



Montana Audubon

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(Photos available)

For Immediate Release

Montana Birds Send Warning About Our Water and Wetlands

HELENA — Many common, favorite birds that depend on waterways, lakes, ponds and marshes — such as the Great Blue Heron — are in a steep decline in Montana, sending a warning about streams and wetlands that serve people and birds alike.

These are the results of a recent analysis of four decades of citizen science organized by the National Audubon Society and US Fish & Wildlife Service.

In Montana and across the United States, Audubon Society volunteers have counted birds every winter and summer for decades. Together, this amounts to the oldest and largest all-volunteer annual wildlife survey on the continent.

A recent review of those data revealed startling declines in some of Montana's most common and beloved birds. For example, Great Blue Herons have declined 81 percent since 1967; the Blue-winged Teal, a small duck, has declined 72 percent; the killdeer, a shorebird that often inhabits urban parks and ponds, is down 80 percent; the Belted Kingfisher is down 88 percent; and a colorful songster, the American Redstart, is down 88 percent.

"If we listen, nature has something to tell us," said noted Montana bird expert Dan Casey of the American Bird Conservancy. "These birds all share two things in common: They all depend on wetlands or streamside forests, and they are all in steep declines."

"Montana's birds, such as waterfowl and Great Blue Herons, do more than just add beauty to our lives," said Steve Hoffman, Executive Director of Montana Audubon. "They reflect the unique Montana way of life and our outdoor heritage."

Hoffman notes that 88 percent of Montana birds (370 of 421 species) breed in, nest or use wetlands and streamside areas at some time during their annual cycle, even though those features make up only 4 percent of the Montana landscape. These areas also benefit people by filtering out water pollutants and preventing floods, he said.

"As Montana grows and develops we see more and more pressure to develop our rare wetland and streamside habitat," Hoffman said. "Once we lose these places, it's difficult, if not impossible, to bring them back."

Hoffman said there are simple, common sense solutions to protect these areas, such as setbacks that guide developers away from rivers, streams and wetlands.

“We know that conservation works. During the past thirty years Montanans helped rescue the Bald Eagle from extinction. We *can* protect our clean water and wildlife habitat. After all, our water and our native fish and wildlife belong to all of us.”

-END-

Top 20 Common Birds in Decline across United States

- 1) **Common Tern**, Decline: 91.9% in 40 years
- 2) **Northern Bobwhite**, Decline: 82.5%
- 3) **Evening Grosbeak**, Decline: 77.8%
- 4) **Northern Pintail**, Decline: 77.4%
- 5) **Boreal Chickadee**, Decline: 73.3%
- 6) **Eastern Meadowlark**, Decline: 71.6%
- 7) **Loggerhead Shrike**, Decline: 71.3%
- 8) **Field Sparrow**, Decline: 68.0%
- 9) **Grasshopper Sparrow**, Decline: 64.9%
- 10) **Snow Bunting**, Decline: 63.7%
- 11) **Black-throated Sparrow**, Decline: 63.4%
- 12) **Lark Sparrow**, Decline: 62.6%
- 13) **Common Grackle**, Decline: 61.4%
- 14) **Greater Scaup**, Decline: 74.9%
- 15) **American Bittern**, Decline: 59.1%
- 16) **Rufous Hummingbird**, Decline 57.6%
- 17) **Whip-poor-will** , Decline 56.9%
- 18) **Horned Lark**, Decline 56.0%
- 19) **Little Blue Heron**, Decline 54.3%
- 20) **Ruffed Grouse**, Decline 54.0%