

18th ANNUAL
MONTANA AUDUBON
BIRD FESTIVAL

June 9–11, 2017
Best Western Plus Heritage Inn
Great Falls, Montana

wings 
MONTANA
AUDUBON
across the big sky



John Larbing

Russell Hill

welcome

We will be celebrating the milestone of Montana Audubon's first 40 Years at our 18th Annual **Wings Across the Big Sky** Festival, co-hosted by the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Chapter. This is shaping up to be a spectacular event and we hope you will join us in Great Falls, June 9–11, 2017. Registration will open at 1:00 p.m. so plan to sign in and enjoy a special presentation Friday afternoon, followed by a Barbecue and Celebration Friday evening. We invite you to participate in dynamic birding field trips, listen to interesting speakers, view a wide variety of informational booths, and join in on other fun festivities as we celebrate efforts to conserve our birds and wildlife in Montana.

Take a minute to review this brochure for information on our Festival headquarters, speakers, and fantastic birding field trips to help you decide how to spend your fun-filled weekend in and around Great Falls.

Festival headquarters and lodging

The Best Western Plus Heritage Inn is located off the 10th Avenue South (I-15) exit in Great Falls and is within minutes of the CM Russell Museum, Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, Giant Springs State Park, First People's Buffalo Jump, Great Falls International Airport, Holiday Village Mall, and the Rivers Edge Trail along the Missouri River. As the largest full-service hotel in Central Montana with 231 guest rooms and over 17,000 sq. ft. event space with 12 meeting rooms, we are able to accommodate groups of all sizes. Complimentary features include: airport and area-wide transportation, parking, wireless internet, indoor pool and fitness center. The address is 1700 Fox Farm Road and is easily accessible from the south, north or west using the 10th Avenue exit, or from the east following 10th Avenue South across the Missouri River to the base of the hill.

Rooms are available for \$104 per night. Please call 406-761-1900 or 1-800-548-8256 and mention Montana Audubon to receive this special discounted rate. We suggest that you book early, especially if you are planning to arrive early or stay late for the extra field trip opportunities offered by the local Audubon Chapter. The hotel will honor the pricing as long as there are rooms available.

The Heritage Inn proudly supports Montana Audubon and looks forward to welcoming you in June!

Overview

FRIDAY

1:00 p.m. Registration Begins
2:30 p.m. Veracruz Tour Presentation
by Steve Hoffman
4:45 p.m. Barbecue
6:15 p.m. Welcome by Mayor Bob Kelly,
and 40th Anniversary Celebration, including
a Bird Calling Contest.

SATURDAY MORNING

5:00 a.m. Breakfast with field trip groups
and leaders, Field Trips

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

1:00 p.m. Keynote Speaker – David Ringer,
National Audubon
2:00 p.m. Afternoon Speaker Sessions with
Montana Audubon Programs

SATURDAY EVENING

5:30 p.m. Banquet, Dessert Auction, Awards

SUNDAY MORNING

5:00 a.m. Breakfast with field trip groups
and leaders, Field Trips

(Look for information on Page 7 regarding pre- and post-festival field trips sponsored and facilitated by the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon chapter.)

Festival Carbon Footprints and You

Included with your registration is an opportunity to offset your carbon footprint travelling to and from the Festival. We once again invite you to donate toward our goal of achieving carbon neutrality at the Montana Audubon Center.

keynote speaker

David Ringer



As Audubon's first Chief Network Officer, David J. Ringer oversees the health, vitality, capacity, diversity, and strength of Audubon's vast distributed network. That network includes more than 460 Audubon chapters, more than 40 Audubon nature centers, key strategic partners, and thousands of advocates and volunteers. He also leads Audubon's Bird-Friendly Communities program, which engages people in practical, joyful solutions to protect birds and special places and to make communities healthier for people too.

Ringer previously served as Audubon's national communications director, overseeing communications, public relations, and social media, and before that as Audubon's communications director for the Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi Flyway. He was Audubon's front-line PR manager in Louisiana during the 2010 BP oil disaster.

Before joining the Audubon staff, Ringer provided a wide variety of communications and media for NGOs around the world, an experience that took him to more than 25 countries on six continents. He has also worked as a web developer and a biological field technician. Ringer writes about bird taxonomy and systematics, and other natural history topics. His love of birds began in childhood, and his connection to Audubon started in high school, when he joined the Greater Ozarks Audubon Society of Springfield, Missouri.

Friday afternoon presentation: Veracruz River of Raptors Project

Steve Hoffman
*Retired Executive Director of
Montana Audubon*

Steve Hoffman will present a slideshow overview of the Veracruz River of Raptors Project (VRR), located near the Gulf Coast in eastern Mexico. This project is designed to monitor the largest raptor migration on Earth (4-6 million raptors of more than 25 raptor species counted each autumn). As co-founder, Steve will describe how VRR was launched, and give an overview of key findings of this unique 25-year raptor population monitoring effort. Steve will also briefly highlight his upcoming fall 2017 birding tour to Veracruz, which includes

opportunities to view the spectacular raptor migration as well as enjoy diverse birding experiences throughout central and southern Veracruz – 300+ bird species can be observed on this trip!

Recently retired as Executive Director of Montana Audubon, Steve Hoffman served in this capacity for more than a decade. After earning his M.S. degree in Wildlife Ecology from Utah State University in 1979, he devoted his entire 38-year career to wildlife conservation. After 10 years of government service (primarily as an Endangered Species Biologist for the US Fish & Wildlife Service in the American Southwest), Steve founded HawkWatch

*Blue crowned
Motmot*



Bob Martinka

International, a nonprofit organization dedicated to monitoring and conserving hawks, eagles and other raptors across the American West. He has authored more than 35 scientific papers on raptor migration, ecology, conservation, and endangered species management. Steve has given dozens of presentations throughout the US and abroad on the identification, migration and conservation of raptors.

Saturday afternoon presentations by Montana Audubon Staff

Janet Ellis
Public Policy Director

Janet Ellis has coordinated Montana Audubon's legislative and public policy work on behalf of Montana's wildlife and habitat since 1983. She became Program Director on a full-time, year-round basis in 1989. She has received several awards for her work, including "Conservationist of the Year" from the Montana Environmental Information Center, Montana Wildlife Federation, and

Montana Audubon; the "Lifetime Award for Conservation and Clean Energy Achievement" from the National Wildlife Federation; and a "Special Achievement Award" from the Montana Native Plant Society. She holds a degree in biology from the University of Montana. In 2015, Janet began a new adventure, serving in the Montana Legislature as HD81 Representative.

Montana Audubon is a respected and influential voice on complex natural

resource issues across the state, with a proven ability to work with diverse stakeholders to solve tough problems. Public policy is an important element of our conservation work. We safeguard Montana's natural heritage by influencing decision makers to protect our state's healthy environment and rich biodiversity.



Amy Seaman
Conservation Program Manager & Lobbyist

Amy Seaman came to Montana Audubon in 2013 and is now our Conservation Program Manager and lead lobbyist. She has a background in biology and environmental science. She works on our Important Bird Area (IBA) Program and myriad other bird conservation and monitoring projects. She has studied birds widely throughout the west and in Montana locations such as

the Madison and Missouri Rivers, Charles M. Russell NWR, Bitterroot Valley, Bridger Ridge, and Glacier National Park.

The long-term conservation of priority birds, with a focus on Montana's important riparian, sagebrush, and native grassland habitats, has been central to Montana Audubon's mission since our inception. During the past 40 years the growth of our program has been shaped by many forces, including how birders communicate, how

we collect data, and what threats are most pressing. As we continue to mold our conservation approach to account for these sometimes sweeping changes it is important to recall our past successes and revisit our dedication to using the best available science as we move forward.



Carolyn Sevier
Montana Audubon Center Director, Billings

Carolyn has been in Montana since 1998, earning her degree from Carroll College and working for a number of environmental education and conservation organizations in the state since then. She was a board member of the Montana Environmental Education Association from 2008–2016, serving as its president for five years.

She has been connected with the Montana Audubon Center as a partner, volunteer, and presenter since moving to Billings in 2007, and has been on staff since January 2016.

For more than ten years, the Audubon Center has been providing nature education along the Yellowstone River corridor in Billings, Montana. On its 54-acre campus and in partnership with the Yellowstone River Parks Association, the story of the Center

is also one of restoration – changing what was once a gravel mine into a vibrant riparian habitat that includes a series of demonstration gardens and plant communities native to south-central Montana.



field trips

All field trips this year have been designated “Family Friendly” by the UMBA Chapter. Come with your water bottles and comfortable shoes and participate in a diverse selection of birding and conservation-themed trips. Please review each description (pages 4–6) and make your choices.

Saturday trips are labeled “SA”; Sunday trips are “SU.” Please note the first 14 trips are labeled SA / SU since the trips are identical both days.

All field trips are limited to 15 participants and will leave the Heritage Inn at 6:00 a.m. unless otherwise noted. Be sure to join your breakfast table marked with your field trip number between 5 and 6 a.m. so the leader can give you pertinent information and make plans for car-pooling. Sack lunches are available as part of your registration, so be sure to pick those up as you leave with your group. Also, bring your gear—comfortable walking shoes, water, raingear, camera, binoculars and any personal needs for your trip. All Saturday trips will return to the hotel by noon, whereas some Sunday trips

end a bit later in the day or away from Great Falls. Check individual trip descriptions for more info.



Restrooms Available



Mostly Driving

Please check out the pre- and post-trips on page 7 that will be offered along with the festival this year. Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon has scheduled two pre- and one post-trip. Contact information is included with the narrative describing the trips.

SA1 / SU1 Arod Lake



Arod Lake is an 800-acre Wildlife Management Area and a Montana IBA. It consists of three main lakes. This water and grassland habitat is home to nesting colonies of American Pelican, California Gull and Double-crested Cormorant. You will see diverse species like Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds, snipe, and shorebirds such as Willet, yellowlegs, Long-billed Curlew and Marbled Godwit. There are also several ancient teepee rings in the area. You'll also learn about the flora, geography, and history of the landscape. **Walking, 2 miles, uneven ground of flat shortgrass prairie with cactus. Wear protective shoes.**

Sparrow, and various flycatchers. Records from 2009 indicate that 100 species were observed on a daylong field trip. Sunday's excursion will spend more time and involve more stops. **Restrooms available only in Choteau.**

SA4 / SU4 Freezout Lake



Located 36 miles west of Great Falls, this Montana FWP waterfowl production area is an 11,350-acre prairie marsh with substantial grassland that attracts American White Pelican, Clark's, western and eared grebes, American avocet, Black-necked stilt, Franklin's gull, Marsh Wren, Say's Phoebe, Wilson's Phalarope, Forster's, Common and the occasional Black Tern, White-faced Ibis, Yellow-headed and Red-winged blackbirds. Best known for the hundreds of thousands of Snow Geese that stage here in March, it has an eBird checklist of over 200 birds. **Limited walking; short distances.**

SA6 / SU6 Highwood Loop



A trip around the Highwood Mountains takes in grassland pastures, cultivated lands, several state Waterfowl Production Areas and unique geographic formations, such as the Shonkin Sag and Square Butte. You'll take a walk to explore the Sag. You could see Northern Harrier, Common Raven, Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, Waterfowl, Short-eared Owl, Mountain Bluebird, Loggerhead Shrike. Time and weather permitting, we will walk to the shallow marsh Kingsbury Lake, through brushy grassland. A prairie dog town on the east side of Kingsbury Lake is a possible location for burrowing owls. More time can be spent at each location on Sunday. **Walking at Shonkin Sag is shortgrass prairie; no trail. Kingsbury Lake has no trails; tall sagebrush, brushy and possibly rattlesnakes. Few restroom facilities.**

SA2 / SU2 Benton Lake NWR



Located eight miles north of Great Falls, Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge is an IBA and was set aside as a refuge and breeding ground for birds in 1929. The prairie marsh and grasslands provides prime habitat for Chestnut-collared Longspur, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Marsh Wren, Eared Grebe, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Forster's Tern and Common Terns, White-faced Ibis, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, American Avocet and in some years Burrowing Owls. A staff member from Benton Lake will accompany the group to talk about current management changes and challenges. **Mostly driving; short boardwalk.**

SA5 / SU5 Giant Springs; Local Hot Spots



Giant Springs was documented by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805 and is one of the largest freshwater springs in the country. The springs are the site of the Roe River, once listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's shortest. Large trees and Missouri River riparian habitat make this a dependable place to see birds near Great Falls. Bullock's oriole, House Wren, swallows, kingbirds, Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, Northern Flicker and Great Horned Owl all nest in the area. It has an eBird checklist over 200 species. This is a great trip for beginners and families. Other local hot spots, West Bank Park (eBird checklist over 150 species), Garden Home Park, and various fishing access sites near Great Falls, will be visited depending on which birds have been seen recently. **Walking established trails and paths, 100 yards to 1 mile at each stop; easy.**

SA7 / SU7 Raptor Special



This trip takes you along the Missouri and Smith Rivers, the high plains between Ulm and Cascade then back along the Missouri River. The route has produced amazing numbers of raptors during spring migration. In June you should see nesting raptors such as Red-tailed Hawks, Swainson's Hawks, Golden Eagle, Ferruginous Hawk, American Kestrel, and possibly Short-eared Owl. The route passes by pasture grassland, cultivated land and several potholes to add to the variety of birds you could see. The Sunday trip will allow more time at each stop and a lunch break stop. **Mostly roadside walking.**

SA3 / SU3 Choteau Loop



This route through ranchlands and around Pine Butte Preserve on the Rocky Mountain Front offers views of grassland birds such as Long-billed Curlew, McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Golden Eagle, Bobolink, Sprague's Pipit, bluebirds, Lazuli Bunting, Clay-colored

SA8 / SU8 Ryan Dam



This trip starts with some easy walking along West Bank Park. June is generally “baby duck” month. The trip continues to Ryan Dam, a public picnic area on an island developed by Montana Power, which is on the Missouri River. The site has large cottonwoods that host a nesting pair of Bald Eagles. The lower stories have a surprising number of warblers, towhees, swallows, catbirds. A large number of birds use the river as a highway. A rough trail used by non-motorized bikes above the island takes you through rocky grassland, yucca, sagebrush and coulees that border the river. West Bank Park and Ryan Dam Island are easy walking up to 1 mile. **Trail is rough, uneven with some elevation up and down.**

SA9 / SU9 Salisbury Farm



Visit a 5000-acre organic farm along the Missouri River near Floweree, 30 miles north of Great Falls. Learn about the small grain and cattle ranch run by Elsie and Russ Salisbury, while observing a variety of birds, a bald eagle nest and tipi rings. Canada geese, Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall, Loggerhead Shrike, Northern Harrier, American Avocet, Willet, Short-eared Owl, Downy Woodpecker, Western Woodpeewee and more. They have recently finished a new home insulated with hay bales! **Walking short distances over farmland.**

SA10 / SU10 Stanford Bluebird Trail



The Stanford Bluebird Trail is a loop that starts at Stanford, follows Dry Wolf Road to the campground then loops back on Running Wolf Road. The route consists of grasslands, coniferous woods, aspen, riparian, wetland and burned forest habitat. With all that habitat you could see nearly anything including Mountain Chickadee, Hairy Woodpecker, Gray Catbird, Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, Dipper, Sandhill Crane, swallows and Mountain Bluebirds, Steller's Jay, Pine Siskin, flycatchers, warblers, and raptors. **Roadside walking. Restrooms available at campground.**

SA11 / SU11 Sulphur Springs



This hiking trail is an easy 3.6-mile round trip through yucca, grasslands and coulees. The trip will highlight birds, plants and Lewis and Clark history on a relatively remote stretch of the Missouri River to the cold springs. Water from Sulphur Springs proved vital in treating Sacagawea's illness during the 1805 portage at Great Falls. The interpretive signs along the trail offer information regarding the Lewis & Clark expedition. Expect to see lark sparrow, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Bullock's Oriole,

American White Pelican, possibly Yellow-breasted Chat and Yellow Warblers. **Easy walking on established trail; 3.6 miles round trip; some up and down.**

SA12 / SU12 Sun River Canyon; Wagner Basin

We will hike along aspens, cliffs, fen, forest and wildflowers on the Rocky Mountain Front and explore the beaver-dam bottomland. Plan on scrambling off-trail for a mile and climbing a ridge for views, looking for bighorn sheep. We will seek Hairy Woodpecker, Clark's Nutcracker, Townsend's Solitaire, Pine Siskin, Mountain Bluebird, Dusky Grouse, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon and Great Horned Owl. Bring bear spray, windbreaker and hiking boots. No restrooms. Sunday we will hike further up the ridge for lunch, returning mid-afternoon. **Hiking off-trail, rocky terrain; elevation gain 1,000 feet; expect wind especially at elevation.**

SA13 / SU13 Teton River; Cave Mountain



From Choteau you will follow the Teton River past cultivated fields, ranches, riparian, and streamside habitats into the Rocky Mountain Front including Cave Mountain campground and Teton Pass ski area. Look for Dippers, Mountain Bluebirds, Rufous Hummingbird, flycatchers, Belted Kingfisher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Chickadee, Swainson's Hawk, Prairie Falcon, MacGillivray's Warbler and Long-billed Curlew.

SA14 / SU14 Thain Creek Road

The Thain Creek Road leads to Thain Creek campground and trailheads into the Highwood Mountains. It is a mixture of grassland, riparian, foothills, mountain streamside and more. If you don't make stops to look and listen, you could miss swallows, flycatchers, Common Nighthawk, Rufous Hummingbird, American Redstart, Belted Kingfisher; kingbirds, goldfinch, Lazuli Bunting, sparrows, Western Tanager even Dippers. There is one vault toilet at Thain Creek trailhead. We will walk up along Thain Creek at the trailhead as time and snowpack allows. **Roadside birding while driving Thain Creek Road; walk along the creek is established trail; little elevation change; stream crossing on primitive footlogs. Limited restrooms at end of road.**

SA15 Bird Creek Ranch



The 2292-acre Bird Creek Ranch has a permanent conservation easement held by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The ranch has a mix of hardwood trees, wetlands, streams, native grassland and farmland. Jim and Cindy Kittredge

will talk to the group about how ranching and protecting habitat for wildlife can coexist. Expect to see a diverse mix of grassland and riparian birds, including upland birds, waterfowl such as herons, shorebirds and nesting Bald Eagles. If road conditions permit, we'll visit the ranch wetlands that attract waterfowl year round. **Walking on ranchlands.**

SA16 First Peoples Buffalo Jump; Surveying



First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park-National Historic Landmark is an archaeological site with possibly the largest bison cliff jump in North America. Native peoples used this site for at least a thousand years before Lewis and Clark arrived. The jump consists of a mile long sandstone cliff; there are remnants of drive lines on top of the cliff and up to 18-feet of compacted remains below. We will visit the jump site and learn about using eBird and survey techniques while observing Rock Wren, Say's Phoebe, Long-billed Curlews, Upland Sandpiper, Black-headed Grosbeak, warblers and flycatchers among the slopes, mixed-grass prairie and if time allows, nearby riparian areas. **Established trail over prairie; some elevation gain/loss; distance 2 miles.**

SA17 Little Belt Bluebird Trail; Logging Creek



This field trip is on fair weather roads. It begins with stops at possibly the “birdiest” rest stop in the state. Then it follows an active bluebird trail on Logging Creek Road into the Little Belts. The area is valley-bottom habitat with small creeks and brush. In addition to Mountain Bluebirds you could see Bobolink, Sandhill crane, Western Tanager, Rock Wren, Lazuli Bunting, swallows, kingbirds, even hear a Veery and observe various raptors.

SA18 Little Belts; Sluice Boxes



Izaak Walton Spring is not only a rest stop, it is a little gem of cliff, riparian and small wetland and the first stop as you head to Sluice Boxes. You can hear and see Common Yellowthroat, Cordilleran Flycatcher, Gray Catbird. You could spend all morning but your next stop is Sluice Boxes. The area is a delight of songs and sightings in an easy 3/4 mile walk on established trail (up to the first stream crossing). We'll find Calliope hummingbird, Red-eyed Vireo, Western Tanager, White-throated Swift, swallows, Spotted Towhee, Northern Harrier. Time permitting we will then explore Dry Fork of Belt Creek. More songs – warblers, thrush, Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Chickadee. **3/4 mile one way on established wide trail at Sluice Boxes; otherwise roadside; easy, level walking on road surface or gravel. Restrooms available at two stops.**

SA19 Muddy Creek Falls

West of Bynum on the Rocky Mountain Front, is a popular hidden slot canyon ending in a 50–60 foot waterfall. The trailhead is near the prehistoric Old North Trail and will take you along a rocky wetland path. The last portion is an undeveloped route that crosses the small stream on rocks several times. You could see Dippers and warblers. **Moderate; 5-mile round trip on undeveloped but well-used rocky trail with several stream crossings. Primitive restroom stops.**

SU15 Beartooth WMA



This trip near Wolf Creek, will explore habitats from ungrazed grasslands, riparian and burned forest to high elevation mountain meadows and conifer forests. We anticipate seeing numerous bird species, including Ruffed and Dusky Grouse, Golden Eagle, other raptors, Dusky, Hammond's and Willow flycatchers, Canyon Wren, Western Tanager, Mountain Bluebird, Spotted Towhee, Lazuli Bunting and Red-naped Sapsucker. The trip ends mid-afternoon at Wolf Creek. **Some light to slightly moderate walking, up to a mile; mostly on fairly level roads/paths; not much elevation change.**

SU16 Beaver Creek Park



Hill County's Beaver Creek Park is the largest county park in the US. The park is a mile wide strip following Beaver Creek for 17 miles in the Bears Paw Mountains, an island range. Habitat consists of rolling grasslands, lakes, brushy stream, aspen/cottonwood groves and cliffs. This eBird hotspot has 114 species so far including Long-billed Curlew, Mountain Bluebird, Swainson's and Ferruginous Hawks, Yellow-breasted Chat, Wilson's Snipe, Lazuli Bunting, Ovenbird, Rock Wren, Golden Eagle and much more. We will stretch our legs and do our first birding at Sands Pothole on our way to Beaver Creek Park. It's a long trip but well worth the time; will end at 4:00 p.m. in Havre. **Easy walking on 1-mile established trail. Additional fee: \$10/car.**

SU17 Blackfoot Sculpture Park; Brown's Lake



The Aspen Campground/Blackfoot Pathway Sculpture Park is easy walking. To be seen are Williamson's Sapsucker, Evening Grosbeak, Red-breasted Nuthatch, warblers, Junco, Pine Siskin, kinglets. The trip proceeds to Brown's Lake which hosts more than just waterbirds – the surrounding sagebrush, grasslands, and cultivated fields are a haven for a diversity of birdlife. 191 species have been reported around this eBird hotspot – Black Tern, Red-necked grebe, Western Grebe, Horned Grebe, Sandhill Crane, various raptors, swallows, Clay-colored Sparrow, Sora, flycatchers, Caspian Tern. Trip ends at 3:00 p.m. at Brown's Lake. **Easy walking in Sculpture Park.**

SU18 First Peoples Buffalo Jump



First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park - National Historic Landmark is an archaeological site with possibly the largest bison cliff jump in North America. Native peoples used this site for at least a thousand years before Lewis and Clark arrived. The bison jump consists of a mile long sandstone cliff; there are remnants of drive lines on top of the cliff and up to 18 feet of compacted remains below. We will visit the jump site while observing rock wren, Say's phoebe, Long-billed Curlews, Upland Sandpiper, Black-headed Grosbeak, warblers and flycatchers among the slopes, mixed-grass prairie and if time allows, nearby riparian areas. **Established trail over prairie; some elevation change; distance 2 miles.**

SU19 Kevin Rim



Located north of Shelby, the Kevin Rim escarpment provides nesting habitat for a diversity of raptors and has been designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern and Key Raptor Area by the Bureau of Land Management and is also an Important Bird Area. In recent years, wind turbine farms have been constructed in the area. With sweeping views of prairie and the Bears Paw Mountains from the Rim, expect to see Ferruginous and Swainson's Hawks, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, Sprague's Pipit, longspurs, and Long-billed Curlew. High-clearance, 4WD vehicles are preferred, but we can carpool the last road section. Wet weather will limit us to main roads. Return mid-afternoon. **Mostly roadside; some walking on the rim—short grass, rocky. No restrooms on the rim.**

SU20 Little Belt Mountains

This trip is a continuation of the Saturday Little Belts trip starting at Dry Wolf Creek Road at Monarch then continuing to Monument Falls and Porphyry Peak lookout. Additional species to look for are Sandhill Crane, Spotted Sandpiper, Mountain Bluebird, Dipper, warblers, thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Will return to Great Falls mid-afternoon. Roadside birding Dry Wolf Creek Road. **Walking at Monument Falls is short, established trail; Porphyry Peak, closed forest service road, uphill elevation gain.**

SU21 Marias River WMA

The 5845-acre Marias River WMA was established in 2009. The site includes an undeveloped 14-mile stretch of the Marias as well as sagebrush and shortgrass prairie. It is non-motorized access only. We will be walking along the river for about 1.5 miles. Birds we may encounter include Gray Partridge, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Killdeer, Long-billed Curlew, Great-horned Owl, Common Nighthawk, Belted Kingfisher,

Western Wood-Pee-wee, Say's Phoebe, Marsh Wren, Brown Thrasher, Sprague's Pipit, Brewer's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow and Chestnut-collared Longspur. To break up the long drive, we'll stop in Valier to visit Rock City (and a rest stop) and end the day at Lake Shel-oolle (eBird list is 140 species) in Shelby. Roads are impassable to the WMA in wet weather – dry road alternatives exist in the area. Trip ends at 4:00 p.m. in Shelby. **Walking undeveloped trails; bears and snakes possible; 3-mile round trip. Restrooms available at rest area, but not at site.**

SU22 Muddy Creek Falls; Blackleaf Canyon

West of Bynum on the Rocky Mountain Front is a popular hidden slot canyon ending in a 50–60 foot waterfall. The trailhead is near the prehistoric, Old North Trail and will take you along a rocky wetland path. The last portion is an undeveloped trail that crosses the small stream on rocks several times. You could see dippers and warblers at this time of year. Sunday will include a stop for lunch at Blackleaf Canyon and a hike to a large meadow with views of Mt. Werner and Mt. Frazier. This area was targeted for natural gas development in the past and a few active gas wells remain to the north. Trip ends mid-afternoon in Great Falls. **Moderate walking; 5-mile round trip on undeveloped but well-used rocky trail with several stream crossings. Primitive restroom facilities.**

SU23 Our Lake

Our Lake is the most popular destination hike on the Rocky Mountain Front. What you don't see in birds you will in mountains vistas. It is a moderate climb to the high alpine lake set in a rugged basin surrounded by rock faces. See mountain goats, marmots and a lake of Cutthroat Trout. In case of heavy snowpack a Rocky Mountain Front alternative is planned. Trip will end about 4:00 p.m. in Great Falls. **Hiking well-traveled trail; 1500 ft. elevation gain; 8 miles round trip; moderate climb; horse free trail; may be snow at higher elevations. Restrooms available only at trailhead.**

SU24 Pine Butte; Buffalo Run



We will stop along the roads for grassland and riparian birds on the way to lunch on a ridge overlooking Pine Butte swamp where you are likely to see moose, deer, and possibly bear. Take your eyes away from the views of the Rocky Mountain Front and you might see Long-Billed Curlews, Bobolink, kingbirds and a host of raptor species. Trips returns to Great Falls mid-afternoon. **Easy prairie walking; 2 miles round trip.**

Pre- and Post-Festival Trips

This year, Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Chapter is offering two Pre-Trips and a Post-Trip. The Chapter will provide transportation from Great Falls and experienced leaders. To register or for more information, call or email the contact listed with each trip.

American Prairie Reserve

June 7–9, 2017

Itinerary: 3 Days

Departing: June 7, 2017 from Great Falls

Travelers: Limited to 10 guests

Cost: \$750

Few places on earth have as intact prairie habitat and ecosystems as the American Prairie Reserve and Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge. On this three day journey, view wildlife in rich environments, discover from experts the programs and studies on the grasslands and learn about the restoration and conservation efforts in the region.

- Take a guided tour of the American Prairie Reserve
- Enjoy a private excursion of Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge
- Eat a delicious dinner prepared on the Reserve

We will depart from Great Falls June 7 for Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge, an Important Bird Area located near Malta. Established in 1936, Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge is a prairie and wetland ecosystem with over 15,000 acres. Nineteen species of global conservation concern are found at Bowdoin (Ferruginous Hawk, Piping Plover, Long-billed Curlew, Red-headed Woodpecker, Sprague's Pipit, Brewer's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur), as well as continental concern species (Upland Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, Common Tern, Short-eared Owl, Willow Flycatcher, Baird's Sparrow, McCown's Longspur).

Bowdoin has one of only four nesting colonies of American White Pelicans, and one of only five nesting colonies of Franklin's Gulls, in Montana. Because of the concentrations of migrating shorebirds, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network recognizes Lake Bowdoin as a site of Regional importance.

We will have dinner and stay in Malta for the night. On June 8, we travel to the American Prairie Reserve to learn of its scientific research, and to view birds found on the Reserve. Incorporating two of Montana's Important Bird Areas, the Reserve has 19 Sage Grouse leks and is home to more than two dozen species of raptors, including Burrowing Owls, Prairie and Peregrine Falcons, and Northern Harriers.

For grassland species, we will search for Baird's Sparrow, Mountain Plover, Lark Bunting, McCown's Longspur, Chestnut Collared Longspur, and Sprague's Pipit.

That night, we'll enjoy fine dinner and drinks catered by the American Prairie Reserve. Returning to Malta for the night, we will arrive in Great Falls Friday June 9 to enjoy the Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival. Beth Hill will be the trip leader, along with Scott Heidebrink, American Prairie Reserve staff.

Thank you to American Prairie Reserve for their generosity in donating a portion of the cost of this trip.

For more information on this UMBA chapter sponsored trip, contact UMBA at umbaudubon@gmail.com or www.umbaudubon.com, or call Candace Beery 907-306-6320.

InFARMatIon

June 9, 2017

Itinerary: ½ day (4 hours)

Departing: 7am June 9, 2017 from CMR High School, 228 17 Ave NW, Great Falls

Travelers: Limited to 8 guests

Cost: \$30

InFARMatIon is a community Ag Advocacy Project to showcase Montana's rich agricultural production. The inspiration came from a similar project at Washington State University. Signs are placed in fields to identify the different crops growing in the area, helping to make the traveling public more aware of agricultural production around them. The Electric City FFA Chapter of Great Falls, Montana is working with Central Montana Tourism Region as well as other contributors to provide this service.

The trip consists of a loop through the three counties of Cascade, Chouteau, and Judith Basin. We'll travel from Great Falls to Fort Benton (US Hwy 87) to Stanford (MT Hwy 80) and back to Great Falls (US Hwy 87).

For more information on this UMBA sponsored trip, contact UMBA at umbaudubon@gmail.com or www.umbaudubon.com, or call Kay Silk 406-453-0545.

Missouri River Float

June 12, 2017

Itinerary: ½ Day

Departing: June 12, 2017 from Great Falls

Travelers: Limited to 16 guests

Cost: \$160 per Guest

Join Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Chapter on an exciting birding adventure with beautiful mountain scenery along the Wolf Creek Canyon and Dearborn River. This is a leisurely float in the Wolf Creek Canyon area, with a fast current and a few riffles, with no rapids or white water. The cost includes lunch and transportation to the canyon. The trip is perfect for couples, individuals and families.

- Take a guided float trip on the scenic Missouri River
- Enjoy a private birding tour and a delicious lunch
- Transportation to and from Great Falls

As we float through this dramatic canyon scenery, we will travel past sheer cliff walls of igneous rock, some over 300 vertical feet tall, beautiful forest, and meadow scenery, with historic Tower Rock. Each raft holds eight passengers. Trip leader and raft guide is Todd Ondick.

Target birds along the Missouri River are Osprey, Bald and Golden Eagles, Bullock's Oriole, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Least Flycatcher, and Spotted Towhee.

For more information on this UMBA chapter sponsored trip, contact UMBA at umbaudubon@gmail.com, www.umbaudubon.com, or call Candace Beery 907-306-6320.

POINTS OF INTEREST IN GREAT FALLS

Charles M. Russell Museum

400 13th St N

Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center

4201 Giant Springs Rd

Children's Museum

22 Railroad Square

River's Edge Trail, including Gibson Park,

Black Eagle Falls, Rainbow Falls

Giant Springs State Park

4803 Giant Springs Rd

18th ANNUAL MONTANA AUDUBON BIRD FESTIVAL

June 9–11, 2017
Best Western Plus Heritage Inn
Great Falls, Montana

A special thank you to John Lambing for the cover photo taken along the Rocky Mountain Front, and to Russell Hill for the Curlew photo taken at Benton Lake, and to Bob Martinka for the bird photos displayed throughout this brochure.

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF CONSERVATION

2017 marks the end of our 40th Anniversary Year of conserving native birds, other wildlife and their habitats across Montana!

At this year's Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival in Great Falls, we will revisit some of our past successes and other notable events in our long history in becoming one of the most trusted conservation voices in the state, as well as look forward to the next 40 years of Montana Audubon.

Stay tuned to our website, www.mtaudubon.org and Facebook page to learn more about what we're doing to further Montana Audubon's interests and issues.

American
Avocet

Bob Martinka

