

fall 2019

WHAT THE BIRDS ARE TELLING US

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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

Can you imagine what Montana would sound like in the spring without the familiar songs of our native birds? From the Rockies in the west to the vast grasslands in the east, our diverse state is host to over 430 species of birds that either breed here or pass through in migration. Many of us have noticed a decline in their numbers and now we learn more about the cause – a combination of climate change, habitat loss and pesticide use. The Three Billion Birds study in the journal *Science* was particularly eye-opening. This is the first study to undertake an accounting of the net population changes across a total of 529 breeding bird species in the United States and Canada. The researchers analyzed birds on a group-by-group basis, allowing them to identify declines among species that use similar habitats.

The study included 48 years of data from multiple independent sources, including the North American Breeding Bird Survey and the Christmas Bird Count. A comprehensive analysis of 11 years of data from 143 NEXRAD radar stations showed a similarly steep decline in the magnitude of migration. The study clearly shows that the losses threaten some of our most common and beloved birds. Of the nearly three billion birds lost, 90% came from just 12 bird families, including sparrows, warblers, finches, and swallows. These common, widespread species play influential roles in ecosystems. The greater web of life, including us, is in trouble.

When studies like these are published, we sometimes are left to wonder “what can I do?” A popular Chinese proverb says: “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago and the second best time is now.” So while I wish we had done more 50 years ago, I also know it is not too late. Rachel Carson taught us all that our actions can not only cause problems for birds but we can also be the solution. In the next few months we will be launching new strategic initiatives that will get to the heart of the problems we are facing in Montana when it comes to our avian populations. Stay tuned as these new programs and projects will need your participation and support so we can all do our part to protect our feathered neighbors in Montana.

Larry Berrin, Executive Director



We need your participation and support so we can all do our part to protect our feathered neighbors in Montana.

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Bob Martinka photo.



Upland Sandpiper

WHAT THE BIRDS ARE TELLING US

Three billion birds disappeared from our skies in just 50 years. What does this mean for us?

In 1962 Rachel Carson challenged all of us to try and imagine a quieter world. To wake up one morning in May and not hear the sounds of birdsong filling the air was a chilling image that resonated with many of us. To this day, *Silent Spring* is considered one of the most important books to document the detrimental effects of pesticides, including DDT which was later banned.

In the early 1960s we didn't realize the full extent that our actions were having on birds. Once people realized that DDT was impacting reproduction by thinning the eggshells of some of our most majestic raptors at the very top of the avian food chain, including our national symbol, we took action. As a result of this ban and the dedication of funding for conservation programs, the Bald Eagle and other birds of prey made a recovery. Rachel Carson proved to all of us that not only can we be the cause of the problem, but once we are made aware of it, we can also be the solution.

Now we have the opportunity to act again.

continued



Chestnut-collared Longspur

Bob Martinka

Birds are indicator species, serving as acutely sensitive barometers of environmental health, and their mass declines signal that the earth's biological systems are in trouble.

This fall, the Three Billion Birds study in the journal *Science* found staggering, widespread bird declines. Cumulatively, three billion fewer birds fill the skies of North America today than in 1970 – a loss of more than a quarter of our birds. This was not a report on projected future loss on the basis of current trends, but rather one that tallied actual losses of familiar species. Sparrows, juncos, finches, blackbirds, warblers, swallows and even our state bird the Western Meadowlark are among the birds in decline. Their loss affects the services birds provide us all, from dispersing seeds to controlling insects. And it is not just birds – scientists are seeing similar declines in wildlife across North America and around the world.

On October 10, the National Audubon Society also released a groundbreaking report that forecasts, in extraordinary detail, the impact climate change will have on North American birds through the end of the century. The *Survival by Degrees* climate report shows that 389 bird species are vulnerable to extinction because of climate change. Audubon scientists studied 604 North American bird species using 140 million bird records and the same climate models used by more than 800 experts in 80 countries. The science shows that the majority of North American bird species – even familiar and beloved birds like the Mountain Bluebird and American Robin – are at risk of extinction from climate change.

Many of us who have been observing birds for decades were not surprised by these reports. You may have your own accounts of trends and evidence that you have observed in your lifetime. From backyards to the vast grasslands in the eastern part of the state – fewer birds filling our skies has not gone unnoticed. Studies like these need data so your observations matter. This is why we launched Montana eBird a year ago. Montana eBird compiles a great deal of Montana-specific bird data by citizen scientists all across our state so we can help by adding to a database that can be used in the future to note trends.

Birds are indicator species, serving as acutely sensitive barometers of environmental health, and their mass declines signal that the earth's biological systems are in trouble. In a way birds are our “canary in the coalmine” when it comes to the environment, so what impacts them will eventually impact us. You may have heard the story of caged birds whose sensitivity to lethal gasses served as a natural alarm call to coal miners as they learned that if the canary died, it was time to exit the cave. The same observation can be made about our planet but unfortunately, there is no exit.

There was one bright spot in both studies however. They show that if we take action now we can help improve the situation. For instance, waterfowl numbers have actually increased significantly, likely thanks to the decades-long efforts to fund restoration and protect the wetlands they need to feed and breed. Unfortunately most birds, including some of our most common species, do not have the kind of consistent, dedicated funding that waterfowl have benefited from. These studies highlight the urgency of addressing America's avian crisis by ramping up conservation investments and defending the laws that protect birds and their habitats.

Right now, there is a bill in the House of Representatives that would provide this kind of sustained funding to other birds and wildlife in trouble – the bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act. If it passes, Montana will receive nearly \$30 million dollars per year for proactive wildlife conservation funding that would benefit birds and other wildlife in our state. Together, we can avoid a silent spring and pass on the gift of bird song to future generations. We urge our congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. to support the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.



Sage-grouse Need State and Federal Conservation Support

As the close of the year approaches, the fate of Greater Sage-grouse in Montana continues to be affected by management decisions on the federal and state level. Given a September 2019 report to state lawmakers indicating a decline of approximately 40% in the past three years (surveys indicating the presence of about 43,000 birds), those decisions will impact the potential need to protect Greater Sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act during the 2020 review of the species' listing petition. Taking steps in the right direction, the Montana Sage-grouse Oversight Team approved over \$3 million in state funding for term easements and permanent conservation easements scattered throughout sage-grouse core habitat. Overall state support for the Sage-grouse Stewardship Act is strong, and the addition of term leases as a conservation option have helped broaden the base of private landowners willing to work with the program.

Further afield, the Interior Department's decision to relax restrictions on oil and gas development on Bureau of Land

Management (BLM) managed lands, continue to threaten core habitat and several Important Bird Areas in Montana. At the onset, an Endangered Species listing was partially avoided because of collaborative efforts to strengthen BLM resource management plans (RMPs) throughout the species' range, alongside of strengthened state management plans. With Montana upholding its end of the bargain, changes to BLM RMPs that are not supported by science may push sage-grouse closer to the brink. Montana Audubon continues to fight these changes, and as part of that process have identified the core areas most at risk, and taken steps to put legal pressure on the BLM to reinstate strong protections in sage-grouse habitat.

Citing extreme drought as the likely cause for declines to sage-grouse numbers in 2019, the September report cautions too much concern over bird numbers they see as falling within normal population fluctuations.



James Yule



2019 Field Projects at a Glance

Working closely with partner organizations, Audubon chapters, and citizen scientists, we supported research and monitoring projects in Important Bird Areas, and statewide, on species like Long-billed Curlew, Harlequin Duck, Chimney Swift, Black Swift, and dozens of songbirds

and colonial waterbird species, like the American White Pelican and Black Tern. This work kept us busy from April through August, a season that started out when snow was still flying, and ended just as the leaves began to turn their brilliant gold.

To get involved and learn more, please visit our citizen science website, montanabirdsurveys.com

OUR WORK BY THE NUMBERS

- 87 Curlew sightings recorded in western Montana, working with 30 volunteers
- 2 Pairs of Harlequin Ducks tagged in Glacier National Park to track annual movement
- 3 IBAs surveyed for waterbirds, locating the fifth nesting colony of American White Pelicans working with two volunteers
- 20+ Locations in Canyon Ferry and Madison River IBAs surveyed for songbirds and noxious weeds
- 8 New nesting sites discovering while hosting three eastern Montana Chimney Swift survey trainings
- 43 Waterfalls surveyed in Black Swift habitat, working with 20 field technicians and volunteers
- 4 New Black Swift nesting colonies discovered



The Migratory Bird Treaty Act Provisions Still in Limbo

In December of 2017, when changes to the interpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) weakened the International Treaty, federal managers were left in limbo regarding how to prevent indirect threats to birds. To recall, the Solicitor General's interpretation of the law, whose language remains unchanged, reversed the intent of the MBTA to cover "incidental" take, or actions, threats or activities creating indirect sources of bird mortality (think wind farms, etc.).

Seeking to understand enforcement of incidental take by individual states in

the absence of federal mandates, the Association Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) combed through laws working with state agencies to find that just 17 states have legal provisions stipulating the regulation of incidental take. They also found that sources of indirect mortality continue to be common in the environment. Among the most common were collisions with buildings, lead in the environment (from shot or ammunition), and collisions with transmission lines or communications infrastructure.

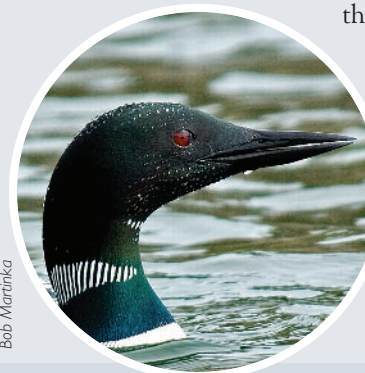
Fortunately, Montana was one of the 17 states with some legal standing, though

AFWA did point out many states have never prosecuted incidental take cases. Montana prohibits the killing any birds, other than game birds, without special permission by our state's wildlife agency.

Our state code clarifies the unlawfulness to "kill... any wild bird, other than a game bird, or any part

of the plumage, skin, or body of the bird... or to take or destroy [its] nest or eggs" (Montana Code § 87-5-201(1)). Though violations can result in fines and hunting restrictions, AFWA's interpretation was that Montana's laws may fall just short of intending to enforce incidental take. As yet, our state hasn't faced this legal test, but the AFWA report suggests this uncertainty is great cause for states to begin strengthening their regulatory authority now.

Common Loon is a species often affected by incidental take, whether from off-shore gillnet operations in the mid-Atlantic, or exposure to heavy metals in settling or tailings ponds.



Bob Martinka



The Promise of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Like the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and our local Habitat Montana land conservation program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has garnered bipartisan support for decades. In exchange for the removal of non-renewable resources generated by offshore drilling, a portion of operational royalties are annually dedicated to LWCF. Funds are intended to protect parks, natural areas, national forests, wildlife refuges, outdoor recreational opportunities, and to encourage sustainable forestry along with a strong recreation economy. Up to \$900 million at the federal level, the injection of funds to states can have a ripple effect. In Montana we have received just under \$620 million over five decades. The support has affected Important Bird Areas like Glacier

National Park, Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), the Charles M. Russell NWR, the Blackfoot Valley (which contains Brown's Lake), and the Madison River, in addition to helping preserve state parks like Lewis & Clark Caverns, Lone Pine, and Giant Springs.

As the program approaches its fifty-five year landmark, Montana Audubon is proud to solidly support permanent reauthorization of this fund. Sentiment remains strong that full funding for LWCF is an important next step for our wild places, wildlife, and educational and recreational opportunities for Montanans.

For more information and to get involved please visit www.lwcfcoalition.org.

Full funding for LWCF is an important next step for our wild places, wildlife, and educational and recreational opportunities for Montanans. Pictured: Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area.



Caroline Provost



Survival by Degrees, Update from National Audubon

Our climate is changing, and our birds are among the visual, measurable indicators that make this truth evident. Five years ago, the National Audubon Society released their first climate report, which opened our eyes to the effects climate change may have on both the summer and winter ranges of 314 bird species. This year, a follow-up report based on data from the U.S., Canada and Mexico, gives us zip code-level detail about potential affects to 604 North American bird species.

In *Survival by Degrees: 389 Species on the Brink*, scientists assess the exposure risk, adaptive capacity, and sensitivity that bird species have, given a changing climate under three emissions scenarios. The first report's findings relied on data from the Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey, but in the 2019 report, over 140 million bird observations were used; observations primarily contributed by individual citizens. Suffice it to say, birds are already bearing the consequences of a changing climate. As an example, the Mountain Plover, a state species of concern and species of the western Great Plains, is predicted to lose 76% of its habitat – facing potential extirpation from the Oklahoma and New Mexico portions of its range.

Interestingly, the report finds that Montana is one of the states most likely to undergo cropland expansion as the climate changes, a threat we know negatively affects many of our most threatened

grassland birds like Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and McCown's Longspur. The report also finds that these species, and especially Greater Sage-grouse, Brewer's Sparrow, Lark Bunting and Baird's Sparrow are threatened by increased fire activity throughout the western U.S. Findings like this underscore the importance of a habitat-focused approach to conservation. It is important to give birds the space and landscape needed to support their ability to adapt and respond. The report also states a clear goal before us: If we are able to come together to move forward on climate solutions, there is reason for hope. "By stabilizing carbon emissions and holding warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, 76 percent of vulnerable species will be better off, and nearly 150 species would no longer be vulnerable to extinction from climate change."

The full report is available online, and you can access it by visiting our website and searching for Birds & Climate.



Mountain Plover

Bob Martinka



2019–2020 Christmas Bird Counts

You can enjoy a fantastic day outdoors this winter and learn about the resident birds in your area by joining a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) near you!

These annual outings have been maintained by Audubon organizations around the nation since the year 1900 with the first Montana count in 1908. There were over 30 counts around the state last season.

This winter's CBCs will occur between mid-December 2019 and the first week of January, 2020. Please visit mtaudubon.org for more information about the CBC, which will post in late November.

Christmas Bird Counts are family-friendly, community events: all experience levels are welcome!

American Tree Sparrow



Bob Martinka



Wildlife Grants Available

Montana Audubon will again make available mini-grants from the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment. The application deadline for the 2020 grant cycle is December 16, 2019. For information and a grant application, visit: mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants

Projects funded through this program in 2019 included supporting the Restoration of Trumpeter Swans in the Blackfoot Valley, the Impacts of Conifer Removal on Sagebrush-Obligate Songbirds, the construction of a Wildlife Viewing Blind at Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir, and development of Avian Profiles in the Sevenmile area of the Prickly Pear Valley.



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 print 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 406-443-3949.

*Montana Audubon is registered as a nonprofit organization without members. Participation in this program does not include voting responsibilities.



Bob Martinka

✓ Back at the Beginning: Ten Years of Conservation Education

"The new Norm Schoenthal Field Lab is open for business at the Audubon Conservation Education Center (ACEC) in Billings!"

So went the announcement of the dedication of the Norm Schoenthal Field Lab on October 17, 2009. Ten years later, the Center now provides education programs to more than 20,000 visitors each year.

The idea of a conservation education facility in Billings – a place to get children and families outside to learn about the animals, plants, and ecosystems of the area – had been around for a long time. What is now called the Montana Audubon Center was the culmination of the efforts of a number of organizations, including Montana Audubon, the Yellowstone River Parks Association (YRPA), Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society (YVAS), and others. The work of all of these partners recognized that connecting kids to the natural world had important benefits to kids and nature.

The location along South Billings Boulevard had been a gravel pit during repairs on Interstate 90 in the early 1990s. The Yellowstone River Parks Association, having only recently been incorporated, acquired the property from the Long Family Trust in 1998. Through the leadership of Norm Schoenthal and others, volunteers began work to rehabilitate the landscape. From the beginning, the vision for the space was always a combination of native Montana plant communities and opportunities for youth engagement. Education was a priority from the beginning, not only via Norm with his own background as a professor for almost 30 years at Eastern Montana College, but also through the involvement of teachers Jean Smith, Dean Smith, and John Miller.

At the same time, Montana Audubon was in the process of identifying a location to establish its first nature center. They were looking at a number of local properties, including the current Sundance Lodge Recreation Area, Riverfront Park, and

Pompeys Pillar. In 2002, Montana Audubon teamed up with YRPA on the current site, and over the next six years collectively raised more than \$350,000 for the construction of a Wet Lab to serve as the headquarters for restoration, education, and research. Kathryn "Billie" Hicks of YVAS, in addition to other significant contributions, made and sold peanut brittle to help fund the project. Other notable individuals from early on include YRPA members John Spencer, Earl Gus, and Sam and Mary Walter, and from Montana Audubon Paul Belanger and Robert Fitzgerald.

Since that time, both the programs and the landscape have matured. On the property, hundreds of volunteers planted cottonwoods and junipers which have grown into an oasis of riparian habitat on the urban edge of Billings and the Center's education programs have become a core community asset as well as a model of conservation education in the region.

✓ Urban Forestry Partnership

We all know fall is a great time to enjoy the color of forests. For a team of professionals from Billings it's also a great time to learn about them – and no better place than in New York City!

As a team, representatives from the Montana Audubon Center, the City of Billings, and Rocky Mountain College won a coveted spot in the Natural Areas Conservancy's "Convening" on urban forested natural areas, held in late October in New York City. The Center's Community Programs Coordinator Heather Bilden, City Forester Steve McConnell, and Dr. Megan Poulette from Rocky Mountain

College joined representatives from 12 cities across the country. They were the only team from Montana and one of only two teams from a Western state.

Urban forests around the world are often overlooked in conversations about habitat conservation, but they are unique ecological and cultural assets. Not only do they provide a primary interface between an increasingly urban human population and the natural world, thus improving community well-being, but are also critical islands of habitat for many species. Birds can especially benefit from appropriately managed urban forests. The public spaces in the Billings-area forests

are made up of 9,400 trees in parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and other spaces as well as vegetation on 1,400 acres managed for their natural characteristics.

Over the last summer, Heather and Steve hosted community programs to increase awareness of the natural areas in Riverfront Park. In addition, Megan coordinated students from Rocky Mountain College to gather park data, combining education with citizen science efforts to determine species distribution. This information was shared at the conference, while also learning about best practices and other case studies on urban forests across the country.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

It's always great to highlight those who contribute to our work. We'd like to introduce and recognize the following star volunteers!

First is **Haley Ash-Eide**, who came to the Center this summer and quickly become an integral part of our volunteer family. Haley is currently studying Environmental Studies at Montana State University, after recently transferring from Chief Dull Knife College, and has intentions of studying Environmental Law. In her short time with us, Haley helped with our restoration and summer camp programs, finding a fondness working with our recurring volunteer restoration groups. One of the greatest things Haley has learned through her volunteer experience is that unexpected things always happen – so come prepared to just go with the flow! Being outside sharing and learning with others and knowing she is making a difference is a big part of why Haley enjoys volunteering with us!



Our second Spotlight goes to a volunteer who has been with the center since YRPA acquired the property: **Harold Silkwood**. Starting his academic career in Agriculture Economics, Harold completed college with a focus in Geology and studied under Norm Schoenthal, creating a lifelong connection to the Center. Harold takes pride in making sure the Center looks its best and participating in its ongoing transformation from a gravel pit to a wonderful environmental education oasis. To Harold, the Center is a special place where you get to "see the excitement in the kids, the discoveries they make, whether it's a snake, bug, or spider," and enjoys working with those who also want to make an impact in continuing to help make the Center the best it can be!



Congratulations to our 2019 Award Winners

During our 2019 bird festival in Glasgow, Montana Audubon honored the following outstanding individuals for their conservation achievements.

Harriet Marble Lifetime Achievement Award

For this year's Lifetime Achievement Award, we recognized Harriet Marble as a Montana Audubon long-term supporter, mentor, and foundational contributor. She made headway for women and conservation across the state, serving as one of the first female Interpretive Park Rangers in Glacier National Park, being active in the League of Women Voters, raising a family in Chester Montana, and contributing to avian conservation via her thousands of bird observations. She provided leadership to Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon, as well as serving on the Audubon Council – the predecessor to what is now Montana Audubon.



As a founding member of the Audubon Council, Harriet provided literature on grizzly bear biology and conservation in public libraries and schools, worked on Bald and Golden Eagle recovery efforts, advocated for wilderness protection and strong conservation on National Forest lands, and worked to limit oil and gas development on

public lands. Later, as the Audubon Council became Montana Audubon, she served on the board continuously until 2018, and also as a participating member of the Montana Bird Records Committee. She is proud of her lead role in the establishment of the Audubon Wildlife Endowment Fund, started with the purpose of using earnings to establish an annual small grants program for worthy bird conservation and science research projects to individuals and local chapters in Montana. Her commitment to Audubon didn't stop at the local and state levels, as Harriet was selected by the Rocky Mountain Regional National Audubon chapters to serve as the Rocky Mountain Regional Board member on

the National Board in 1987 and again in 1989. During her tenure on the National Board she served on the Chapter Relations, Planning, Scientific, and Sanctuaries subcommittees, including an Ad Hoc Committee on the Platte River.

Harriet is beloved by Audubon at all levels, speaking highly of her commitment to conservation. We are honored to recognize her many achievements.

Sherry Ritter Conservationist of the Year

Montana Audubon and Bitterroot Audubon recognized Sherry Ritter for her commitment to conservation with our 2019 Conservationist of the Year Award. The one sentiment continuously expressed regarding Sherry, is that her enthusiasm and love for birds and the natural world is palpable, contagious, and unending. Whether she is leading field trips of young 4th or 7th graders in the Bitterroot, or trips of more mature birders to special places like



the Big Hole River during Memorial Day, her patience and teaching style make one and all feel welcomed and excited to learn about birds and the natural world.

Sherry's contributions to conservation are multi-faceted. Her professional biology career

spans three decades and three great Western states, Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. During that time she also contributed to citizen science projects like the Breeding Bird Surveys – completing 29 routes in those three states up until the late 90s.

Mike Schwitters Outstanding Achievement Award

Mike Schwitters was honored with the 2019 Outstanding Achievement Award. Mike's contributions to the knowledge and conservation of wildlife are legendary in Montana and throughout the country. When it comes to knowledge of both Snow Geese and Ross's Geese migration and populations, in particular at Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area, no one individual has contributed more. He is the "go to" person for information about this magnificent area, and his competence and diligence at data recording, analysis, and writing are exemplary and represent one of the finest long-term, consistent records of bird migration for a localized geographic area. Mike's contributions go beyond documenting



birds at Freezout Lake, as his interactions with hunters, birders, and other interested parties are always informative and professional. Birders can consult his "Birding at Freezout Lake" brochure for what birds to expect and he regularly posts updates of bird migration on "MOB" (Montana Outdoor

Birders), a site monitored daily by many Montana birders. Mike also served on Montana's Bird Records Committee for 10 years, currently serves as an eBird reviewer for a number of Montana counties, and continues to help guide the Berkeley Pit Advisory Council with his knowledge of "white geese."

Beyond birding, Mike's reputation for being a positive force in avian conservation is unmistakable, and we appreciate his knowledge and his affinity for sharing that knowledge.

MERLIN TOURS



Cuban Tody

Visit Cuba before the possibility vanishes.

New restrictions will severely limit travel to this remarkable island. Our trip gives birders the possibility to see all 27 endemic bird species, along with over 60 sub-endemics, and over 400 total bird species. Our travel partner, Holbrook Travel, allows a maximum of 12 travelers on this excursion. Will you be one of the lucky birders to add Cuba endemics to your life list?

For more information, visit www.merlinbirding.com/cuba

Costa Rica should be on every birder's bucket list.

Our trip visits many Costa Rica hotspots. Habitats vary from cloud forests to lowland tropical rainforests, greatly increasing the chances of seeing more birds. We'll also visit both Caribbean and Pacific slopes to increase the diversity of plant, bird and other animal life we'll observe. The trip concludes with a visit to Corcovado National Park of which *National Geographic* calls "the most biologically intense place on Earth."

For more information, visit www.merlinbirding.com/costa-rica

What's Your Legacy?

A significant legacy for any conservationist is protecting outstanding habitats for native wildlife in perpetuity.



Globally Significant Important Bird Areas like Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area, North Valley Grasslands, and Mussellshell Sage-steppe are all reminders of human reverence for birds and other wildlife.

You can ensure this good work will continue by investing in a Montana Audubon Endowment. The gift principal is preserved in perpetuity; the investment income from your gift is used to achieve lasting protection of wildlife and habitats. The original gift is never depleted, but continues to give, year after year.

Gift annuities are one of the simplest ways to convey a planned gift to Montana Audubon's endowments. In exchange for a transfer of cash or marketable securities, you can establish an annuity that guarantees annual payments to you, or you may choose to defer those payments, making additional funds available for Montana

Audubon to help protect places for birds, other native wildlife and the human spirit.

Montana donors may be eligible to receive significant tax advantages through the Montana Endowment Tax Credit. This program gives donors an incentive of 40 percent of the present value of a planned gift – up to \$10,000 annually – that can be taken as a direct credit (not deduction!) against your state income tax liability.

Contributions to Montana Audubon's endowments truly keep on giving. Sprague's Pipits, Burrowing Owls and Greater Sage-grouse win, native grasslands win, you win, and Montana Audubon's vital work continues.

For more information on how you may become a Montana Audubon endowment donor, please contact the Montana Audubon office in Helena at 406-443-3949 or email at info@mtaudubon.org.

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!

Montana Audubon Center Volunteers

Advisory Council
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Bob Mackin
Darryl Wilson - YRPA President
Steve Regele - YVAS President
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John Miller
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Michelle Butler
Joe Chilcoat
Sarah Chatwood
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Dylan Forquer
Heather Gaitonde
Alex Garner
Alina Garner
Kaitlyn Harper
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Brian Henderson
Ashley Heppner
Jennifer Holm
Riley Hutchens

Keely Huth
Ruth Johnson
Christine Jones
Carolyn Jones
Braydee Kaercher
Daniel Kenyon
Shelby Kiekover
Hannah Knick
David Mayamek
Alisha Merfeld
Arciela Mesa
Susan Mikkelsen
Nora Moran
Dirk Moritz
Mary Mullen
Derek Mungia
Jessica Ostwalt
Sarah Parker
Sarah Peper
James Pittock
Anna Rogers
Julien Rollins
Andrew Rutz
Allie Saudoval
Lolly Schafer
Ashlee Scherr
Danyel Schnetter
Melissa Schwiegart
Gretchen Sellegreen
Rachel Shea
Jan Shorthill
Bev Silkwood
Harold Silkwood
Carrie Staggie
Ellie Stock
John Sugden
Brianna Sullivan
Kylie Tiller
Tori Tindle
Joan Trent
Renee Verbeck
Daniel Vukonich
Campbell Walker
Chuck Ward
Madisynn Weber
Shellie Wherley
Brooke Wittchell
Mia Yegen

Groups

All Nations Middle School
Boy Scouts of America
COR Enterprises
Girl Scouts of America
HELP Flight Team
Leadership Billings
MOM's Club
Montana State University-Billings
Rimrock Foundation
Riverside Builders Club
Rocky Mountain College
Skyview High School
United Way
Day of Caring
West High School
Yellowstone River Parks Association

Montana Audubon Field Volunteers

Kim Alexander
Tammy Bennett
Elaine Caton
Cara Chamberlain
Tracy Cook
DeeDee Cress
Jeremy Ditto
Katie Eaton
Ammanda Emmel
Carol Fox
Christian Frazza
Connie Geiger
Walt Gusler
Judy Halm
Erin Harbaugh
Randy Hawkins
Marilyn Hayes
Connie Herzog
Jake Hewitt
Liz Hiltunen
Cindy Holder
Sue Jackson
Pat Jaquith
Carolyn Jones
Vlad Kovalenko

Helena Mahoney
Robert Martin
Nancy Matheson
Janice Miller
Jim Oates
Jodi Perros
Martha Powers Swanson
Sherry Ritter
Torrey Ritter
Lynda Saul
Sandy Schull
Shawn Service
Rebecca Sharp Hamlin
Wyatt Smith
Hanna Specth
Molly Todd
Stephen Turner
Anya Tyson
Jeff Van Tine
Raylene Wall
Pam Willison
Kristin Wokanick

Bird Festival Volunteers

Lars Anderson
Woody Baxter
Dianne Borgreen
John Carlson
Wes Cochran
Josh Colville
Andrew Guttenberg
Heather Harris
Scott Heidebrink
George Horse Capture
Henry Hvizdos
Dan Kinsey
Nate Kohler
Dennis Longknife
Ron Martin
Bob Martinka
Kelsey Molloy
Heather Nenninger
Mark Sullivan
Jacie Vonada
Stan Zander

A PLATEFUL OF BIRDS

You can make a meaningful impact for the birds of Montana by choosing the Bird Habitat license plate. Sporting several favorite Montana bird species—American Avocet, Ruddy Duck, Lewis's Woodpecker, and a trio of Black-billed Magpies, we are pleased to boast over 1,000 Bird Habitat plates across Montana! The initial cost is \$40, which includes a \$20 donation that directly supports our work to ensure long-term protection for critical wildlife habitat.

For more details, visit mtaudubon.org/support





wings 
across the big sky

Bob Martinka

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SAVE THE DATE!

JUNE 5 – 7, 2020
YOGO INN, LEWISTOWN

Wings Across the Big Sky 2020 Festival and Bird Science Conference

Montana Audubon will host its 21st annual bird festival at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown, Montana on June 5 – 7, 2020.

This longstanding, community event celebrates Montana's native bird species and typically draws hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts from across the state and beyond. New for the 2020 event is an optional, pre-festival bird science conference on Friday, June 5.

There are many other fun activities to choose from at *Wings Across the Big Sky* including a Saturday evening banquet, Montana Audubon's annual conservation awards, "Nature Adventure Tour" silent auction, "Cakes for Conservation" fundraiser and more.

Stay tuned to our website for more 2020 festival and science conference information in the coming months: mtaudubon.org.


MONTANA
AUDUBON

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Helena, MT 59624