



2018 Birdathon Report – May 31, 2018

*Birdathon team: Steve Hoffman, Bob Martinka, Stephen Turner, and Larry Berrin
Bird Photos by Bob Martinka (thank you Bob!)*

Thank you for supporting our 2018 “Pass the Torch” Birdathon fundraiser for Montana Audubon! Your support makes a tremendous difference for our statewide bird conservation work. I am delighted to share the highlights of conducting this fun and most successful fundraiser. Although this year’s 15-hour birding *marathon* yielded a smaller tally of **136 species** we still had a great adventure. I wish to express special gratitude to Stephen Turner for doing the driving (320 miles!), and to Stephen, Bob & Steve for their energy, expertise, and enthusiasm in helping the “new guy” out!

Well the forecast was not favorable but we did it anyway (call us “crazy” but I prefer “dedicated”) as we departed from near downtown Helena at 5:25 AM on Thursday, May 31st for our Birdathon extravaganza in west-central Montana. Through the cold, rain, hail (yes HAIL), fog and a few brief blue sky moments, we made our ambitious trek through what can only be described as “less than ideal conditions” for birding.



Steve and Larry spotting a bird

More importantly, my goal for this year’s Birdathon was to generate at least \$40,000 in much-needed support for Montana Audubon’s critically important statewide bird conservation work. This ambitious goal is an absolute must for fulfilling a generous \$20,000 1:1 match challenge pledged by one of Montana Audubon’s most generous donors! We still have a ways to go so if you haven’t sent in your donation, please do as we would really like to make the match this year.

After we gathered, we immediately drove up Grizzly Gulch. Here was a good mix of deciduous and conifer forest which produced 14 species including **Dusky Flycatcher**, **Rock Wren**, and **Green-tailed Towhee**. Next we headed to the foothills of Mt. Helena and hiked a short distance to pick up 12 more including the smallest North American bird - the **Calliope Hummingbird** performing it’s unique U-shape courtship flight display. We also picked up **Western Wood-Pewee** and **Hammond’s Flycatcher**. Steve taught me a good trick for spotting Hammond’s which usually sit on top of the tree (thanks for the tip Steve!).

By 6:35am we made it to the Helena Fairgrounds and produced our biggest list so far (17 species) as we saw **Hooded Merganser**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, and **Bullock's Oriole**. Next we stopped at Forestvale Cemetery and saw a **Great Horned Owl** (why do they always look so angry?) and **Pinyon Jays**.



Lark Sparrow

We then left Helena for what would be a long day of driving (thanks again Stephen!) and by 7:47am we had made it to Sieben Canyon along the Little Prickly Pear Creek which proved to be a worthwhile stop with a total of 36 species! Meriwether Lewis & William Clark themselves would have been delighted as we picked up both **Lewis's Woodpecker** and **Clark's Nutcracker**! But the highlight for me was the **Lark Sparrow**... what a beauty. Then it was off to Cascade for another productive stop as we hit some small local roads for a number of raptors and grassland specialists like **Upland Sandpiper** and **Long-billed Curlew**.

Then it was on to the highlight of the trip – Freezout Lake! We arrived at 11:45am and picked up over 40 species including a lifer for me... **Clark's Grebe**!!! Not to mention the first time I've ever seen a **Wilson's Phalarope** in breeding plumage! Other highlights included **American White Pelicans** (we saw 350!), **Clay-colored Sparrow**, **Black Tern**, **Willet**, **Black-crowned Night-Heron**, and **Cinnamon Teal**. A quick break in the rain as we were leaving Freezout allowed us to make a quick stop which produced my second lifer of the day as we found both **Chestnut-collared Longspur** and **McCown's Longspur** (lifer!) in a grassland off Hwy. 200.



Bob and Steve at Browns Lake

Next we hit Fairfield at 1:56pm and found a **Swainson's Hawk** nesting in a Russian Olive tree along with a few soaring raptors. Then the rain started to really come down but Bob was determined to make a quick stop in Lincoln for a hummingbird. We debated on if the stop was worth it since it was pouring down rain. As we pulled up to the house and peered through our binoculars, there perched on the feeder (avoiding the rain) was a **Rufous Hummingbird**!

Our final stop was at 4:57pm at Brown's Lake to wrap up the day with more than 30 more species. The highlight for me on this stop was seeing a **Red-necked Grebe** in breeding plumage on its nest! Stephen Turner also noted an impressive flock of 20 **Western Tanagers**!



Red-necked Grebe (on nest)

After a long (and wet) day we decided to call it quits and drove back to Helena through a storm to make it home safe and sound. Included with this report is a detailed list of all **136 species** seen or heard. I'm grateful to Stephen, Steve and Bob for not giving up and being my guides on what would turn out to be a productive day of birding!

And thanks to you, it was also a productive day for Montana Audubon. Thanks so much to those of you who generously supported me on my first Birdathon in Montana! I look forward to keeping each of you informed of Montana Audubon's conservation successes throughout the year. If you'd like to join me to any of these spots, please give me a call as I'm always happy to go birding (but let's hope for better weather!).

Yours in Conservation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L Berrin'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Larry Berrin
Executive Director

Montana Audubon's 2018 *Pass the Torch* Birdathon

Birdathon Tally (5/31/18):

(H) = Heard only

Geese/Ducks:

Canada Goose
Trumpeter Swan
Wood Duck
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Cinnamon Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Bufflehead
Canvasback
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Barrow's Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Ruddy Duck

Pheasants/Grouse:

Ring-necked Pheasant

Grebes:

Pied-billed Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Eared Grebe
Western Grebe
Clark's Grebe

Pelicans/Cormorants:

American White Pelican
Double-crested Cormorant

Hérons/Cranes/Ibis:

American Bittern (H)
Great Blue Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron

Hawks/Eagles/Falcons:

Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Swainson's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Golden Eagle
American Kestrel

Rails/Coots/Cranes:

Sora (H)
American Coot
Sandhill Crane

Shorebirds:

Killdeer
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Spotted Sandpiper
Willet
Upland Sandpiper
Long-billed Curlew
Wilson's Snipe
Wilson's Phalarope

Gulls/Terns:

Franklin's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
California Gull
Black Tern
Common Tern
Forster's Tern

Pigeons/Doves/Owls:

Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
Great Horned Owl

Nighthawks/Swifts:

Vaux's Swift

Hummingbirds/Kingfishers:

Calliope Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher

Woodpeckers:

Lewis's Woodpecker
Red-naped Sapsucker
Hairy Woodpecker (H)
Northern Flicker

Flycatchers:

Western Wood-Pewee
Willow Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Hammond's Flycatcher
Dusky Flycatcher
Cordilleran Flycatcher (H)
Western Kingbird
Eastern Kingbird

Birdathon Team:

Steve Hoffman, Bob Martinka, Stephen Turner & Larry Berrin

Vireos/Shrikes:

Warbling Vireo

Jays/Crows:

Pinyon Jay
Clark's Nutcracker
Black-billed Magpie
American Crow
Common Raven

Larks/Swallows:

Horned Lark
Tree Swallow
Violet-green Swallow
N. Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Barn Swallow

Chickadees/Nuthatches:

Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch

Wrens/Dippers:

Rock Wren
House Wren
Marsh Wren

Kinglets/Thrushes:

Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Mountain Bluebird
Swainson's Thrush
American Robin

Mimids/Waxwings/Longspurs:

Gray Catbird
Sage Thrasher
Cedar Waxwing
Chestnut-collared Longspur
McCown's Longspur

Warblers:

Northern Waterthrush (H)
MacGillivray's Warbler (H)
Common Yellowthroat (H)
Yellow Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Wilson's Warbler

Towhees/Sparrows:

Green-tailed Towhee
Spotted Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Brewer's Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Song Sparrow

Tanagers/Buntings:

Western Tanager

Blackbirds/Orioles:

Bobolink
Red-winged Blackbird
Western Meadowlark
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
Bullock's Oriole

Finches/Grosbeaks:

Cassin's Finch
House Finch
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch
Evening Grosbeak
Black-headed Grosbeak

Additional Exotics:

European Starling
House Sparrow

TOTAL: 136 species