

spring 2018



MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT AT RISK

page 4



Bob Marinka



BIRDING AT THE CENTER

page 12

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

page 18

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

Emily Dickenson once said, "Hope is a thing with feathers that perches in the soul." This always makes me think of the sounds of birds returning in spring which gives me hope that the snow will eventually melt and I can trade my skis and snowshoes for hiking shoes and shorts!

But hope is also what drives us in our effort to protect birds. I recently returned from a very rewarding trip to Washington D.C. where I "flocked" together with my Audubon counterparts in other states to meet with each of our Congressional delegations to show support for substantive and critical federal legislation that are foundational to Audubon as we fight for the protection of birds and the environment. In this newsletter we highlight these important pieces of legislation including the threats to the 100-year old Migratory Bird Treaty Act and a new bill that could have an enormous impact on wildlife both here in Montana and across the nation, called the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

The trip was not just about lobbying, but coming together as independent Audubon organizations that work closely with our individual states. We convened to share best practices from working with local chapters to figuring out how to reach new audiences with our message. The power of thinking globally but acting locally was on full display and it made me proud to know that we have such an effective model in Montana that is also working in other states. Being independent and locally focused means we can put Montana first in our minds and our work.

So as we remove the studded tires from our cars and search for the spring migrants returning home to nest in the mountains, grasslands and sagebrush here in big sky county, let us all hope that we never experience a birdless, silent spring and continue to work together to ensure healthy bird populations for generations to come.

Yours in conservation,

Larry Berrin, Executive Director

Being independent and locally focused means we can put Montana first in our minds and our work.



Senator Jon Tester and Executive Director Larry Berrin

Pat Comins, Connecticut Audubon

spring 2018

- 4 **Cover Story:**
MBTA Threatened
- 8 **Conservation Briefs**
- 12 **News from the Center**
- 18 **2017 Annual Report**

On the cover:
Pintails at Freezeout Lake on the Rocky Mountain Front.

ADMINISTRATION UNDERMINES AMERICA'S MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

THE MBTA IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE
FOUNDATIONAL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES

In early 20th century America, the country's wildlife was teetering on the brink, having greatly suffered from unregulated market hunting and the industrial activities of our rapidly expanding nation.

This was an era when wholesale extermination of wildlife was so visible and egregious, the public would no longer tolerate it.

In the late 1800s, the most rapacious activity affecting birds was the use of their feathers, particularly as exotic decor for women's hats.

The outright hunting of millions of birds annually to fuel the millenary industry raised the call to action and led directly to passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918; one of the first substantive laws protecting wildlife in the United States and Canada.

The Act (later expanded to include Mexico, Japan and Russia) makes it illegal to "...pursue, hunt, take, attempt to take, capture or kill, in any manner, by any means whatsoever..." any bird species listed in the law.

continued...



Great Blue Heron



Hooded Mergansers (left), Canyon Wrens (right), and Red-breasted Nuthatch (below) are among the hundreds of Montana species protected under the MBTA.



The Act establishes a baseline for conservation by encouraging companies to mitigate potential threats to birds, such as covering industrial oil pits or siting wind farms properly, and by allowing the prosecution of serious violations.

Currently, 1,027 birds are protected, though the term “migratory” in the law’s title is a bit misleading, since there are many species conserved by it that are not necessarily long-distance migrants. Crows, ravens, jays, warblers, herons, loons, woodpeckers, sparrows, owls, chickadees and creepers are all listed. The MBTA is considered one of the foundational wildlife conservation laws of the United States, held in the same regard as the Clean Air Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act and others.

These days, the most significant detrimental impacts to bird populations each year are not a result of hunting or poaching, but domestic cats and human industrial activity.

For perspective of annual bird mortality resulting from some of these unintentional or “incidental” means, consider the following estimates: collisions via building glass, 676 million; collision via electrical transmission lines, 35 million; oil pits/industrial waste pits, 750,000; wind turbines, 350,000. (Source: US Fish & Wildlife Service) Historically, these types of mortalities were understood to be prohibited and subject to enforcement or penalty under the MBTA. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010 for example, caused the death of about 1 million birds. In response to

violating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, BP paid \$100 million as part of its final settlement. The Act establishes a baseline for conservation by encouraging companies to mitigate potential threats to birds, such as covering industrial oil pits or siting wind farms properly, and by allowing the prosecution of serious violations.

For a century, the “incidental take” provision of the MBTA has been used by the federal government to encourage and enforce compliance of bird conservation. Everything changed on December 22, 2017 however, when Interior Deputy Solicitor, Daniel Jorjani, a Trump appointee, issued a new legal opinion which nullifies the longstanding interpretation entirely. The 41 page document asserts that only direct, intentional “take” of migratory birds (such as poaching) is to be considered a violation of the Act, despite legal or historical precedent to the contrary. In practice, this means that any and all killing of birds due to industrial activity (oil pits and spills, mortality from wind and gas development, etc.) is permissible and unpunishable under the law. Thus, the effectiveness of one of America’s signature conservation laws was largely dismantled with the stroke of a pen. (A similar call to undo the MBTA is being led in Congress by Representative Liz Cheney, from Wyoming.)

Reaction to the legal opinion has been swift and bipartisan: in early January, seventeen former top officials from the Department of Interior/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service serving from 1973 to 2017, co-signed a letter to current Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, opposing the new interpretation. It states in part: “This legal opinion is contrary to the long-standing interpretation by every administration (Republican and Democrat) since at least the 1970s, who held that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act strictly prohibits the unregulated killing of birds.” Administrative legal opinions like the one issued by Deputy Solicitor Jorjani carry a great deal of weight and cannot be challenged in court the way regulations are, creating a very troublesome predicament for conservationists.

“We are watching closely for any follow-up actions the administration may take, such as additional rules or guidance, around this new interpretation,” National Audubon policy analyst Erik Schneider says. He acknowledges the difficulty of dealing with the new legal opinion head on, but believes pressuring legislators can help build a case to reverse it; “We’re also working to increase Congressional support,

including engagement with our members, chapters, and other organizations and directly with lawmakers, to strongly encourage Congress to uphold the law and oppose any efforts that would weaken the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.” National Audubon coordinated a sign-on letter to Congress from over 500 bird and wildlife conservation organizations in support of the Act as it was previously interpreted. Montana Audubon and nine Audubon chapters in the state were among the signatories.

This foundational wildlife conservation law, one that protects untold numbers of birds across North America, stands at a crossroads in the nation of its founding. What transpires in the coming months may determine if the Migratory Bird Treaty Act will remain a relevant conservation law into the future. Stay tuned!





The Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Berkeley Pit

In 1996, over 300 snow geese touched down on Butte's Berkeley pit, a former open pit copper mine, and perished soon after from contact with its highly contaminated water. In response, Montana Resources and ARCO/BP, the companies responsible for reclamation and management of the site, initiated a mitigation plan to prevent future bird mortality.

For twenty years, all was quiet at the Berkeley pit until November 2016, when an estimated 3,000–4,000 geese perished during a migratory push of many thousands of birds. In the years between these two incidents, hazing and vigilance of mine employees limited the death of migratory birds to just .3% of those landing on the pit's contaminated water. Until recently, the mortality of migratory birds at the site was classified as "incidental take" under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA)—at least until the new solicitor's opinion in December 2017 (see cover story).

This new interpretation completely rejects the concept of incidental take, which previously covered bird kills like those occurring at the Berkeley pit. The Trump administration now compares the threat of criminalization due to incidental take as an unacceptable burden, interfering with otherwise lawful business activities. Whereas Montana Resources could have faced fines for

violating the MBTA, the current opinion suggests that unintentionally caused bird mortalities on site are no longer covered by the act.

As a Superfund site, it is important to remember that courts have already dictated management of the Berkeley Pit. Currently, the hazing and mitigation plan is sufficient to offset penalties for the mortality of individual birds under the MBTA. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does have the ability to bring criminal charges in certain egregious instances.

One of the primary goals of the Berkeley Pit Advisory Council is to push ARCO/BP and Montana Resources to write and implement an improved mitigation plan for EPA and United States Fish and Wildlife Service approval by fall 2018. Though the public focus at the Berkeley pit has been on Snow and Ross's Geese, the Berkeley Pit Advisory Council members are focusing on the need to explore hazing techniques effective for all species of migratory birds.

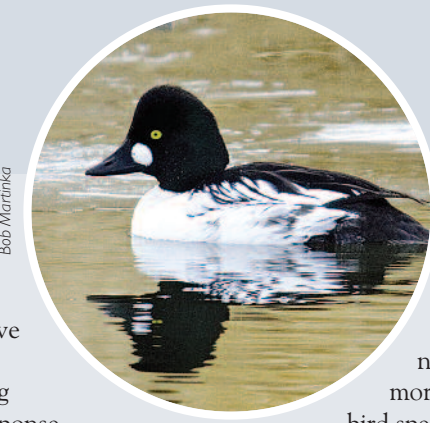
New efforts are underway to train workers on the identification of 42 important migratory species known to land in the pit. Prior to the council's recommendation for bird identification classes, accurate species information was not collected by employees of the facility.

The training program has shown to be useful: during the 2017 fall migration season the American Coot was the most abundant migratory bird to land on the pit's toxic waters, but improved identification also noted area use by Redheads, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, Common Goldeneye, Eared Grebe, Ring-necked Duck, Mallard, and Bufflehead. A Surf Scoter was even reported in late October.

Butte's Berkeley Pit



Bob Marinika



Common Goldeneye

Improved knowledge of species landing in the area should improve the workers' hazing success rate. One of the concerns about hazing migratory species is that their response behaviors differ so much. Diving birds can be difficult to haze. American Coots, Common Loons, and Western Grebes were the most commonly reported diving birds. Despite heightened vigilance, new hazing techniques, an early response communications network, and one four day period of constant work, there were 22 mortalities during the 2017 fall migration period.

Although the system is not perfect, more accurate bird species data is now being collected and an advanced warning system is in place to help prevent migratory birds from dying in the Berkeley pit. For the time being, birds migrating in and around the site gain protection through a court order rather than the MBTA, however the Advisory Council will continue to emphasize the protection of all migratory birds.



Native Streamside Vegetation Gets a Leg Up

Last fall we reported that Montana Audubon hosted a successful workshop for resource managers on the problems arising from the invasion of Russian olive and saltcedar (also known as tamarisk) along our rivers and streams. One of our main workshop goals was to create a statewide network of managers who are working to remove these highly invasive trees—and restore our native streamside vegetation. We believe that better conservation work is best accomplished when it is cooperative and coordinated.

At the urging of workshop participants, in November 2017, the Montana Invasive Species Council (MISC) decided to take on this issue as a project—giving our network a boost by providing it with staff time and a website. We are still working out the details of this network, but having a home base will help with communication and collaboration regarding projects.

The Montana Invasive Species Council was created by Governor Bullock in 2015. Housed within the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation,

MISC is the main organization in Montana bringing together resource managers throughout the state to work on invasive species, including infestations of noxious weeds such as Russian olive and saltcedar, as well as threats from Aquatic Invasive Species, including the new threat posed by a possible infestation of quagga mussels. Montana Audubon is pleased to work with MISC on a statewide network for invasive streamside trees.

To learn more about the fall 2017 workshop we hosted, as well as the threats posed by Russian olive and saltcedar, visit our website www.mtaudubon.org and enter "Conservation Workshop" in the search box.

Cavity nesting birds like the American Kestrel lose nest sites if invasive Russian olive and saltcedar replace cottonwoods along our waterways.



Bob Marinika



The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will benefit farmers, hunters, anglers, boaters, birders, hikers and other wildlife enthusiasts.

"This is an important and creative legislative initiative to protect ecosystems across our nation through constructive partnerships in states," said Fortenberry in a statement about the act. "The bill provides smart upstream policy to avoid triggering the 'emergency room procedures' of the Endangered Species Act. By effectively putting preventative measures in place, we can now better protect habitat and wildlife from becoming lost or endangered in the first place. This will benefit farmers, hunters, anglers, boaters, birders, hikers and other wildlife enthusiasts, as well as the burgeoning field of eco-tourism. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will also prove to be a powerful new tool to connect resource extraction policy with prudent resource recovery."

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would reinvent wildlife conservation for the next century, reducing conflicts over endangered species and protecting our natural heritage. The bill already has bipartisan support and to date has 35 co-sponsors in the house (14 Republicans and 21 Democrats). Montana Audubon is working closely with Montana Wildlife Federation to support this important piece of legislation and will keep you updated on the progress moving forward. You can also visit www.congress.gov and enter bill number (HR4647) to follow the progress of this critically important wildlife legislation for Montana.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act

In 1964 Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), a bipartisan commitment to safeguard our natural areas, water resources and cultural heritage. Without use of taxpayer dollars, the fund invests earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to help strengthen communities, preserve our history and protect our national endowment of lands and waters. On a recent trip to Washington DC, Montana Audubon joined forces with other independent, state Audubon organizations to support a new piece of legislation using a similar model that could be a watershed moment for the protection of wildlife across the country.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R.4647) was introduced this past December by Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Nebraska, and Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Michigan, and would provide \$1.3 billion in additional annual funds to state wildlife agencies for conserving wildlife and habitat, increasing wildlife associated recreation opportunities, and increasing conservation education programs. Although the program would be similar to the LWCF model, identified earnings earmarked to the Recovering America's Wildlife Fund would be outside of LWCF funding and currently go to the U.S. Treasury.

The majority of wildlife in the United States falls under management of state wildlife agencies, like Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) here in Montana. These agencies are largely funded by hunter and angler dollars, collected through a variety of sources including license and user fees and federal excise taxes on hunting, angling and sporting equipment. If approved, the \$1.3 billion allocation would translate into nearly \$30 million of new revenue to Montana each year for critical work to recover and manage important species and habitats on public and private lands.

How do Wind Farms Impact Birds?

We begin by reminding readers that wind energy is an important, growing renewable energy source in Montana—and that climate change is a more significant overall threat to birds than wind turbines. That said, it is important to locate—or 'site'—wind energy projects in areas that minimize adverse impacts to habitat and wildlife, including birds.

Research shows that significant, negative wind farm impacts come from two main sources: 1) towers and blades killing birds (and bats), and/or 2) turbines and their support infrastructure fragmenting habitat:

- **Bird (and bat) kills.** In order to minimize the number of birds (and bats) that die from wind towers and blades, turbines should not be placed in areas that attract a lot of wildlife—including streamside areas, migration corridors, and crucial habitat for species of conservation concern. Best Management Practices encourage developers to conduct studies *before* building a wind farm to ensure that the proposed building site is not significant for wildlife.
- **Reducing habitat.** Habitat fragmentation occurs when wind farms—and their associated roads, power lines, and other structures—displace wildlife. The impacts of habitat fragmentation go far beyond the immediate "footprint" of the wind farm, because some wildlife—particularly prairie species (like sage-grouse)—avoid areas with high towers.

The solution? Keep wind farms close to established roads, cropland, and other developed areas—and away from large blocks of important wildlife habitat.

Montana has significant wind resources: several large-scale wind farms have already been built—and a few new projects are under development. Click on the Renewable Energy button under the Conservation Policy section of www.mtaudubon.org. Currently the biggest barrier to more development is that our state has limited capacity for the transmission of wind energy.

Until last December, wind farms that killed a significant number of birds could be prosecuted under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). As an example, in 2013 a Duke Energy wind facility in Wyoming was fined about \$1 million for killing 14 Golden Eagles and 149 other birds protected under the MBTA.

Alarmingly, a recent solicitor's opinion about the MBTA (see main article) eliminates all (short-term) need for wind farms ensuring that they are not to be sited where significant bird kills could occur. This change could be reversed under future administrations.

Some prairie birds, such as the Greater Sage-Grouse, avoid areas with towers.



Habitat fragmentation is one of the main impacts from wind farms.



FWP photo

Bob Maranka

Birds and the Montana Audubon Center

“The first Maker was always wandering around talking to himself as if someone else were there. He said, ‘This is no good...let’s make land.’ So he created some ducks... finally, one last one, a little duck – they’re called mud hens, there used to be some around here.

So the little mud hen went down there and the first maker waited and waited and soon the water was all bubbling up there and there, and the poor little duck came up and he was dead. He went and opened up its little beak and there was mud, and he said ‘this is good.’

And he took that mud and mixed up it good and made ‘strong medicine’ – as the white people say – great power, and made land. The water started going down into springs and little lakes, but there was land. This is good, he said.”

–Transcript of the Crow Creation Story, as told by Daakkeebaguas, Joseph Medicine Crow.

The fourth-grade students in our Audubon Naturalists in the Schools (ANTS) program watch a video of this story as part of the “Introduction to Storytelling” lesson during the winter months. It’s the perfect piece to bring together two important threads in our education programs: an emphasis on stories of nature, especially those the students themselves have and create as part of their program, and the integration of content and pedagogy from indigenous cultures. We also love that it features a mud hen, otherwise known as the American Coot, as a core feature of the story.



American Coot

Bob Martinka

Every day at the Center, we witness the impact that studying birds can have on students of all ages. Each of the 25,000 annual visitors and program participants has an opportunity to learn about and observe the birds and other wildlife they share with the place. This learning extends to the whole of the landscape – the plants, rocks, people, invertebrates, and all of the connections between them. Some notable experiences at the Center came to our attention recently.

A woman attended a Saturday Bird Stroll in the winter months, accompanied by her granddaughter who had participated in a Center summer camp the year before. Winter is a great time for raptor viewing, and we were not disappointed that morning: the birding was made particularly easy with the use of a scope provided by a local member of Yellowstone Valley Audubon. A few days later, that grandmother told Center Director Carolyn Sevier of her experience; “I just learned so much about hawks and eagles; it was great! My granddaughter had so much fun, and as soon as we got home she dug out our Audubon book and spent the rest of the morning drawing pictures of birds.”

On another occasion, a woman called from a foster grandparent organization in Billings, interested in a Center presentation to their group about the importance of getting kids outside.

She had seen a Facebook post about our annual owl prowl, which she and her husband attended, later saying, “We had such a good time, owls are amazing!”

She also described learning about bioaccumulation of toxins in the food chain, explaining how she’d communicated



Each of the 42 classes (nearly 1,000 students) who come to the winter field trip add their own citizen science data to the eBird database.

to all her friends the danger that rodent poison presents to raptors, and how much conversation was generated within the group. She was equally excited about the professional connection she wanted to make between the foster grandparent organization and the Montana Audubon Center. That partnership represents a bridge to an expanded audience for our programs – older adults – as well as a source for additional support and supporters for our work.

Finally, birding is a popular part of the winter field trips at the Center for our ANTS kids. They learn basic identification and binocular skills at the beginning of the day (another of their class visits explores birding by ear), then go on a walk and keep track of each bird they see. Individual kids are responsible for remembering the total count of each species, so that one student is “the chickadee kid” and another “the nuthatch kid.” At the end of the day, students

return to the Center and staff brings up eBird on the projector screen. After entering their class list, the staff moves to the real-time submission map on the site, and the whole class cheers when the data point shows up in Billings. Each of the 42 classes (nearly 1,000 students) who come to the winter field trip add their own citizen science data to the database.

The accounts could go on: the time our staff rescued an injured and starving rough-legged hawk on Norm’s Island; the Great Egret that was blown off course and landed in our pond, surprising everyone who was on site that day. Story upon story, we are honored to be able to help people connect with birds, and in so doing help to preserve bird populations, habitat, and open space for years to come.

We have programs at the Center throughout the year for all ages. Check them all out on our website: www.mtaudubon.org/center

Board Profile

Curt Larsen

Growing up on a farm in southeastern South Dakota, Curt Larsen developed a deep respect for the land that was fostered early on. The prairie pothole country, a mix of grasslands, lakes and rivers, was rich in wildlife, especially birds, a meeting place where both the Central and Mississippi flyways come together. It was in this setting that Curt developed his conservation ethic.

Curt graduated from Sioux Falls College with a degree in mathematics. His wife Mary, from Yellowstone Park, also attended SFC, where they met and later married. He attended the University of Nebraska College of Law, but the lure of western landscapes brought them both to Yellowstone for summer work. After his graduation in 1981, Helena became their home and they embraced a rewarding life of service to community and local non-profits, while raising a family of two sons and a daughter. In his professional life, he has held positions in private law practice, in Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), and Montana State Fund. Much of his time at FWP was spent on Habitat Montana, a program that has helped ranching families statewide while protecting and enhancing wildlife habitat through conservation easements. Another focus of his work there included water rights/stream flow provisions in the Missouri River Basin.

He has also served non-profit organizations as diverse as Habitat for Humanity, Prickly Pear Land Trust, the Myrna Loy Center, and Helena Area Community Foundation. His legal background with Habitat Montana in developing conservations easements that

would stand the test of time coincided with the formation of Prickly Pear Land Trust in 1996. Curt was a founding board member and acted as board chair for two years, commenting that his legacy “contributed to putting the land trust on a firm organizational foundation.” Curt recently retired but his life overflows with volunteer commitments.

When asked ‘why birds’, in addition to his personal interest fostered by his youth, Curt is drawn to the considerable historical foothold Audubon possesses at the national level as well as Montana Audubon’s unique niche—both with devoted followers, credible voices, and a collaborative conservation ethic. As for his personal commitment as a new board member, he is eager to put his energy and expertise toward helping with organizational procedures and policies that will allow for sound decisions. He sees a bright future of increased bird conservation through collaborative partnerships.

We are pleased to welcome Curt to Montana Audubon and look forward to his guidance and advocacy for habitat conservation!



Curt is drawn to the considerable historical foothold Audubon possesses, with devoted followers, credible voices, and a collaborative conservation ethic.

Montana Audubon Grants Support Montana’s Birds

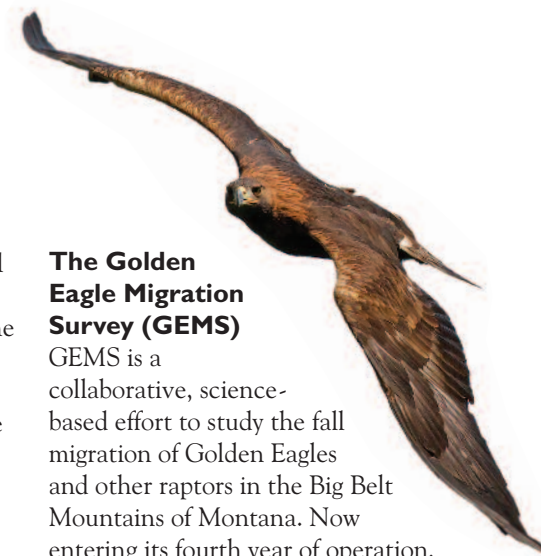
Each year Montana Audubon awards small grants from the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment. For the last 23 years, these grants have supported research and education projects directed toward wildlife and/or wildlife habitat. The 2018 grant project awards are as follows:

Project FeederWatch for Missoula Third-Graders

The University of Montana’s Bird Ecology Lab will continue to use schoolyard bird feeders to engage third-grade students in Missoula in a wintering bird population study.

The Golden Eagle Migration Survey (GEMS)

GEMS is a collaborative, science-based effort to study the fall migration of Golden Eagles and other raptors in the Big Belt Mountains of Montana. Now entering its fourth year of operation, census data already collected from the GEMS site suggests that this flyway may represent the largest observable concentration of migrating Golden Eagles found in the lower 48 states.



Bob Marinka

BECOME A MEMBER OF MONTANA AUDUBON THROUGH OUR ANNUAL CONSERVATION FUND

Your membership helps support one of the most effective conservation organizations in Montana. Enjoy a year of benefits including timely conservation updates, invites to special events, our biannual newsletter and the peace of mind knowing that you’re actively contributing to the protection of birds, other wildlife and their habitats across our vast state.

For more information email us at info@mtaudubon.org or call 406-433-3949.

TREASURES NEEDED FOR BIRD FESTIVAL SILENT AUCTION!

Think fun, think good-natured bidding wars, think treasures, think NEW ITEMS.

Please donate to the silent auction at our Bird Festival, June 8–10, in Kalispell. Montana Audubon will have a small silent auction this year. In the past, people have donated art, pottery, bird feeders and houses, delicious

homemade cookies, preserves, and more. Donations may be delivered to a Montana Audubon office—or brought with you to the Festival.

Questions? Contact Janet Ellis at jellis@mtaudubon.org. Thanks for your generous help!

ANNUAL
conservation
FUND



American Avocet

Bob Marinka

Bob Marinka

WELCOME TO MERLIN BIRDING & NATURE TOURS!



In 2017 former Montana Audubon Executive Director Steve Hoffman, along with partner Steve Eshbaugh, launched Merlin Birding & Nature Tours, an international birding enterprise.

The company's mission is to provide unique and extraordinary birding and natural history excursions in the U.S. and abroad while supporting effective conservation programs in the local areas visited. A recent Merlin Tours trip to Veracruz, Mexico for example, helped support the River of Raptors Migration Project – an important long-term effort to monitor the largest concentration of migratory raptors on earth, and to protect key stopover habitats the birds require to survive their arduous journey.

In partnership with the National Audubon Society and Holbrook Travel, Merlin Birding & Nature Tours is offering an adventure to Guatemala from January 30 to February 9, 2019.

This is a rare opportunity to explore the rich avian diversity of Guatemala's tropical ecosystems. See firsthand many species Audubon is working to protect. You'll explore a variety of habitats while searching for uncommon and endemic species, and meet with locals who are part of the Audubon Bird Tourism Initiative. Birders will experience the area's stunning natural riches while supporting the local community and helping to protect this diverse, yet threatened ecosystem.

A portion of tour fees from Audubon participants is donated to Montana Audubon.

For more information on this trip and other tours, please visit www.merlinbirding.com or call 406-461-5714.

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!

- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Andrew Byl | Loralai Hammond | MSU-B Yellowjacket | Karen Grimes |
| Tracy Thompson | Nikki Witherall | Volunteers | Hannah Finch |
| Brenna Bodine | Lesley BuckElk | Rimrock Foundation | Alina and Alex Garner |
| Cortnee Tryan | Alene Molloy | Educational Talent Search | Jennette Rasch |
| Lydia Zuklic | Kylee Brawley | Volunteers | Emily and Joseph Chilcoat |
| Harold Silkwood | Cat Lynch | 4-H Volunteers | Cat Lynch |
| Matthew Losneck | Jackie Haider | Boy Scouts of America | Sandra Abraham |
| Brockmeier Family | Kelly Smith | HRDC Staff | Gayle Lam |
| Helen and Clint | Katrina Miller | Riverstone Health Staff | Donald Seibert |
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| Quincy Petty | Guercio Family | Clarissa Cerovski | Megan Poulette |
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| Kevin Pope | West High Special | James Calderhead | Lucinda Butler |
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| Darryl Wilson | Skyview High Special | Brian Henderson | Steve Regele (YVAS) |
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| Jeanne and Cash | | | |
| Guckeen | | | |



*Wild swans
in the Mission
Valley*

Jenene Lichtenberg



Nominate a Conservation Hero for a 2018 Montana Audubon Award

Nominations are now being accepted for Montana Audubon's 2018 awards. Consider nominating someone you know for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, a Special Achievement award, Citizen Scientist of the Year, or a Lifetime Achievement award!

Nomination forms can be found on our website mtaudubon.org. The deadline for nominations is May 21, 2018. Please submit via email (preferred) to jellis@mtaudubon.org or by mail to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624.

Award winners will be announced at our Bird Festival banquet in Kalispell on June 9.

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Thanks to you and other generous supporters, Montana Audubon continues to positively impact native birds, other wildlife and their habitats across Montana. Thank you for your exceptional level of support for our vital conservation work!

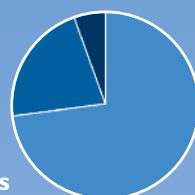
We are fortunate to have permanent endowments at both the Montana Community Foundation (MCF) and Billings Community Foundation (BCF). MCF manages three endowment accounts with one benefiting bird distribution information and special projects, one for general support of Montana Audubon's conservation programs, and the George and Laurene Engler Montana Audubon Conservation Fund, providing support for all Montana Audubon programs. BCF manages three separate endowment accounts—for the Montana Audubon Center, our Public Policy program, and for general support of Montana Audubon. We invite you to consider these options of giving to help ensure the bright future of Montana's native birds and wild places. For more information, please contact staff at the Helena office, 406-443-3949.

Statement of Financial Position 12-month Fiscal Year Ending 9-30-17

Unrestricted Net Assets	\$ 499,904
Board Designated Endowment	\$ 906,994
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	\$ 57,663
Permanently Restricted Net Assets	\$ 51,744
Total Net Assets	\$ 1,516,305



Contributions	\$ 320,920
Earned Income	\$ 284,801
Grants & Contracts	\$ 277,262
Investment Income	\$ 110,617
Total	\$ 993,600
Other Income (Estate Gift)	\$ 388,675



Programs	\$ 680,488
Administrative	\$ 200,339
Fundraising	\$ 45,431
Total	\$ 926,258

Montana Audubon is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization under 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. This financial information is drawn from audited financial statements by the accounting firm Douglas Wilson & Company, PC.

Thank You for Supporting Montana Audubon

Montana Audubon depends on the generous gifts of individual donors who support our mission to protect Montana's bird species, wildlife, and habitat. The following people contributed to a variety of projects from April 2017 through March 2018. Due to space constraints in this publication, we have listed donors with gifts totalling \$100 or more. We also express our sincere appreciation to the additional 500 supporters who gave gifts under \$100 this year.

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Bob Martinka

Snow Geese



American
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Donor Profile

Bob Mackin

A descendant of early 20th century settlers, Montana Audubon donor Bob Mackin has deep roots in Montana; “My paternal grandparents both homesteaded near Brockway in the early 1900s, following the great westward migration.” As he describes it, Walter and Marie Mackin both came from pioneering families out of North Dakota and Minnesota respectively. After marrying, the couple maintained businesses in the area for many years before moving to Billings in 1934. “By that time, grandpa had already launched the bridge construction business, one that we’re still running today.” It was partly that business that enabled Bob to see a great deal of the state during his summers growing up. “We built, repaired and surveyed bridges all over the place. It inadvertently gave me a perspective of how geographically big and ecologically diverse Montana really is!”

Bob was raised in Billings and had many outdoor and intellectual experiences that cemented his interest in the natural world as a young man. He credits camping and hiking with his Boy Scout troop and later, inspiring high school teachers who helped, as he puts it, “open my mind to environmental issues and concepts,” as foundational to his outlook on life. Even after marriage to his wife Elizabeth and raising their son Elliot, in addition to running the family business, Bob Mackin still found time for long journeys into the backcountry. Multiday winter trips to places like Yellowstone’s Shoshone basin and Grand Canyon with his friend Ryan were particularly memorable;

“I want future generations to be able to experience nature as I have.”

“On one of our Yellowstone winter skiing expeditions, we were surprised to stumble across a freshly killed pair of elk, which ravens were feasting on. We clearly sensed a well-fed wolf pack was close by!”

His reasons for supporting Montana Audubon isn’t just about birds, but stems from a desire to help establish a conservation legacy for the state he cares so deeply for. “Birding is great, it gets me outside and maintains my passion for wildlife and nature. But I’m most interested in supporting outreach, education and community engagement related to conservation, which is a big part of what Montana Audubon does. We have to get all people, younger ones especially, out on the landscape so they can develop a lasting relationship with it. I want future generations to be able to experience nature as I have.”

Well said Bob; we thank you for your steadfast support!

Bob with his wife Elizabeth and their son Elliot



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Please note this list does not include festival, tour, or event registration fees, nor does it include sales, auction purchases below fair market value, or endowment giving.

Please consider including Montana Audubon in your estate plans to ensure a bright future for Montana's birds and other wildlife.



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We are deeply grateful to those of you who have made generous gifts and lasting tributes in memory of:

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Norma Devan
Natalie Dietrich
Tom Folkers

Kathryn (Billie) Hicks
Lorraine Hummel
Barbara Wilson Molen
Betty Sanford
Jean E. Smith
Tom Thode

Bob Merrinika

Special Thanks

With sincere gratitude, we thank the following Audubon chapters, foundations, corporations, businesses, agencies and organizations for their support and partnership over the past year. Their contributions make our work possible.

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Bitterroot Audubon Society
Five Valleys Audubon Society
Flathead Audubon Society
Last Chance Audubon Society
Mission Mountain Audubon Society
Pintler Audubon Society
Sacajawea Audubon Society
Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society
Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society

Foundations

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Sample Foundation
Whitefish Community Foundation
Wolf Creek Charitable Foundation

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MT Dept of Administration, Title and Registration Bureau
MT Dept of Natural Resources & Conservation
MT Dept. of Fish Wildlife & Parks
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Organizations and Educational Institutions

American Prairie Reserve
Arrowhead Elementary School
Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana
Beartooth Elementary
Bench Elementary
Big Sky Elementary
Billings School District #2
Billings Senior High School
Billings YMCA
Bitterroot Elementary School
Blue Creek Elementary School District #3



Bob Merrinika

Horned Grebe

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Canyon Creek School District #4
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Glacier National Park Conservancy
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Head Start, Inc.
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Junior League of Billings
Lame Deer Public Schools
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Montana Wilderness Association
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Network for Good
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Pioneer School PTA
Poly Drive Elementary School
Ponderosa Elementary
Pryor Public School
Raptor View Research Institute
Rocky Mountain Elementary
Sandstone Elementary
Spring Creek Colony School - Fergus County
Sunrise Montessori School
The Partnership Project Action Fund
United Way of Yellowstone County
Yellowstone Art Museum
Yellowstone River Parks Association

wings across the big sky

19th ANNUAL BIRD FESTIVAL
June 8–10, 2018
Red Lion Hotel, Kalispell, Montana

**We're delighted to bring Montana Audubon's
19th Annual Wings Across the Big Sky Bird
Festival to northwest Montana this season!**

Our longstanding community event is co-hosted this year by the Flathead Audubon Society and will be held at the Kalispell Red Lion Hotel, June 8–10, 2018.

Registration opens at 1:00 pm, so plan to sign in and enjoy a special presentation Friday afternoon, followed by a dinner buffet and our keynote address. This year's featured speaker is noted conservationist Dr. Stuart Strahl of the Chicago Zoological Society who will give a talk entitled, "Birds, People, & Communities – Charting the Future of Conservation"

Fun festival events like our "Cakes for Conservation" dessert fundraiser, Nature Adventure Tour silent auction, and more are on tap for this year. And of course, amazing birding field trips are scheduled around the Glacier-Flathead region over the weekend in addition to timely bird conservation presentations on Montana Audubon's work. A variety of informational tables and festivities will be on hand as we celebrate efforts to conserve our birds and wildlife across Montana.

Visit our website www.mtaudubon.org for information on our Festival headquarters, speakers, and fantastic birding field trips to help you decide how to spend your bird festival weekend in and around Kalispell.

**REGISTER NOW—
the field trips fill fast!**
We make it easy: register
online at www.mtaudubon.org,
call the Montana Audubon office
in Helena (406) 443-3949, or
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