers, Kristin Neva, Susan Newell & Dick Walton, Jim Petek, Linda Pickard, Sherlene Robison-O'Dea, Jack & Carol Sterling, Pat Sweeney & Teresa Erickson, Michael Szczutkowski, Tom & Ruth Towe, Ruth Vanderhorst, Bruce Waage, Gene Wade

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