



Y E L L O W S T O N E

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 1 SPRING 2008

DISCOVERY

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE YELLOWSTONE ASSOCIATION



Sandhill cranes travel along the spine of the continent every spring, returning to Yellowstone from Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in central New Mexico. Photo: Peter Murray

By **MICHAEL LEACH**
Yellowstone Association

Each spring, thousands of visitors to Yellowstone National Park descend upon the Yellowstone River to witness one of nature's greatest marvels. From Le Hardys Rapids to Fishing Bridge, a spectacular display, ancient in its workings, plays out—a spectacle whose very existence, tragically, is being threatened, not only in Yellowstone, but all over the globe. To the delight of visitors, thousands of native Yellowstone cutthroat trout tail-dance out of the water as they follow one great, irrepressible urge—the urge to migrate back upstream

What's Inside...

- YELLOWSTONE ASSOCIATION 75TH ANNIVERSARY TIMELINE
- EXPANDED JUST FOR KIDS PAGES
- EXPLORE YELLOWSTONE! TOWER FALL TRAIL
- THANK YOU TO BOB LANDIS, YELLOWSTONE'S OWN WILDLIFE FILMMAKER

to the refuge of North America's largest mountain lake, Yellowstone Lake, to spawn in the place of their birth.

Yellowstone, America's sacred wilderness, is one of the few places left on earth where the wildest of animals and the most natural of processes can still be observed. Each spring, summer, and fall, in and around our nation's first national park, mammals, birds, fish, insects, and amphibians follow their innate desire to move, and thus ancient routes are traveled once more. This is the story not of a single species, but of a process—one that is among the most dramatic, and imperiled, phenomenon on this planet.

continued on page 2

The Process of Migration

The term “migration” conjures up images of 1,000-mile flights or 400-mile journeys across land. These are the more dramatic stories of migration. However, when examined closely, migration at any level is extraordinary and is a life process that must be protected and preserved to ensure species’ survival. What better place to study that process than in one of the few remaining healthy and intact ecosystems—Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding area known as the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Behind many of Yellowstone’s beloved creatures can be found a remarkable story of movement and travel. The migration of Yellowstone’s elk serves as a prime example. Yellowstone is home to North America’s largest elk herd. Approximately 15–20,000 elk summer in the park; but this number drops by more than half, to around 12,000, during the harsh winters. While the Firehole herd stays within the interior of the park throughout the winter,



Yellowstone is home to North America’s largest elk herd. Photo: Bill Mahoney

TABLE OF CONTENTS:


Association News	6-9
Just for Kids!	10-11
Institute News	12-13
Resource Notes.....	14-15
Explore Yellowstone!.....	16
Park Store.....	17-20
Membership	21-23



THE MISSION OF THE YELLOWSTONE ASSOCIATION

The Yellowstone Association, in partnership with the National Park Service, fosters the public’s understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of Yellowstone National Park and its surrounding ecosystem by funding and providing educational products and services.

P.O. Box 117 • Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190
 www.YellowstoneAssociation.org • ya@yellowstoneassociation.org
 Office: 307-344-2293 • Institute: 307-344-2294 • Membership: 307-344-2289
 Monday - Friday • 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Mountain Time

 Printed on 100% post-consumer waste, chlorine-free paper with soy-based ink.

other herds move either north or south. The northern range herd (the largest in the park) winters in the lower elevations, from the Lamar Valley to Gardiner, Montana, and outside the park in the Gallatin National Forest, often venturing onto private lands. The southern herds move farther down to the Jackson Hole area and the National Elk Refuge, where they are joined by thousands of other migratory elk.

Another migrant moves through Jackson Hole on its way south. North America’s sole remaining endemic ungulate continues a tradition of long-distance travel that rivals the migration of the African wildebeests. The migratory tradition of the pronghorn dates back 5800 years and is all that remains of long-distance migratory mammals in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Pronghorn travel up to 300 miles a year, round trip, from the Grand Teton National Park into Wyoming’s Upper Green River basin.

The last of the nation’s original free-ranging bison make Yellowstone their home, but their migration story stands in stark contrast to that of the elk and the pronghorn. Migration of the park’s bison has been deliberately and methodically curtailed. These incredible beasts, which once numbered 30–60 million in North