

fall 2017



RAPTOR MIGRATION IN THE BIG BELT MOUNTAINS

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Our mission is to promote appreciation, knowledge and conservation of Montana's native birds, other wildlife, and natural ecosystems to safeguard biological diversity for current and future generations.

Founded in 1976, Montana Audubon has built effective programs in public policy, education, and bird conservation to serve its members and Montana's nine community-based Audubon Chapters.

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Montana Audubon is a proud member organization of Montana Shares, a partnership of Montana-based nonprofits devoted to improving the quality of life in the Big Sky state.

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

In just over a month's time, I've been fortunate to witness the remarkable spectrum of Montana Audubon's work: children joyfully running through the Center's meadows and their sudden concentration when pausing for a lesson; hundreds of Sandhill Cranes staging in a lush pasture, critical habitat that a local

Audubon chapter hopes to preserve in perpetuity; climbing up a ridge with conservation partners to see firsthand where our Golden Eagle migration survey takes place.

I'm excited to join such a talented staff and dedicated Board of Directors to help build on our conservation legacy in Montana.

After spending 25 years working across the country in the environmental field, from Maine to Oregon, I'm excited to join such a talented staff and dedicated Board of Directors to help build on our conservation legacy in Montana. Over the past four decades, this organization has worked to conserve our state's remarkable wildlife and habitat through programs in conservation science, public policy and education.

In the coming months, the board, staff, chapter leadership and supporters will collaborate on a thoughtful examination of the future as we set the strategic direction for Montana Audubon. Changes in ecological communities and their impacts on birds highlight a need for us to expand our efforts and point to more ways to make a difference. Our 40 year history provides the foundation for future success as we enhance our role as a leader in the conservation of native birds, other wildlife and natural ecosystems. Given the scale and pace of change that is occurring to habitats across the state, our work is needed now more than ever before.

This is an exciting time for Montana Audubon; I hope you will continue to support our vision and strengthen our presence across this incomparable landscape we all cherish. Together, we will build upon an impressive legacy of working across the state to protect Montana's natural heritage.

Larry Berrin, Executive Director



More about our new Executive Director

Larry Berrin comes to Montana Audubon most recently from Asbury Woods Partnership in Erie, Pennsylvania where he served as President/CEO.

Previously, he acted as Branch Director for Discover Your Northwest in Central Oregon. In this role, he was responsible for managing multiple visitor centers, recreation sites and programs in the Deschutes National Forest and Newberry National Volcanic Monument.

Earlier in his career, Berrin served as State Education Director in Vermont for National Audubon where he oversaw centers and education programs in addition to leading birding trips to Mexico, Costa Rica, the Galapagos, the Amazon, and Kenya.

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On the cover: Fall comes to central Montana.
John Lambing photo.

GOLDEN EAGLE MIGRATION SURVEY

RAPTOR MIGRATION IN THE BIG BELT MOUNTAINS

The Golden Eagle Migration Survey, though named after one charismatic species, collects data on all birds of prey observed from the count site, in an effort to understand population dynamics over time.

Rising prominently to the east of Helena, the undulating Big Belt range forms an impressive skyline. These mountains, comprised largely of ancient-seabed limestone, were fractured, twisted and thrust into the sky by the earth's

incrementally slow, but unimaginably powerful tectonic energy. The range trends northwest to southeast, and is home to peaks averaging between 6,000 to 9,000 feet in elevation. When autumn storms gather against its spine, these mountains form part of a continent-sized natural corridor, each year drawing thousands of migrating raptors. Species include Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers, Goshawks, Rough-legged Hawks, several falcons as well as Golden Eagles, among others.



Many raptors are known to make long distance migrations, sometimes traveling thousands of miles between breeding and wintering habitats. Constant, wing-flapping propulsion on these annual journeys is inefficient and would quickly lead a bird of prey to exhaustion and death. An elegant adaptation to this problem is to utilize migratory corridors where geography, weather and air currents combine to enable soaring. This type of flight, where these magnificent birds gracefully ride the wind, is their preferred mode of travel.

continued...



Golden Eagle Migration Survey, continued

In early autumn, before major weather systems buffet the country, raptors ascend rising air columns (thermals), in a lazy upward spiral. When aerodynamic lift dissipates, the birds will gain distance with a descending glide to the next thermal and then repeat the process. However, if larger storms approach ranges like the Big Belts, powerful, landscape-scale updrafts can occur, enabling the birds to coast along a river of wind, with hardly any effort at all. Gusts may carry the birds hundreds of miles per day.

Since 2015, Montana Audubon has maintained the Golden Eagle Migration Survey, a partnership with the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, Last Chance Audubon Society and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to monitor the impressive raptor migration near Duck Creek Pass, in the Big Belt range. GEMS co-chair, Janice Miller, says, “The partners in this project work well together, each helping to ensure our observers are safe and have the support they need to accurately collect this important scientific data.” The count site was identified by recently retired Montana Audubon executive director Steve Hoffman in 2014.

The project, though named after one charismatic species, collects data on all birds of prey observed from the count site, in an effort to understand population dynamics over time. Still, there are a lot of Golden Eagles that travel through the corridor: 2,620 individuals were counted last season. “It’s the biggest known Golden Eagle

flyway in the United States,” observer Jeff Grayum says, “and a great way to collect long-term population data on birds that breed all the way up into Canada and Alaska.” Co-observer Hilary Turner cites the significant outreach potential of the project, “When conditions are right, the birds come in directly over our heads. It’s a unique way to expose the public to raptors, and help people develop an interest in wildlife and conservation.”

Raptors are considered “apex” predators by wildlife biologists and as such, can provide important insights with regard to changes in habitat. Allison Begley, Avian Conservation Biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks explains, “Avian predators are sensitive to a great number of things including human disturbance, environmental contaminants, development, and climate change. By observing their population trends, we can learn a lot about what is happening to the habitat out there.” When asked about “local” Golden Eagles in Montana she responds, “Our resident population appears stable, but migratory populations may be declining. By continuing to collect information from the Big Belt site and across the region, we’ll be able to better assess their status.”

Sustaining a two-month migratory count at a remote mountain location is a logistical challenge, and has been especially so in 2017 when a powerful storm dumped nearly two feet of snow on the range in early September. The operation requires that the two GEMS observers are kept safe, transportation and supplies are arranged and data efficiently collected. Much of this critical support has been performed by Last Chance Audubon (LCAS) that maintains a committee responsible for managing the complex logistical needs of the count. Project committee member Stephen Turner sums up the organization’s commitment to the Golden Eagle Migration Survey, “LCAS wishes to promote understanding of raptors and other birds as a way to help interpret what is happening ecologically in our world.” The organization also helps publicize the effort, and assists with getting interested groups to the site. He continues, “The GEMS project combines science and public outreach in a breathtaking natural setting. You can’t help but be moved by these birds as they sail over your head or drop from the sky to attack our owl decoy!”

The 2017 count will conclude on November 10.

For more information about this project visit eaglemigration.org

“Avian predators are sensitive to a great number of things including human disturbance, environmental contaminants, development, and climate change. By observing their population trends, we can learn a lot about what is happening to the habitat out there.”

—Allison Begley, Avian Conservation Biologist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

*Above: Rough-legged hawk
Right: GEMS observers near
Duck Creek Pass in the Big Belts*



FROM VALUED TREES TO INVASIVE SPECIES

Montana Audubon is bringing together practitioners from throughout the state who are working to control Russian olive and salt cedar.

Almost everyone in Montana, especially east of the divide, knows the silvery-green leaves of the Russian olive tree and the gray-green, scaly leaves of salt cedar (also known as tamarisk). These trees decorate yards in our communities—but over time they have become invasive, especially along our waterbodies. Their transition from valued ornamental plants to invasive species reflects a shift in our understanding of how plants interact with natural systems and what that means long-term.

Russian olive

Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) was introduced into the Great Plains sometime in the early 1900s. This plant occurs as a shrub or a tree. Originally it was used as an ornamental in neighborhoods or a shelterbelt tree to block the wind around homesteads. Its ability to grow in areas with little water and saline or alkali soils made it popular: it was planted throughout the plains and intermountain west where it expanded rapidly. It has even been touted as a food source for wildlife species.

Because it had no natural predators in North America, Russian olive began outcompeting native vegetation especially along watercourses in cottonwood/willow ecosystems. It has completely overtaken some riverside areas in Montana, particularly along the Yellowstone, Musselshell, and Missouri Rivers. While small amounts of Russian olive can be beneficial for some wildlife species, near-monocultures that inevitably emerge are highly detrimental. Gradual displacement of native floodplain forests by Russian olive has been documented to result in loss of habitat for cavity-nesting and insect-eating birds.

Many government agencies and landowners worry that Russian olive has overstayed its welcome, especially along our waterways. Eradication efforts have been ongoing for a number of years, particularly along the Marias and Yellowstone drainages.

Several Montana counties, including Treasure and Powder River, have declared Russian olive a noxious weed. In 2010, Montana Audubon and the Montana Native Plant Society successfully prohibited the sale of these invasive plants statewide.

Salt Cedar

Salt Cedar (*Tamarix spp.*) was also introduced in North America sometime in the early 1800s as an ornamental tree. It also was used for erosion control and in shelterbelts. These plants have steadily spread, particularly throughout the southwestern United States and Mexico—with extensive infestations found in the Pacific Northwest, including Montana.

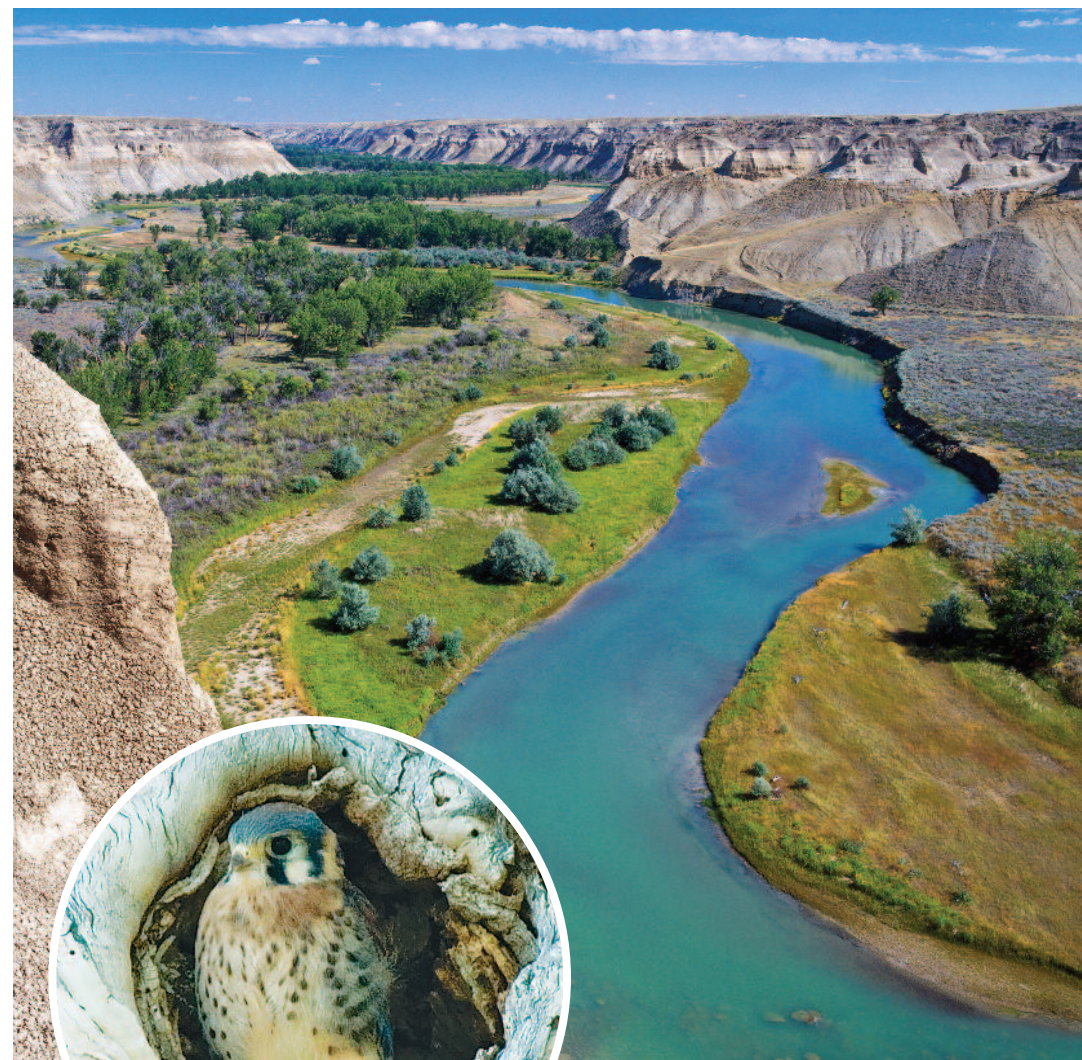
Salt Cedar can live in various environments, but thrives particularly along streams, floodplains, and in wetlands. It has been considered invasive—and a noxious weed—since 2000 in Montana. These small trees were first established around 1960 on the Yellowstone and Big Horn Rivers. They have since been found scattered around the state, primarily along the Yellowstone, Big Horn, and Powder Rivers. In addition, salt cedar are abundant at Fort Peck Reservoir.

There have been extensive efforts to remove salt cedar. In addition to using mechanical

Salt Cedar



Becky Kingston



John Lambing



Bob Marinka

Gradual displacement of native floodplain forests by Russian olive results in loss of habitat for cavity-nesting birds. Above: Marias River. left: American Kestrel

cutting, herbicides, and other control mechanisms, a more recent tool has been the introduction of a biological agent, the saltcedar leaf beetle (*Diorhabda elongata*). Although these beetles have produced habitat concerns for the southwestern Willow Flycatcher, in Montana (which does not have this race of Willow Flycatcher), the beetle may prove to be a promising control. The larvae and adult beetles feed on and remove the leaves from the salt cedar, ultimately killing the trees.

In spite of all the work to remove salt cedar throughout Montana, this plant is tenacious: in southeastern Montana the infestations are entrenched and may be almost impossible to remove.

Working Together

With guidance from the proverb “many hands make light work,” this October Montana Audubon is bringing together practitioners from throughout the state who are working to control Russian olive and salt cedar. Our plan is to develop a path forward that will increase the success of projects designed to eradicate these invasive trees along our waterways. We don’t know where this journey will take us—but we do know that our stream and river habitats, and the wildlife that depends upon them, require help to be successful.

This project is part of Montana Audubon’s River Initiative.



Citizen Science: Eyes and Ears on the Landscape

During spring and summer, groundwork was laid for a number of citizen science projects to better understand the conservation status of “Species of Greatest Inventory Need”. These are defined by the Montana Natural Heritage Program as organisms in need of population data across their range, to make an accurate determination of conservation status. Only repeated, standardized surveys, using established and field-tested survey protocols are robust enough to provide this data. With a state as big as ours, it takes many eyes, ears, and “boots on the ground” to accomplish this task, as well as a many hours establishing the protocol, designing data sheets, and understanding the biology of each study species before entering its habitat.

While Montana Audubon annually leads volunteer projects on many diverse bird species, we took this year’s efforts to a higher level, with in-person field training by professionals.

Our most concerted effort was establishing a baseline range for the Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*) in Montana, increasing the number of known nesting colonies from about 17 at the beginning of the season, to approximately 35 as of this writing. Twenty-six individuals ranging from agency personnel to seasonal technicians and volunteers, participated in trainings in both Glacier National Park and at Holland Lake. Hours were spent working through survey details and techniques, and generally interacting to get a collective feel for habitat characteristics. Each of the highly nuanced habitat aspects of a Black Swift’s nesting waterfall is “scored” with



Jeff Van Tine

standardization of data being the goal, and scores later applied to sites in the field.

Understanding more about each of these species and the threats they face enable conservationists to advocate for better management. The value of the information collected is shared by partners and others around the state especially via the Montana Natural Heritage Program that assigns a specie’s conservation status. Partnerships do much of the behind the scenes work, but the whole effort only happens if dedicated people step up and engage. We’re happy to report that many did so in 2017! Support came from partnerships with The Glacier National Park Conservancy, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, small foundations and committed individuals.

Montana Audubon will hit the ground running in 2018 with projects for Rosy-finches, Chimney Swifts, Black Swifts, cuckoos and others planned. As part of our River Initiative, the goal is to continue utilizing citizen scientists as the eyes and ears of our water-dependent habitats from the headwaters to river valleys.

Please visit our website for blog posts, reports, factsheets, and how to get involved: mtaudubon.org



Keeping Public Lands in Public Hands—Montana Update

The Lake County Conservation District (LCCD), a local government body centered in the Mission Valley, voted in September to continue its push for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) to assume management of about 60,000 acres of Flathead National Forest; an action called the Swan Forest Initiative. Under the proposal, DNRC would be asked to manage commercial timber projects for the LCCD—even though the DNRC legally cannot and does not wish to take on this project.

Transferring management of federal land (owned by all Americans) to financially benefit a particular county government would be a dramatic policy change in this country. Consequently, a Congressional Act must pass before this ‘take over’ could happen.

Montana Audubon and other conservation organizations are working to try to prevent this issue from proceeding. To keep up-to-date on this and other conservation issues, sign up for our alert program on our website: mtaudubon.org



Join a Christmas Bird Count Near You!

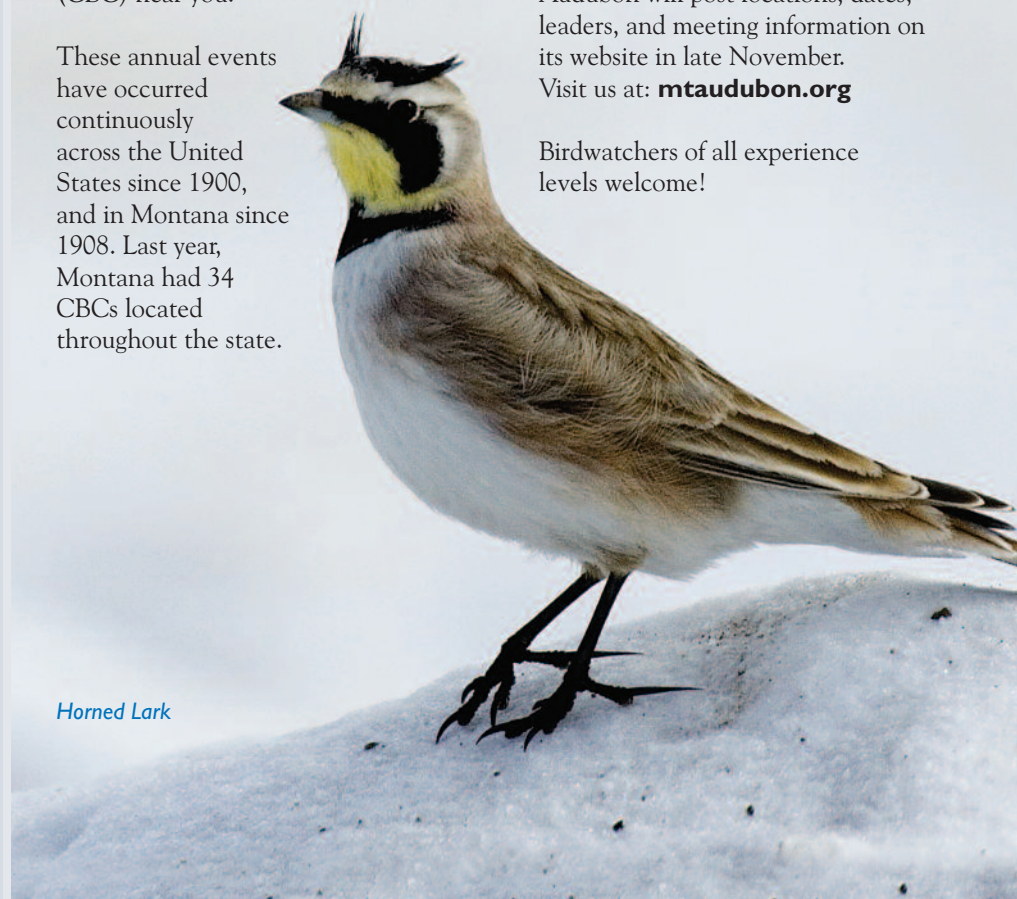
You can enjoy a day outdoors this winter, and learn the basic birds in your area, by joining a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) near you.

These annual events have occurred continuously across the United States since 1900, and in Montana since 1908. Last year, Montana had 34 CBCs located throughout the state.

This year’s CBCs will take place between Thursday, December 14, 2017 and Friday, January 5, 2018. Montana Audubon will post locations, dates, leaders, and meeting information on its website in late November. Visit us at: mtaudubon.org

Birdwatchers of all experience levels welcome!

Horned Lark



Bob Martinka



Wind, Fires, and Oil & Gas Development: What's a Sage-Grouse to do?

Conservation efforts for the Greater Sage-Grouse are on a roller coaster these days. As you may remember, these birds have NOT been listed for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) largely because of the significant conservation efforts in 11 western states that are underway. Montana Audubon works collaboratively on our state's program. Our goal is to conserve these birds, which we believe can occur without protection by the ESA.

Sage-grouse are very particular; the state defines the bird's habitat as consisting of Core Areas, where approximately 76% of Montana's sage-grouse live on 10 million acres, and General Habitat, where 24% of the birds can be found on 24 million acres.

The biggest cause for sage-grouse decline is habitat fragmentation: these birds thrive in open sagebrush country with very little development. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration is proposing to increase fragmentation on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) sage-grouse habitat. This is significant because in Montana the BLM owns 32% of our Sage-Grouse Core Areas and 15% of our General Habitat. Management changes for the BLM may bring more oil and gas development and resulting disturbance, and less science-based management. Instead of empirically-based habitat protection and restoration, programs may focus on grouse population numbers, predator control, and captive breeding—which are not scientifically beneficial for these birds.

For more information about science-based sage-grouse management, visit the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife agencies at: www.wafwa.org/initiatives/sagebrush_ecosystem_initiative/



If increased development on 20% of our state's sage-grouse habitat is not enough, there are at least two proposed wind farms that would expand fragmentation in sage-grouse habitat. Because Montana has no wind farm regulations, wind development companies can essentially do whatever they want, wherever they want:

- The Mud Springs Wind Farm would construct 155 turbines in a Sage-Grouse Core Area east of Red Lodge. Surveys conducted during 2015 found 18 active Golden Eagle nests within 10 miles of the project and 13 sage-grouse breeding leks within four miles. This project may apply for a Golden Eagle "take" permit. For more information, visit: www.fws.gov/mountainprairie/wind/Mud_Springs_Wind_Energy_Project/1.
- The Clearwater Energy Wind Farm near Forsyth would place about 200 turbines in Sage-Grouse General Habitat, and punch transmission lines through a Core Area. Because this project is moving slowly, we currently do not know the potential impacts to sage-grouse or other wildlife.

Montana's fires also affected sage country in 2017: an estimated 358,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat burned this summer—another source of habitat fragmentation.

We are always open to your ideas on how to influence decisions on these projects and issues: contact Janet Ellis at jellis@mtaudubon.org or 406-443-3949.



Snow Geese and the Berkeley Pit

Mass die-offs of Snow Geese—and other birds—in Butte's highly toxic Berkeley Pit is unacceptable. The Pit, which has been filling with water since mining pumps stopped in 1982, is now a mile in diameter. Last November, approximately 10,000 Snow Geese landed there, and about 3,000 later perished. The last large die-off at the Pit was in 1995 when 342 Snow Geese were killed from contact with its contaminated water.

As a result of the November 2016 event, Montana Resources and Atlantic Richfield (ARCO) assembled a committee tasked with developing solutions to prevent similar bird mortality from happening in the future. Montana Audubon has a seat at that table; Sacajawea and Yellowstone Valley Audubon are also participating. To date, the committee has made recommendations on spring and fall 2017 preventative measures. The standing committee will continue to evaluate on-the-ground events and scientific literature to ensure that the companies are using state-of-the-art technology available to prevent future bird die-offs.

This fall, the companies will strive for early detection of any large bird migrations headed toward Butte. If such an event is detected, many different hazing devices will be employed: from drone boats and aircraft to fireworks.



Bob Martinka



Montana Audubon file photo

There is even a cannon that blasts air at 200 miles per hour and lasers designed to keep birds from stopping at the site.

In terms of preventing large-scale bird mortality, the situation at the Berkeley Pit is challenging. To begin, most hazing equipment is not effective over long distances—and the Pit is a large, growing, toxic water body (the largest Superfund Site in the world). Adding to the complexity, most birds migrate at night and travel rather quickly (ducks and geese commonly fly 40–50 miles per hour, making the trip from Helena to Butte in just over an hour); these facts make it difficult to give company staff adequate warning to prepare and deploy hazing equipment. However, this work will help conserve birds by creating and testing state-of-the-art hazing systems that can be used around other contaminated or dangerous industrial sites anywhere in the world.

The first test of the new 2017 hazing system occurred over the weekend of September 22, when 1,100 coots, grebes, and Ruddy Ducks landed on the Pit—but were successfully hazed off before they could be negatively affected by the water. In addition, we want to thank volunteer Gary Swant for teaching identification classes to company staff so that birds at the Pit are more accurately recorded.

Above: Mitigation systems to protect migratory birds are being established at Butte's toxic Berkeley Pit.

Left: Snow Geese take off by the thousands at Freezeout Lake.



Diversity and Inclusion in Environmental Education

Fall is a fantastic time at the Montana Audubon Center. Asters and sage are in bloom, cottonwoods and cattails change color, and our share of migrating birds pass through, like pied-billed grebes, Wilson's warblers and coots. Our programs also see a big change, moving from summer camps and family programs to field trips and preschool. Many of our summer visitors are surprised to hear that our programs operate year-round, but in fact, fall and spring are just as busy as summer, and winter isn't far behind.

From the beginning of our programs in 2008, the Center made it a priority to provide opportunities for all students and families to connect with nature. Outdoor experiences are critical for child development, and can be particularly beneficial for those who lack opportunities in many areas—low-income, minority, kids with differing abilities, and other at-risk populations. Those same children, however, often have less access to the outdoors than their peers. Montana Audubon Center programs are frequently the first or only intentional outdoor experiences for many of our participants, and much of our work is designed specifically to reach these populations.

In our Audubon Naturalists in the Schools (ANTS) program, 86% of participating schools qualify as Title I schools, that is, those with the highest percentages of ethnic minorities, including Native American students. The core of ANTS started with the schools on Billings' South Side, which has the highest number of underserved students. In our public and

family programs, we provide \$10,000 in financial assistance to those individuals and families who could not otherwise participate.

Representing and honoring the cultural diversity of our community is also a high priority for the Center. South Central Montana is home to two Indian Reservations, the Crow and Northern Cheyenne, and there is a significant Native American population in Billings. In our ANTS program, education related to culture is fully integrated in all lessons. We work closely with the Indian Education office in the Billings School District to ensure culturally-appropriate programming, and the ANTS program was featured at the 2017 Indian Education for All Best Practices Conference. This work has expanded to the high school level as well, in our hosting of cultural presenters from both the Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribes in an ethnobotany-focused field trip for the Environmental Science students at all three Billings public high schools, now planned for a second year.

Representing and honoring the cultural diversity of our community is a high priority for the Center.

Montana Audubon file photo



Outreach to diverse populations is also reflected in our LINKS (Leadership Institute for Nature, Kids, and Stewardship) program and in our work with students with physical and developmental disabilities. LINKS provides mentor development training for local high school students, who then partner with after-school students from Friendship House in Billings for outdoor education and exploration on-site at the Center. Friendship House programs work directly with underserved and low-income students and families in the Billings area, and the LINKS program is, through sponsorship and grant funding, provided free to participants.

In addition, our Shepard Nature Play Space is specifically designed to be ADA-compliant, ensuring that individuals with mobility assistance needs have a safe place to play outside. Students in the schools we work with who have disabilities are full participants in our field trip programs, whether following the trail to the river or canoeing in our ponds. In recent years, we have welcomed children from Eagle Mount Billings, which enhances the lives of individuals with disabilities through recreation. The Montana Audubon Center also has dedicated groups of volunteers from COR Enterprises and from Billings West High Special Education, who have contributed immeasurably to our restoration program in the last year.

During a recent roundtable, one of our program staff said, "It is so great to be employed by an organization that works with people of all abilities so comfortably." The Montana Audubon Center continually strives to include all people, regardless of background or ability, in our nature-connection programs. To learn more, visit mtaudubon.org/center.

MONTANA AUDUBON CENTER STAFF UPDATES

Our team of teacher-naturalists at the Center, along with our restoration specialist and support staff, are key to the strength of our programs. Three of these staff have recently taken on additional leadership roles at the Center:



Heather Bilden is a familiar face to many at the Montana Audubon Center. She served as its first Education Director from 2007–2013 before moving north to Lavina to help run the family ranch. She returned to the Center part-time as a Teacher Naturalist in 2016, helping out with our Fledglings

Preschool and the LINKS program, and has now moved into managing our public and family programs and teaching the Master Naturalist adult education course. She has a Master's in Education degree from MSU-Billings, with her graduate residency at the Teton Science Schools in Wyoming. Heather firmly believes that nature provides an endless educational opportunity for the curious minds and active bodies of youth.



Alina Garner comes to Billings from Walla Walla Washington, having worked in a variety of outdoor education positions in the Pacific Northwest since 2012. She has an undergraduate degree in Biology from Whitworth University. She has a passion for outdoor activities, with a particular

interest in fly fishing, a pursuit well suited to her new home in Montana. In her expanded role, she is coordinating the ANTS school program and often lends her keen artistic eye to projects at the Center.



Hannah Finch has worked at the Center for a year and half, beginning work on our 2016 summer camp staff. Her immediate past position was at the Rock Eagle 4-H Center in Eatonton, Georgia, in school programs similar to those we provide here in Billings. Hannah

is particularly knowledgeable about raptors, having worked with live birds at the George Miksch Sutton Avian Research Center at the University of Oklahoma. Hannah is now leading our Out-School programming, including summer and break camps.

Board Profile

Bernie McHugh

Growing up in a city just across the river from Boston, exposure to nature was not a large part of Bernie McHugh's day-to-day life. "Although I loved animals, I was completely a city kid and literally thought all the wildlife left in the world was in Alaska or Africa. I never saw anything wilder than suburban woodlots because I never traveled outside southern New England until I was in my thirties." By that time, he was well into his long association with W.J. Grosvenor & Company, a flooring and tool distributor that he'd worked with since 1975. But despite coming from a background with virtually no formative outdoor experiences or awareness, he quickly turned a corner when he met his wife-to-be, Frances Clark. "I married a botanist" he said, "and had to find something to do outside."

Serving as Secretary on the Executive Committee of Montana Audubon, Bernie's vision for the future is plain: to strengthen the organization's ability to perform on-the-ground bird conservation projects.

Bernie's story demonstrates that although he grew up without an outdoor family culture, it was still very possible to develop a passion for nature and wildlife later in life, through contact with enthusiastic birders. "Frances and I spent a number of our early years together participating in Massachusetts Audubon classes, workshops and outings and a lot of time in the field. Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge was a favorite haunt of ours." He asserts that spotting his first Wood Duck in 1984 is what quickly led him to the world of birding. From there, like many people, a commitment to wildlife and habitat conservation soon followed.



Bernie McHugh

From 1999–2011, he served as the Coordinator for the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, an association of over 100 land and wildlife conservation groups dedicated to promoting land protection, and from 2006–2008, he concurrently served as Citizen Education Coordinator for the Environmental League of Massachusetts. Frances' longstanding connection to Jackson Hole, as well as the couple's many trips to the Yellowstone region and Bernie's support for the Yellowstone to Yukon conservation initiative, made the area a natural choice for them when deciding to "unplug from the East." They have resided in Wilson, Wyoming since 2011. Bernie came into contact with Montana Audubon during the organization's bird festival in Glasgow, Montana, that same year. "I really appreciated the culture of the organization and was encouraged to join the board, which I eventually did in 2015 after wrapping up several other nonprofit commitments."

Now serving as Secretary on the Executive Committee of Montana Audubon, his vision for the future is plain: to strengthen the organization's ability to perform on-the-ground bird conservation projects. "Montana Audubon is the only organization that uses the tools of conservation science, policy, and education to protect the remarkable diversity that exists in our region. And we have to act today because extinct is forever."

Star Volunteers

These Montana Audubon volunteers have offered time, expertise, passion, elbow grease, advice, and a sense of humor as they've helped with recent events, projects, programs, and more. Thank you!

Rebecca Hamlin
Shane Sater
Carol Wilburn
Danny Stark
Boo Curry

Jeff Van Tine
Jesse Devoe
Ben Turnock
Alissa Anderson
Kaitlyn Farrar

Jill Davies
Austin Rice
Christine Peterson
Weston Roemmich
Matthew Keefer

Gerard Byrd
Loretta Byrd
Jack Toriello
Jessica Swanson

Center Volunteers

Special thanks to our community partners, especially the Yellowstone River Parks Association, without whose support and collaboration the Center would not exist. Also a big thanks to the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society for their continued commitment to our shared goals.

Advisory Council
John Miller
Shari Dayton
Marian Lyman Kirst
Lucinda Butler
Gordon Lemmel
Donald Seibert
Lara Guercio
Don Roberts,
Montana Audubon Board

Bob Mackin,
Yellowstone River
Parks Association
Sheila McKay,
Yellowstone Valley
Audubon Society
Megan Poulette,
Rocky Mountain College
Susan Gilbertz,
MSU-Billings

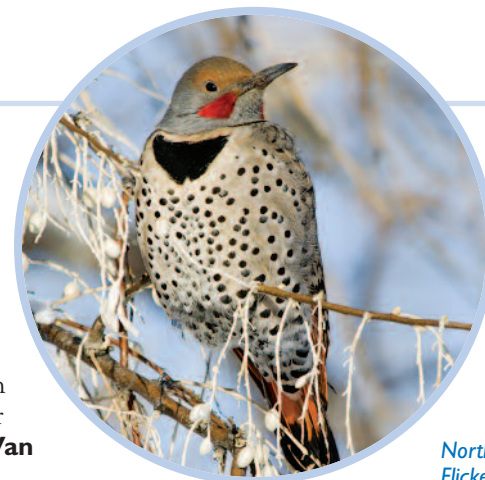
Volunteers and Interns
Theodore Hampton
Chuck Ward
John Spencer
Ron Smith
Bruce Larsen
Norm Schoenthal
Ken Reiter
Harold Silkwood
Deb Magilke

Board Members' Comings and Goings

As seasonal change is upon us in the natural world, we also have changes within the Board of Directors. The election at our recent board meeting resulted in **Rachel Van Wingen** (Ennis) as president, **Joe Batts** (Lakeside) as vice-president, **Bernie McHugh** (Wilson, WY) as secretary, and retaining **Ron Farmer** (Bozeman) as treasurer. We are very appreciative of the exceptional commitment these four officers are making in their leadership roles.

Special thanks to **Cary Lund** and **Fred Weisbecker** for their many years of service as officers—we are pleased that they both have chosen to remain on the board as at-large members. We extend a welcome to **Catherine Goodman**, who will serve as Five Valleys Audubon Chapter alternate.

We are bidding adieu to two long-time board members, **Judy Tureck** and **Bob Martinka**. Bob has been an active and dedicated Board member, having served as the Last Chance Audubon Chapter delegate as well as an at-large member over his 12-year tenure.



Bob Martinka

Northern Flicker

He participated in multiple committees, led numerous tours, and donated the stunning photographs seen on most everything Montana Audubon publishes. His infectious curiosity of the natural world has been a welcome delight.

Judy has also devoted many years to our board. Her deep conservation ethic manifests itself in she and her husband Hugo's stewardship and commitment to their ranch near Stanford, Montana. They have devoted their lives to enhancing the quality of its natural habitat as much as possible while balancing with agricultural production. Her representation on the board provided an agricultural perspective that is an important part of bird conservation across the state. We thank them both for their dedication and support for the conservation cause in Montana.

Congratulations to our 2017 Award Winners

Montana Audubon recognized the following outstanding entities and individuals during our Bird Festival in Great Falls:

The Montana Natural Heritage Program received our *Conservationist of the Year Award* for the critical role they play in wildlife and ecosystem information in the state of Montana. Many government agencies and private consulting firms use this information to better understand the impacts of development projects on our natural environment. The bird data is especially important for Montana Audubon. Learn more at their website: mtnhp.org



Beth Hill received our *Lifetime Achievement Award* for her countless hours of volunteer work over many years for the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon chapter. Beth has served the chapter in many roles (President, Treasurer, Membership Chair, Newsletter Editor, and Education Chair). She has also been involved in activities like field trips, the annual Great Backyard Bird Count, by submitting bird sightings to the Heritage Program, and more. Volunteers like Beth help Audubon chapters run smoothly!



Beth Hill

Gail Engler received an *Outstanding Achievement Award* for her tireless work and dedication toward establishing a permanent endowment fund for Montana Audubon that honors her parents, George and Laurene Engler. Both parents were deeply involved with conservation issues, especially in the Great Falls area and Rocky Mountain Front.

To learn more about George and Laurene, and the memorial fund in their honor, visit mtaudubon.org/support/our-endowments/.



Gail Engler, left, with Montana Audubon's Norane Freistadt

We also recognized **Chuck and Jean Carlson** with an *Outstanding Achievement Award* for their lifelong devotion to birds. Their achievements include running the Fort Peck Christmas Bird Count for 40 years, submitting thousands of records to eBird and the Montana Natural Heritage Program, as well as playing a pivotal role in bird monitoring and conservation in northeast Montana. Sadly, Chuck passed away in August. See adjoining memorial article.

Chuck and Jean Carlson, left, with Montana Audubon's Janet Ellis



Save the Date! June 8-10, 2018 in Kalispell

Plan on joining us for our 18th annual bird festival at the Kalispell's Red Lion Hotel next June! Montana Audubon and Flathead Audubon are already laying plans for another fun, bird-centric event! Check mtaudubon.org for festival updates in the coming weeks!

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Wildlife Grants Available



Each year Montana Audubon awards small grants from the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment.

Projects that were funded in 2017 included a citizen science study on overwintering eagles in the Bitterroot Valley, a project with high school and college students that will identify nocturnal bird calls, and two others that developed curriculum for elementary students using birds as a hook.

The application deadline for next year is December 14, 2017. For information and a grant application, visit mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants/

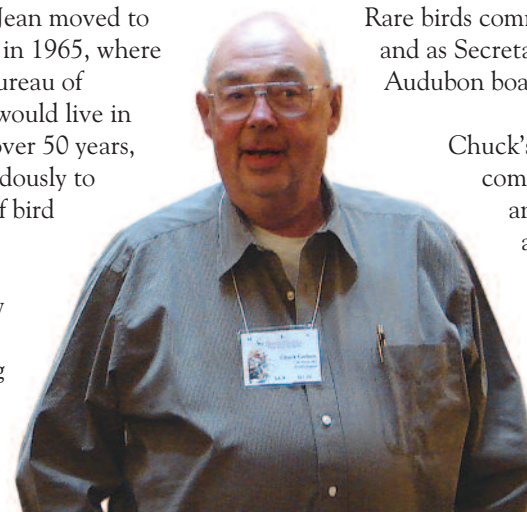
IN MEMORIUM: CHUCK CARLSON

Montana Audubon would like to take this opportunity to mark the passing of pioneering bird advocate Chuck Carlson, who died at the age of 81 on August 28, 2017.

Chuck and his wife Jean moved to Fort Peck, Montana in 1965, where he worked for the Bureau of Reclamation. They would live in the community for over 50 years, contributing tremendously to the understanding of bird populations in east-central Montana. A few of Chuck's many accomplishments include: maintaining the Fort Peck Christmas Bird

Count for nearly four decades; submission of over 6,500 bird records to the Montana Natural Heritage Program; entering an astonishing 27,000-plus records (accumulated over fifty years) into the public eBird platform; serving on the Montana Rare birds committee for many years and as Secretary on the Montana Audubon board from 1992-2003.

Chuck's warm nature, commitment to education and conservation of birds and habitat in Montana will be deeply missed. He is survived by his wife Jean, son John and daughters Chris and Cathy.



Where's the envelope?



In this issue, you may have noticed the absence of a small remittance envelope that was regularly included in our print newsletters over the years as another way for members to support Montana Audubon.

In an effort to streamline the organization (and save resources) we'd like to take this opportunity to direct your desire to support us by visiting our website. While there, you can also explore our News page for current happenings and events, join our Online Network to receive timely conservation alerts and learn more about our Public Policy, Science and Education programs.

Visit us today at
mtaudubon.org



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