

“Swifting” All Around Western Montana 2019

by Caroline Provost



All photos by Caroline Provost

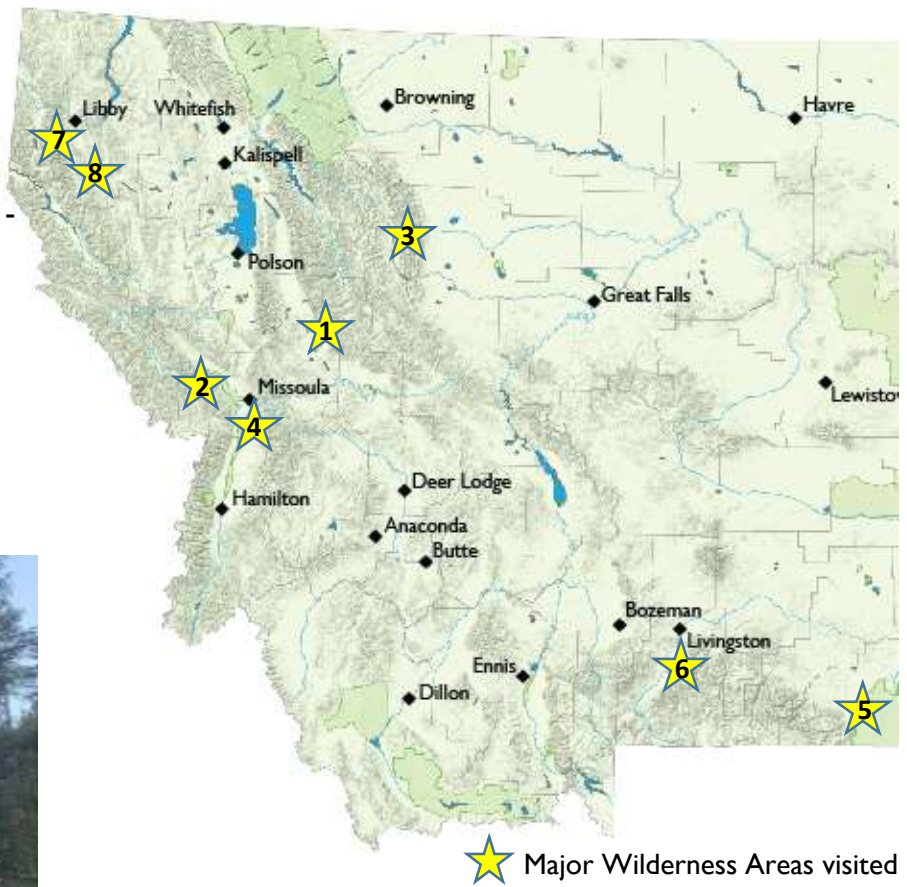
For the first time, Montana Audubon had a team of two technicians, myself and Danny Stark, survey for Black Swifts throughout Western Montana, outside of Glacier National Park. This season we were able to score **twenty-one waterfalls**, and **perform nineteen evening surveys**, along with several morning surveys. We are happy to report that after **six weeks** of traveling and hiking to remote waterfalls we were able to record one site, **Rock Creek Falls**, in the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness as occupied by a Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*). At last, we got lucky during our final pursuit of the season. During our evening survey, we caught a quick glimpse of the crescent moon shaped wings, and knew that it wasn't another bat we were seeing, it was a Black Swift! In order to confirm our observation, we woke up the following morning at 6:00 AM to perform one last morning survey. We lucked out once again, spotting a black swift zipping in and then back out of its pocket nest niche! While every other site was observed as unoccupied, we were able to acquire valuable habitat characteristic data on each waterfall that has helped us determine which ones would be worth revisiting in the future. The data also gives us more clues as to which variables contribute to the presence or absence of the species, such as moss availability, elevation, or even rock type. This long-term work helps state managers, especially the Montana Natural Heritage Program, determine this specie's conservation status in a rigorous manner. Captivated by this mysterious bird, we worked hard, spending many hours on the road, and dozens of miles backpacking on the trails, visiting a total of twenty-one waterfalls. The thought of seeing a Black Swift and receiving more insight on the species motivated us to wake up before the sun rose, backpack in the rain, bush-whack through devil's club, and walk on slippery rocks! Along with Montana Audubon's work in Glacier, Montana now has an inventory of over fifty locations where there has been evidence of Black Swift nesting.



(Above) At last! Rock Creek Falls within the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness. Breeding grounds for a pair of Black Swifts.

Major Wilderness Areas

1. Bob Marshall Wilderness
2. Lolo National Forest
3. Lewis & Clark National Forest - Rocky Mountain Front
4. Bitterroot
5. Custer National Forest: Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness
6. Gallatin National Forest
7. Kootenai National Forest
8. Cabinet Mountains Wilderness



(Below) Occasionally during our surveys, an American Dipper would pop in and brighten the mood. An American Dipper sighting is always a good sign: 1) Because they are known indicators of the presence of Black Swifts, and 2) they are so cute when they bob up and down!



(Above L) Amy Seaman and Jack Toriello helped us survey Morrell Falls before we split off on our own. One important part of performing evening surveys is finding a prime observation spot. (Above R) Technician Danny Stark, trying to find a dry piece of wood to catch fire while covered in mosquitoes, all after a long day of hiking through scattered rain. This was after a nine mile hike on the Beaten Path. The rain wasn't ideal, but the overcast skies were. (Below) A beautiful panoramic of the Rocky Mountain Front. Here we surveyed Willow Creek Falls. No Black Swifts were seen, we believe due to a lack of nest niches within the rock face behind the waterfall.

