



Montana Audubon

**BIRDS OF CENTENNIAL VALLEY & RED ROCK LAKES NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE TOUR
MAY 30 – JUNE 1, 2014**

A 3-day, 2-night bird watchers tour of world-renown Red Rock Lakes Refuge and Centennial Valley – it will be great fun for birders of all skill levels!

Friday, May 30: We will depart with rental vans from Bozeman, Missoula and/or Helena (coordination of group transportation will depend upon where participants are coming from) around 1:00 PM. We will drive to the scenic Centennial Valley and picturesque Elk Lake Resort (possibly making a stop or two along the way) where we will be staying both Friday and Saturday nights. We will arrive at the resort by dinnertime, the first meal of the tour. We will have snacks and drinks available that afternoon as well as all other times when traveling as a group. After dinner, there may be some optional birding around the nearby lake.

Saturday, May 31: After an early breakfast we will depart for Red Rock Lakes Refuge. Our first stop will be the sandhills and wet meadows along North Valley Road. Here we will spend an hour or two searching for Short-eared Owls, Long-billed Curlews, Sandhill Cranes, Swainson's Hawks, Sage Thrashers, Brewer's & Vesper Sparrows, White-faced Ibis and other wading birds, moose and other wildlife. We will try to spot the Peregrine Falcons (with spotting scopes) nesting on an artificial platform a mile to the west.

Our next stop will be the willow fen adjacent along South Valley Road, where an abundance of warblers, sparrows, tanagers, flycatchers and other migrant songbirds can be seen. Moose, elk, fox, and badgers are also possible here. (Please bring your rubber boots if you wish to slog around in this willow-dominated wetland!)

Our third stop will be a unique, remnant spruce-fir forest along the southern shores of Upper Red Rock Lake – here we will look for various flycatchers, kinglets, warblers, vireos, tanagers, thrushes and woodpeckers. We will arrive at Upper Red Rock Lake Campground by 11:00 AM, where we will view a variety of waterfowl on the lake, as well as forest birds in the mature aspen groves. We hope to make arrangements with a refuge staff person who will join us for lunch and provide us with an overview of the history, current research and management challenges on the refuge.

After lunch we will travel west, stopping at Shambow Pond for superb views of nesting Trumpeter Swans and other waterfowl. We will then drive past the refuge headquarters and down Lower Lake Road for outstanding views of shorebirds (including phalaropes, yellowlegs, sandpipers, avocets, willets and more), waterfowl, wading birds, raptors, etc. If there's time we will then continue in a westerly direction, searching for Ferruginous Hawks, Northern Harriers, Prairie Falcons, Golden Eagles and other open-country species along the way. In past trips, we have then gone to the north end of Centennial Valley, passing through expansive wetlands and grasslands on our way to the J-Bar-L Ranch. Here we have been treated to a fantastic dinner of ecologically-sustainable grass-fed beef, and joined the ranch manager in the field to learn more about the ranch's successful efforts to graze cattle sustainably in ways that maintain and enhance habitat for the Sage Grouse and other grassland and shrub-steppe species on the ranch. We are in the process of trying to arrange for a similar experience for our 2014 tour. As we drive back to

Elk Lake Resort during the late evening we will then search for wildlife (and especially sage grouse!)

Sunday, June 1: Breakfast at 6:00 AM, followed by an early morning exploration of the forests, meadows and wetlands near the resort. We will search for late-migrant warblers, vireos, sparrows, tanagers, and thrushes, resident woodpeckers and raptors while enjoying breath-taking views of the surrounding landscape. We will then drive to the refuge to further explore Red Rock Lakes wetland complex, including a tour of Picnic Creek and MacDonald, Wigeon and Culver ponds. We plan to return to the resort for a late lunch (1:00 PM), and then say good-bye to our wonderful hosts, Lerrina & Craig Collins. Departure will be no later than 3:00 PM, returning to Bozeman, Missoula and Helena by early evening.

Biographical Information About Your Tour Leader

Bob Martinka retired in 1997 after nearly 30 years with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). At FWP Bob began as a field biologist and then held a number of administrative positions, ending his career as Deputy Director. In “retirement” years Bob has become an avid birder and photographer, traveling to numerous locations in the Western Hemisphere to pursue these interests. He has served as a member of the Montana Audubon Board for the past 5 years. Bob was born and raised in Pennsylvania, and then migrated west to obtain degrees in Wildlife Biology and Ecology from Colorado State Univ. & Purdue Univ., with a Ph.D. from Montana State University in 1970. Helena has been Bob’s home with wife Kathy for the past 18+ years.