

spring

2022

MONTANA  
AUDUBON

# EXPANDING PROTECTION

An opportunity to help all wildlife

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2021  
ANNUAL  
REPORT

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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 seeks to create an environment in which all of Montana's native bird species have healthy, sustainable populations, ensured by long-term habitat security. Montana Audubon uses science, conservation education, and public policy work to protect our state's incomparable wildlife and landscapes.

## spring 2022

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On the cover:  
*Pileated Woodpecker*  
Bob Martinka photo

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## THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

It started with a spark. While leading a hike for a fifth-grade class as part of my graduate internship in Ohio, our group heard a loud knocking sound in the woods which, on further investigation, turned out to be a Pileated Woodpecker completely destroying a log. As we watched the wood chips fly, an excitement came over me, and I was hooked. That experience lit a fire in me, and one moment in the woods became a lifelong pursuit.

As birdwatchers, we can all remember the moment when we got hooked on birds. But while we search every field, forest, and stream for the next exciting sighting, we also carry with us a responsibility to protect what we love. In this issue we focus on expanding our work as we consider the rapid decline of avian life. We reference the study that determined there are nearly three billion fewer birds in North America than in 1970. We highlight wildlife conservation efforts that are at a critical point, with more than one-third of American species at-risk and in need of proactive recovery. Finally, we talk about actions we can take to help find solutions, like leading the coalition in our state to pass the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

Passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act will ensure that our fish, wildlife and outdoor recreation traditions, and their associated economic benefits, will continue as we prioritize safeguarding biological diversity for current and future generations. The collaborative, non-regulatory approach of this bill will empower conservation for the full diversity of America's wildlife as well as critical natural resources. Failure to fund these conservation efforts will endanger many more at-risk species. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act represents a historic opportunity to protect birds, other wildlife, and habitats which make our treasured state the remarkable place it is and allow all of us to continue our lifelong pursuit of birds (and happiness).

Yours in Conservation,



Larry Berrin  
Executive Director



**The Recovering America's Wildlife Act represents a historic opportunity to protect birds, other wildlife, and habitats which make our treasured state the remarkable place it is.**

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.





On the heels of our victory  
to restore protection of  
migratory birds, we now  
have an opportunity to  
help all wildlife.

# EXPANDING PROTECTION



Wilson's  
Warbler

*Declining populations  
of familiar birds like  
meadowlarks, sparrows,  
juncos, finches, blackbirds,  
warblers and swallows  
are a warning sign not  
to be ignored.*

**This past fall**, a collective sigh of relief could be heard from Montana Audubon and other conservation organizations across the country as the news broke that companies which kill migratory birds will once again face the threat of punishment from the federal government. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published a final rule formally overturning an earlier policy, which said the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) only applied when companies or individuals killed birds on purpose. MBTA will once again protect birds from “incidental take” which means companies will be responsible for killing birds even if they didn’t intend to but could have reasonably anticipated the deaths (think oil spills).

I’m sure none of us could have imagined that something so foundational to the Audubon movement as MBTA could ever be threatened. Now that protections have been restored, we wonder if this is enough. A major study released in 2019 showed bird numbers plummeting across forests, grasslands, waterways, and backyards of North America, a cumulative loss of nearly three billion birds since 1970. The dramatic declines in bird populations documented in this study are deeply concerning but not surprising. We are seeing similar declines in wildlife populations across North America as well as right here in Montana.

*continued...*

Bob Marinka





Wood Duck

**As a parallel process**

to restoring the MBTA, Montana

Audubon has been leading a

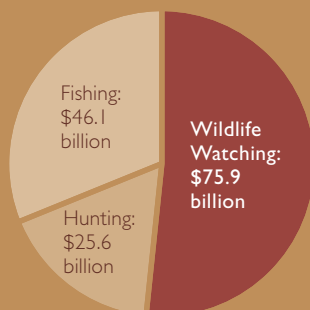
coalition in Montana to promote the passing of the bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). The act will direct nearly \$1.4 billion annually to states and tribes to reverse alarming declines of birds and other wildlife at risk. Passing this innovative conservation legislation will prevent wildlife from becoming endangered, leading to a tremendous payoff and savings for states and a boost to birding and wildlife-watching eco-tourism. More importantly, the loss of birds and unraveling of our ecosystems imperils our world's biodiversity and our own survival.

*Passing this innovative conservation legislation will lead to a boost to birding and wildlife-watching eco-tourism.*

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would support state wildlife agencies in implementing their State Wildlife Action Plans to tackle habitat loss and degradation which drive declines of bird populations and countless other wildlife. The Act would provide funding to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), and every other state fish and wildlife agency in the nation, to make smart investments to protect and restore habitat, control invasive species, and conduct essential monitoring of species populations. Activities funded through the Act could include building the FWP nongame species management program, collaboratively working with ranchers and other landowners, and funding and fueling education and wildlife-watching programs statewide.

Protecting and restoring wildlife habitat won't just help birds; this kind of investment in our natural infrastructure will help provide clean safe drinking

**Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation (2016)**



**Investments in conservation helped support wetland protection and restoration across the country to bring waterfowl species back from the brink.**

water, mitigate flooding, foster pollination via recovered birds, sequester climate-disrupting carbon emissions, improve soil health, and safeguard our food supply. When birds and habitats are healthy, we're all healthy.

We've succeeded in protecting birds before, and we will again – with your support! Why, for example, have waterfowl increased by 56% over the past 50 years? Investments in conservation through legislation like the Pittman-Robertson Act and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act helped support wetland protection and restoration across the country to bring these species back from the brink. When passed, RAWA will add to these sources and be one of the most significant conservation funding efforts in our lifetime.

**Now it's time** to roll up our sleeves on behalf of birds we grew up watching and hearing from our windowsills and backyards. Declining populations of familiar birds like meadowlarks, sparrows, juncos, finches, blackbirds, warblers and swallows are a warning sign not to be ignored. Their loss deeply impacts food webs and birds' natural services, from dispersing seeds to naturally controlling insect populations which devour crops and forests.

It seems that birds are our world's "canary in the coal mine," warning us of an ecological crisis. Back when passenger pigeons darkened the skies, no one believed we could lose them all. Their population, too, fell by tens of millions, and then there was only one. Martha, the last passenger pigeon, died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. It's up to us to make sure this is one of our nation's last extinction stories. Future generations should know of birds as creatures of the sky and trees and not as symbols of times past.

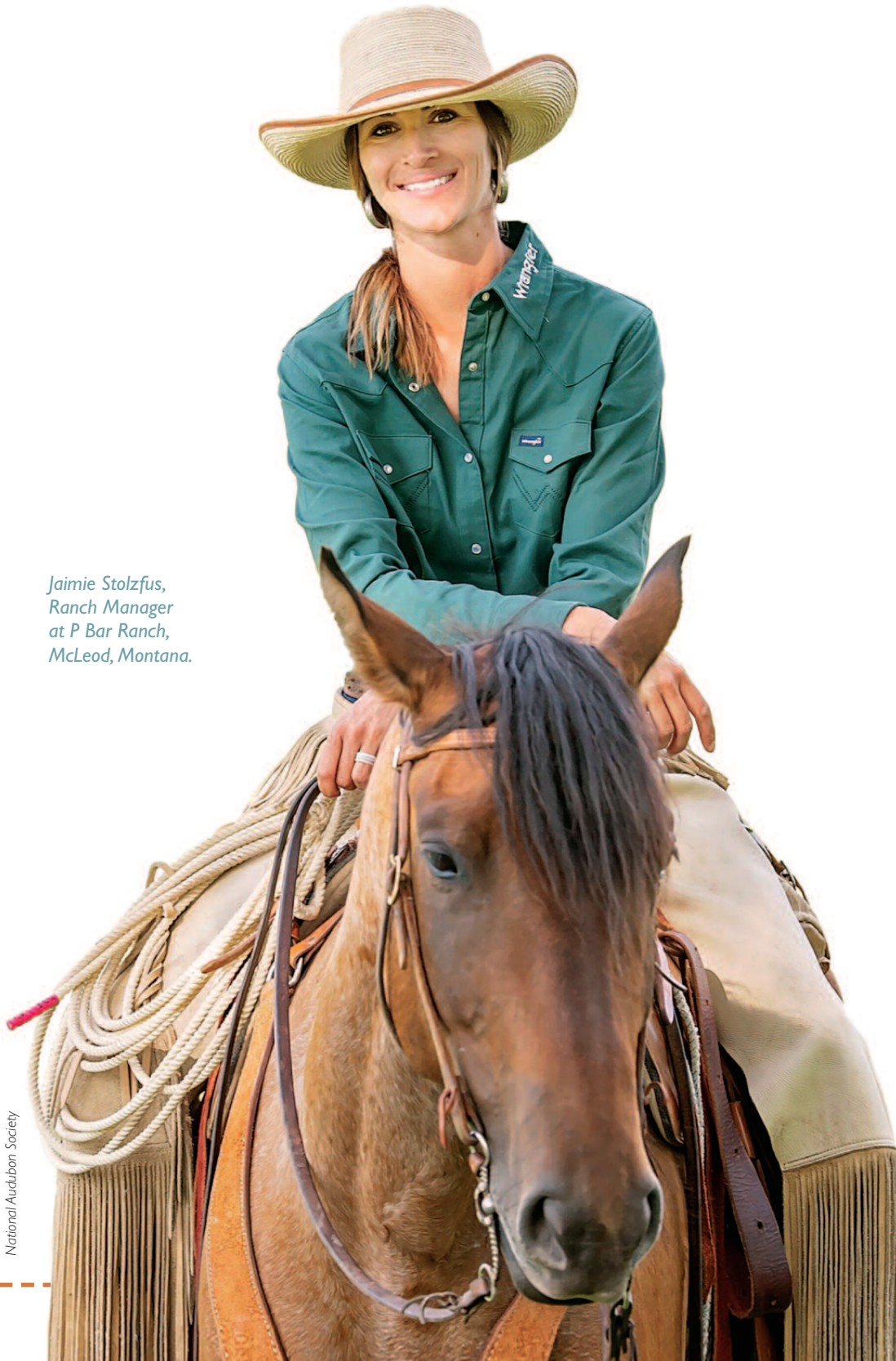
After years of work, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act is awaiting passage by Congress. Senator Jon Tester is a cosponsor of the bill and has been working hard with us to get it across the finish line. Together, we can pass a solutions-oriented, bipartisan bill. Let us be the generation who ensures that birds will keep singing and that wildlife will keep animating our treasured Montana landscapes.



*Larry Berrin, Montana Audubon Executive Director, meets with Senator Jon Tester to discuss the Recovering America's Wildlife Act.*



# WOMEN IN ACR



Jaimie Stoltzfus,  
Ranch Manager  
at P Bar Ranch,  
McLeod, Montana.

**In 2019** Montana Audubon partnered with the National Audubon Society to launch the Audubon Conservation Ranching Program (ACR) in Montana. To date, we've enrolled approximately 92,000 acres across nine bird-friendly ranches in diverse regions of the state. These ranches partner with Montana Audubon to implement adaptive Habitat Management Plans – to maintain, create, and enhance bird habitat. This is critical work, due to the fact that grassland birds are imperiled – and it's a program that's growing.

Part of this program's expansion is thanks to several ranchers highlighted in Audubon Conservation Ranching series featuring women in ranching. These women don't let anything stand in their way, working around the clock in all weather conditions fiercely defending birds, the land, their animals, and the food we eat. We asked questions, and they responded with fun, insightful, and birdy answers. For example, here's what rancher Heather Bilden had to say about her favorite bird on the Coulee Creek Ranch in Lavina, Montana:

*This is a tough question! It's like asking me to pick my favorite color – my answer depends on my mood, my surroundings, and the season. In this moment, my favorite bird is the common redpoll. I love their bright red caps and the variety of reddish hues on the males' chests (what the field guide aptly refers to as a "variable pink wash"). If you ask me in a month, I'll likely say my favorite bird is the sandhill crane, which will be returning to Montana by mid-March. Their rattling calls will echo across the prairie for months, and become part of the fabric of our daily lives. We have the pleasure of watching a pair raise their young in our pastures every year.*

You can check out our website to read more about these women and Conservation Ranching. We have three featured, innovative Montana ranchers, Heather Bilden, Kristi Patterson, and Jaimie Stoltzfus (along with ranchers from other states). Bilden owns and operates the fourth-generation, family-owned, Coulee Creek Ranch in Lavina. She sells beef products direct to consumers from the ranch website [couleecreekranch.com](http://couleecreekranch.com). Patterson and Stoltzfus, respectively the owner and manager, team up to run the P Bar Ranch in McLeod. They sell beef products direct to consumers under the brand Cow Girl Meat Co. [cowgirlmeatco.com](http://cowgirlmeatco.com). Both ranches use regenerative grazing practices, and produce 100% grass-fed, Bird-friendly Certified beef.



Emmie Sperandio

Above: Heather Bilden,  
owner and operator of  
the Coulee Creek Ranch  
in Lavina, Montana.  
Below: Kristi Patterson,  
owner of the P Bar Ranch,  
McLeod, Montana.

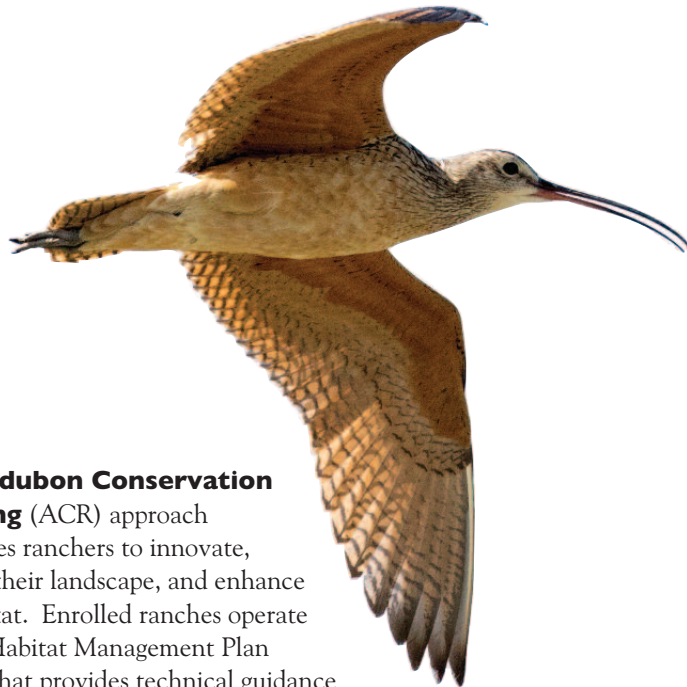


National Audubon Society

**Read more about these  
women and Conservation  
Ranching on our website:  
[mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org)**



# RANGE EXPANSION



**The Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR)** approach encourages ranchers to innovate, diversify their landscape, and enhance bird habitat. Enrolled ranches operate under a Habitat Management Plan (HMP), that provides technical guidance on regenerative grazing, invasive species management, and infrastructure projects. As Bird-Friendly ranchers enroll and work to improve management, we'd like to see some kind of range expansion for rangeland bird species as more habitat becomes available.

Our Avian Specialist, Bo Crees, has been compiling and entering large data sets containing observations for many species. Data has been compiled and entered from numerous sources, including: Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions program (IMBCR), the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), and eBird. This enormous input of data has made us reconsider the geographical ranges for many species.



*The Audubon Conservation Ranching approach encourages ranchers to innovate, diversify their landscape, and enhance bird habitat.*

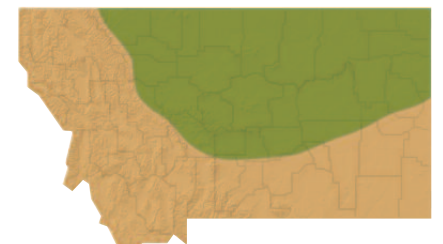


*Very similar in appearance to the Long-billed Curlew (left), note that the Marbled Godwit (right) has the upturned bill, while the Curlew has the decurved bill.*

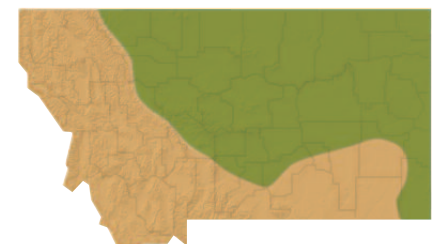
One grassland species that could benefit from Audubon Conservation Ranching may be the Marbled Godwit. This is one of three of Montana's breeding upland shorebirds; the other two being Upland Sandpiper, and Long-billed Curlew. This large shorebird species, with an upturned bi-colored bill, breeds in native shortgrass prairies near wetlands. They probe mud or sand with their bill, foraging on aquatic invertebrates, earthworms, insects, aquatic plant tubers, leeches, and small fish. Very similar in appearance to the Long-billed Curlew, note that the Marbled Godwit has the upturned bill, while the Curlew has the decurved bill.

The recent input of data has revealed a larger range for the Marbled Godwit. Comparing the maps on the right, we can see that the green area from the new 2022 range map shows a significantly larger breeding range for Marbled Godwits into central and southeast Montana as compared to that prior to 2022. It's hard to tell whether this bird's range is actually expanding, or if it is just a function of increased observation records, but a more definitive understanding of current range can help Montana Audubon target conservation, as well as enrollment of priority ranches into the Audubon Conservation Ranching program.

*Marbled Godwit range prior to 2022*



*Marbled Godwit range 2022*





## Expanding Habitat: Pond and Plants

While walking through the winding juniper forest, cottonwood-aspen stands, and peppered grasslands prairies, one may not recall the site's former existence as a gravel pit. For over 24 years, community members and local partners have been reshaping the landscape at the Montana Audubon Center, enhancing it for the benefit of wildlife and humans alike – an effort that is still in progress to this day.

While much has already been accomplished in restoring the landscape there's still more to be done. Center staff, with help of volunteers, interns, and community partners have been working on two major

habitat improvement projects: establishing a pollinator prairie and enhancing the aquatic habitat and nearby native turtle nesting sites. Located in the Center's west end, the pollinator prairie will provide beneficial habitat utilizing native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs. The hope is to attract beneficial insects – including monarchs and a variety

*For over 24 years, community members and local partners have been reshaping the landscape at the Montana Audubon Center.*

of moths – to the area to fill a key niche in the Center's overall landscape ecosystem.

The waters within the Center's three ponds, shadows of its gravel quarry days, rise and fall with the groundwater. These unnatural ponds have begun to fill with decaying plants and runoff, resulting in shallow ponds with little place for resident turtles, fish, and macroinvertebrates to seek shelter or lay their eggs. With help from professors at Rocky Mountain College and FWP, Center staff and interns are working towards improving our aquatic habitat by creating island refuges and establishing safe nesting sites for turtles.

Conservation landscaping is a process better thought of as a “quest,” aimed at creating a sustainable native habitat. While the Center is still in the middle of our conservation “quest,” there are signs of affirmation that the work being done is making an impact. As we enter another season of growth, we are excited for what new signs of affirmation are ahead.

*With help, Center staff and interns are working towards improving our aquatic habitat by creating island refuges and establishing safe nesting sites for turtles.*



## Creating a Sense of Place

Over the past six years, I have had the opportunity to see the activity level at the Center take off with flying colors. First introduced to the Montana Audubon Center through its Nature Nuts program, I was a new resident from the Midwest trying to find my footing in the vast Montana sky – and I found it at the Center. With a background in natural interpretation, I instantly felt comfortable here. These were my kind of people!

Intrigued by the different perspectives involving wildlife and plants, I started looking for opportunities to learn so that I could feel connected with this new place. I began developing my sense of place by learning about the different natural aspects that Montana has to offer. Some were not so different from my previous home while others felt like a whole other universe. I found my sense of place in the rambling walks along the Yellowstone River, secretive game trail excursions around Norm's Island, and discovery of new things to explore at the Montana Audubon Center.

Studies show that this ability to connect with one's surrounding aides in personal interests for learning, supports development of personal identity, and often fosters a sense of stewardship. For over 14 years, students at the Center have learned, explored, and taken part in the Center's ongoing conservation efforts. These connections inspired their sense of place which is now being observed by the number of individuals who have visited the Center for a field trip or camp and now look to volunteer, seek employment, or are participating in internships for their own environmental careers. We're creating stewards. Just as wonderful is seeing first year Fledgling preschoolers, now in elementary school, coming for class field trips. Hearing them reminisce about their days exploring the landscape is only outshined by the excitement that follows when they see the people who made that time special. We're creating an impact.

A sense of place is often thought of as one's personal relationship or attachment with a



*At the Center, nature-based experiences are taking root in the minds of our next generation.*

place. However, in many cases there is a human factor, someone who has influenced this kind of interest. I invite you to take a moment and think back to when you were younger. Was there a place that was important to you? How did you learn about this place? What are your fondest memories of it? Thinking about these memories, what significance do they hold for you? Most likely this place still holds a strong emotional connection to you.

Although it's never too late to start forming these connections, research suggests that people between the ages of 3–10 are at the prime age to form life-long meaningful connections. In 2021 the Center engaged over 16,000 individuals with over half being early educational learners. Just like the vegetation now rooted deep into the ground, these nature-based experiences are taking root in the minds of our next generation.

My sense of place in Montana was initiated by the staff at the Montana Audubon Center many moons ago, and now I'm privileged to lead the continuing effort to inspire and connect people to Montana Audubon Center, the place they live, and the Yellowstone River. If you have never been to the Center, I invite you to come and see the impact this reformed gravel pit is making in the lives of so many. While you're here you can even take part in continuing the legacy by rolling up your sleeves and making an impact. We've come so far already but we still have room to grow.

*–Emily Chilcoat, Center Director*



## eBird Data Tag-team: Montana Audubon and Montana Natural Heritage Program review over 2.3 million records

Over the past two years Montana Audubon and the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) have been working to review, process, and make it easy to access all of Montana's eBird, bird observation data. As a result of this monumental effort, appx. 2.3 million new eBird observation records have recently been added to the MTNHP state avian database, more than doubling the number of reported bird observations for the state! These eBird data were collected by thousands of dedicated citizen scientists, and represent observations submitted since 2014.

The widely used MTNHP database is invaluable to many partners and

stakeholders, including members of the public and private sectors, and state and federal agencies, all who rely on data meticulously maintained by MTNHP for regular business permitting and planning. Expanding the database directly improves all parties' understanding of bird population numbers, population trends, and key habitats, and users expect the data to be correct. Although eBird observations are vetted by local reviewers, most records are further proofed prior to addition to the state database. Some steps we had to take in preparing the eBird data include combining suspected repeat observations of the same individual bird into a single record (for example, observations of the

same Black-capped Chickadee visiting a feeder during winter, or the 71 observations of the single Ivory Gull on Flathead Lake), closely examining observations outside of a species' normal range and season, and processing high-value breeding observations of state Species of Concern (SOC) for potential inclusion in environmental review and informational data products. Significant parts of the review process for the 2 million+ eBird records were automated, but we still had to manually review about 200,000 observations!

For all of Montana's bird species, the new data will improve predictive habitat suitability models and our understanding of seasonal habitat use. Already using the updated data set, we altered or created new state range maps for 49 bird species.

You can view  
this new data and  
explore millions of bird  
observations on our  
Montana eBird website:  
[ebird.org/mt](https://ebird.org/mt)

We extended 20 species' year-round ranges (ex. Pygmy Nuthatch, Marsh Wren, Evening Grosbeak), and 27 species' breeding ranges (ex. Common Poorwill, Marbled Godwit, Ovenbird). Within the data were thousands of new SOC occurrence sites that require focal attention for project impact mitigation in environmental review, permitting and planning efforts. Perhaps just as important, we will now be able to quickly and efficiently add future eBird data to the MTNHP database using the process we developed.

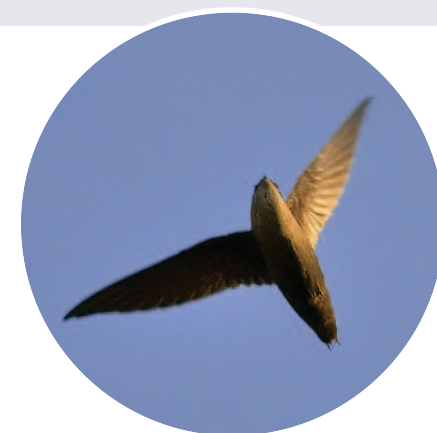


Using the updated data set, we extended year-round ranges of 20 species, like the Evening Grosbeak

Bob Martinka

## Chimney Swifts: An Old Neighbor, Growing in Number

This summer, if you take a sunset walk through town in central or eastern Montana, you might hear the chattering twitters of our state's growing population of a neighborhood favorite: the Chimney Swift. Though their dark gray-brown plumage doesn't catch the eye, one can't help but be captivated as groups of swifts circle over a Montana sunset. Chimney Swifts evolved to nest in large, hollow tree trunks, typically preferring those with broken tops that create a protected cavity. This nesting niche has led to significant native habitat decline for Chimney Swifts as old growth forests disappear; however, these adaptable birds found new suitable homes after European Settlement of North America: the chimney! In Montana, there is still much to learn about their breeding habitat, and we are dedicating more



Bob Martinka

resources this summer to studying these charming birds. Chimney Swifts, like other members of their family, spend life on the wing, only returning to their nests to roost during breeding season. This year, we will be expanding our series of "Swift Nights Out" to collect valuable nesting data and engage the public across Central and Eastern Montana. Our first event will be held on Friday, June 3 at our Wings Across the Big Sky Festival in Lewistown, with more to be announced in the coming months.





## Montana Audubon's Ongoing Citizen Science Programs

Even though citizen science resources like ebird.org continue to grow and facilitate the usefulness of data collected during passive birding adventures, a handful of Montana's bird species continue to require special efforts to detect. For these species, often state Species of Concern, Montana Audubon has designed targeted citizen and researcher survey programs that will continue through 2022! This year we are looking forward to:

### Citizen Science Programs

- Long-billed Curlew surveys in the Mission, Flathead, Helena, and Blackfoot Valleys (April – May)
- Great Blue Heron rookery surveys across the state (May – June)



Bob Martinka

Red-breasted  
Nuthatch

- Chimney Swift surveys and training across eastern Montana (June – July)
- Climate Watch surveys across the state for target species like Pygmy and Red-breasted Nuthatches (May – June)

### Researcher Surveys

- Audubon Conservation Ranch surveys (May – July)
- Black Swift Nesting Surveys (July – August)
  - Cuckoo surveys for Black and Yellow-billed Cuckoos (June – August)
  - Harlequin Duck Brood Surveys (July – August)



Harlequin Duck

# NEWFOUNDLAND AND NOVA SCOTIA



Atlantic Puffin

**Enjoy whale-watching, nesting seabirds, warblers, and more!**

**With Merlin Birding & Nature Tours**

**July 1–12, 2022**

**\$4,200 double occupancy; a few spots still available!**

Newfoundland and Nova Scotia provide spectacular landscapes, uber-friendly people and great seafood! The beach at St. Vincent's provides such close views of humpback whales you can smell their blow. Tens of thousands of Atlantic Puffins are another trip highlight, as is the stunning Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, where tens of thousands of Northern Gannets nest, along with Razorbill, Thick-billed and Common murre, and Black-legged Kittiwake.

We expect to see 20+ species of colorful warblers. This is truly a nature and bird-lovers' dream trip!

Please visit [www.merlinbirding.com/nova-scotia-newfoundland](http://www.merlinbirding.com/nova-scotia-newfoundland) for more info, or call lead guide Steve ("Esh") Eshbaugh at 406-570-2428.





# BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Our organization has expanded not just in staff, but in professional knowledge. A conservation-oriented group is only as good as those on their team and Montana Audubon's is growing.

This year alone, we've added two new year-round staff positions: A Communications Specialist and a Conservation Ranching Manager. At the Montana Audubon Center in Billings, a long-time staff member has taken over as Center Director.

What does this mean for the future of Montana Audubon? In a nutshell, it allows us to devote more time to ongoing projects such as the Audubon Conservation Ranching Initiative. It means that we're able to provide you with more information about the important wildlife policy initiatives, citizen science opportunities, and species information we know you love. Lastly, this means that we can spread awareness about the plights our land and species face a little wider and little larger. As our organization continues to expand, your support will be even more critical.



**Christian Meny**  
*Manager, Conservation Ranching Program*  
Christian comes with a swath of bird-related experience including the

Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions program (MT IMBCR), the World Wildlife Fund Sustainable Ranching Initiative (WWF-SRI), and the WWF Ranch Systems and Viability Planning Network program (WWF-RSVP). Not to mention his involvement with Montana's very own MPG Ranch. His ability to connect people to the land will be indispensable as the Montana Audubon works towards connecting land owners and wildlife.

**Emily Chilcoat**  
*Director, Montana Audubon Center*



Emily moved to Billings from Dayton, Ohio in the fall of 2014 and quickly found the Center through participation of her two sons in the Nature Nuts program. She has a degree in Natural and Historical Interpretation and Applied Science at Hocking Technical College and has provided conservation education programs to local communities ever since, including with the Five Rivers MetroParks. Billings is the farthest west Emily has been and she's excited to be a part of the Montana Audubon Center.

**Laryssa Rote**  
*Communications Specialist*

Laryssa comes into the Communications Specialist position with over eight years of nonprofit communications experience. She spent six years with the Tamarack Wildlife Center in Pennsylvania working in wildlife rehabilitation, specializing in birds of prey. She took an intern position with the World Bird Sanctuary summer of 2015 where she flew a multitude of bird species in the Sanctuary's zoo shows. January of 2020, she moved to Montana where she was hired by the Montana WILD Rehabilitation Center in Helena. There she continues her rehabilitation work while working on the side with the Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation to raise funds for nonprofits using social media and the power of a story.



## NOMINATE A CONSERVATION LEADER FOR A 2022 MONTANA AUDUBON AWARD!



Nominations are now being accepted for Montana Audubon's 2022 awards. Consider nominating someone for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, or a Lifetime Achievement award! Nomination forms can be found on our website [mtaudubon.org](https://mtaudubon.org). The deadline for nominations is **May 20, 2022**. Please submit via email (preferred) to [info@mtaudubon.org](mailto:info@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 Lewistown on June 4.

### Conservationist of the Year

For an individual who has provided significant wildlife conservation achievement in Montana.

### Environmental Educator of the Year

For a person who has shown outstanding achievement in educating others about birds, other wildlife, and conservation of habitat.

### Lifetime Achievement Award

For a volunteer who has dedicated extraordinary effort, time and energy to shape the activities and successes of a local Audubon Chapter and/or Montana Audubon.

## MOBILIZE YOUR PASSION FOR BIRDS

Make a meaningful impact for the birds of Montana by choosing the Bird Habitat License plate, which features an American Avocet, Ruddy Duck, Lewis's Woodpecker, and a trio of Black-billed Magpies—on a Rocky Mountain Front backdrop.



For an affordable price, you can support Montana Audubon and our bird conservation work while cruising under the big sky.

For more details visit [mtaudubon.org](https://mtaudubon.org)

## CALL FOR VEHICLE DONATIONS

Are you looking to upgrade your vehicle this year? Before you trade in or scrap your old one, consider donating it to conservation.

Montana Audubon is looking for vehicle donations to support our science and education programs. Our top priority right now is securing a small SUV to support our scientific research activities in remote areas of the state. If you have a vehicle and are interested in learning more, contact us using the form at [mtaudubon.org](https://mtaudubon.org).

All vehicle donations are tax deductible.





# Montana Audubon Grants Support Wildlife Habitat

**For over 25 years**, Montana Audubon has awarded grants to organizations in support of research and education projects directed toward wildlife habitat conservation. Funds are awarded from earnings generated by the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment. Supported 2022 projects include:

**UMBEL: Assessing the impacts of heavy metal mining contaminants on riparian obligate songbirds**

This project will provide insight into the impacts of mining damage and elemental contamination in the Clark Fork watershed Superfund site in western Montana. We will assess: (1) the severity of bioaccumulation of contaminants from the aquatic food web to intermediate terrestrial trophic levels (using riparian obligate songbirds as a model system), (2) the impact this contamination has on reproductive success of these songbirds, and (3) whether these potential fitness impacts are mediated by changes in stress physiology or measures of cell senescence/damage (measured with plasma corticosterone and relative telomere shortening).

**Fostering Appreciation of Montana’s Birds through Hopa Mountain’s StoryMakers**

Hopa Mountain seeks funding to purchase 1,000 copies of *A Pocket Guide to Northern Prairie Birds* to distribute to Montana youth through our StoryMakers program. This long-standing early literacy program distributes books to children in under-served rural and tribal communities in 37 Montana counties. Books that encourage children to be outdoors and that connect them with their local environment, such as this bird guide, are especially valuable resources.

**Jewel Basin Hawk Watch**

For the 14th year in a row, Flathead Audubon Society will conduct raptor monitoring at the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, tracking long-term changes in Northern Rocky Mountain raptor populations.

**2021 GRANT HIGHLIGHT**

**Farm to School of Park County  
Native Pollinator Habitats**

One of last year’s grant recipients provided us with an update on their project. Pollinators were planted at B.A. Winans Elementary School Garden and the Lincoln School Farm in downtown Livingston. All of these sites grow produce that goes directly back to local students in school lunches and farm to school lessons. Native perennials were chosen based on their edible aspects (ex: berries), colorful foliage and flowers that will attract a variety of pollinators and contribute to wildlife habitat.

*Bee Balm*



# Because of your dedicated support

Amidst another difficult year, your participation in 2021 helped ensure our continued success. With your help, we built new partnerships, provided nature education to thousands of children and families, collected data and led citizen science projects on our state’s species of concern, and advocated for environmental protections that will benefit us today and for years to come.

In 2022, new challenges have emerged. From dozens of bills that threaten public lands and wildlife protections to declining bird populations, we need your continued support. Please consider making a tax deductible donation today.

**All contributions, big or small, help us achieve our mission and support our statewide conservation programs.**



*Bob Martinka*

*American Kestrel*

Thank you.



# 2021

## ANNUAL REPORT

### 2021 FINANCIALS

**Thanks to you,** Montana Audubon has maintained a strong financial position which empowers us to continue our work on native birds, other wildlife and their habitats across Montana. You make this possible through your much-appreciated support of our vital conservation work. Thank you!

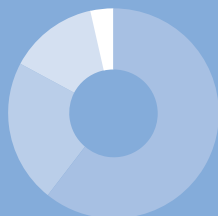
#### Statement of Financial Position

Unrestricted Net Assets	\$ 1,014,918
Board Designated Net Assets	\$ 2,066,716
Restricted Net Assets	\$ 89,804
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 3,171,438</b>

Montana Audubon is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization under 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Financials are audited annually by the accounting firm Douglas Wilson & Company, PC.

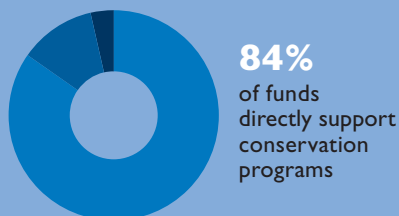
#### Revenue

Contributions	\$ 1,248,440	●
Grants & Contracts	\$ 459,138	●
Earned Income	\$ 307,857	●
Investment Income	\$ 67,206	●
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 2,082,641</b>	



#### Expenses

Programs	\$ 769,479	●
Administrative	\$ 109,926	●
Fundraising	\$ 36,642	●
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 916,047</b>	



12-month Fiscal Year Ending 9-30-21

In honor of her 100th birthday this spring, we are republishing our 2015 Donor Profile of the remarkable...

## Jean Setter



Each spring, high in the Little Belt Mountains, snowpack loosens and begins its trickle into quiet, unnamed streams. Many rivulets flow together here, gain momentum and coalesce, eventually becoming the Judith River. This waterway descends through dense forest, pine savanna and on to open prairie before joining the Missouri, many miles to the north. Herds of elk, mule deer and pronghorn share this wild landscape with a host of raptors and native songbirds.

The Judith country has always been rich in wildlife and natural wonder and it was here in 1922, that long-time Montana Audubon supporter Jean Setter was born. She vividly remembers the freedom of growing up on her family ranch southwest of Utica, and how the experience impressed upon her the power and beauty of nature.

"Some of my earliest memories are of the wildflowers and birds on our place, which my parents encouraged me to learn about as I grew." Theirs was a big, remote homestead with few people nearby; "Our nearest neighbor was a Forest Service ranger at the Judith Guard Station a few miles away who was very helpful with my nature-learning!"

After high school, Jean studied nursing at Montana State, a decision that would ultimately take her far from the family ranch. She became an Army nurse in 1945 and over the next three decades was stationed in California, Germany, Korea, Hawaii and elsewhere. After retiring in the mid-1970s, she decided to come home, settling in Great Falls. In 1980, Jean became an early supporter of a new conservation organization, Montana Audubon.

*"I want to protect some of this planet for future generations and believe that supporting Montana Audubon is a very worthwhile way to do so!"*

"I was bothered by the fact that so many people seemed to have little understanding of nature and its importance to us. I felt a need to become active in protecting wildlife and habitat in my own backyard." When asked why she consistently supports Montana Audubon, Jean replied, "It is one of the best organizations that aligns with my broad interests in conservation; I admire the science-based, collaborative approach they use to do their work."

Jean still visits the family ranch when she can, the place where she developed her strong conservation ethic. Today, it forms part of the Judith River Wildlife Management Area, the oldest such area in Montana. By including Montana Audubon in her estate plans, Jean feels she can leave a meaningful conservation legacy of her own; "I want to protect some of this planet for future generations and believe that supporting Montana Audubon is a very worthwhile way to do so!"

*Judith River Guard Station circa 1920, the nearest neighbor to the Setter Ranch.*





Thank You for Supporting Montana Audubon

We are truly appreciative of your continued and generous support of Montana Audubon. Together, we can achieve our mission and conserve Montana's native birds, other wildlife, and natural ecosystems for current and future generations. Thank you for sharing in these accomplishments with us. We could not do this work without you. The following people generously contributed \$100 or more between March 2021 and February 2022.

\$2,500 & Up

Joe & Lana Batts  
Ron & Cheryl Farmer  
Susie Maclin  
Bernard McHugh  
Roy & Susan O'Connor  
Walter Rowntree  
Jean Setter  
Jennifer Speers  
Anonymous Donors

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Shirley Bollinger  
Douglas Broadie  
Braden Brown  
Don Bryant  
William Bucher



Bob Martinka

We are sincerely grateful to those who have made generous gifts to honor the legacy of the following individuals:

Mervyn Berrin  
Stanley "Skip" Burns  
Chuck Carlson  
Natalie Dietrich  
Sheryl Rae Evans  
Dick L. Franz

Curt Karlen  
Edie Ryan  
Dr. Norm Schoenthal  
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Jessica Nagle  
Kristin Newgard  
Keith Newman  
Colleen Nichols  
Heather & Mark Nitz

continued...

PROTECTING BIRDS TODAY AND BEYOND

The George and Laurene Engler Montana Audubon Conservation Fund was created as a memorial for two very special people: George and Laurene Engler.

The fund is meant to provide a sustainable funding source for bird conservation, habitat protection, and public policies that are consistent with these conservation goals. Thanks to this generous gift, George and Laurene's legacy of furthering conservation work in Montana lives on. All contributions to the Fund, including planned gifts, directly benefit Montana Audubon.

To learn more about the Fund or to contribute, visit [mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org) or contact the Montana Community Foundation.

American Pipit

Bob Martinka





Bob Martinka

## HONORARIUMS

Special recognition to the following individuals for recent gifts in their honor

Bentley/Fisher Grandchildren  
Julia Childs  
Mark Dowling  
George & Laurene Engler  
Steve Hoffman  
Don Murray  
Nathan Senner & Maria Stager  
Papa Swallow  
Lisa Trankley  
Rachel Van Wingen

Western Bluebird

Catherine Nolan  
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Anonymous  
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Dr. Kenneth & Jenny Younger  
Hugh & Karen Zackheim  
Hans & Barbara Zuuring

**Please note:** Due to space constraints, we are only able to list donors who gave \$100 or more. However, we express sincere appreciation to all of our donors, as every donation makes a difference.

Also, this list does not include event registration fees, sales, auction purchases below fair market value, or endowment gifts. If you notice any inaccuracies with the information provided, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Bob Martinka

## Special Thanks

With sincere gratitude, we thank you, our institutional supporters and partners. Thanks to your engagement, our critical work is made possible and is ever more impactful.

### Montana-based Audubon Chapters

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

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Billings Area Chamber of Commerce  
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MT State Library / MT Natural Heritage Program  
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The Wildlife Society, Montana Chapter

## Thank You, Volunteers, for Giving Your Time

Thank you, Montana Audubon volunteers, for so freely giving your valuable time to help us meet our conservation mission. You have not only offered your time, but also your expertise, humor, perspective, and so much more.

### Citizen Science Volunteers

#### Climate Watch Volunteers

Kristi Dubois  
Heather Bilden  
Barb Pittman  
Becka Barkley  
Steve Barkley

### Montana Audubon Center Volunteers

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## CONTINUE YOUR LEGACY WITH A PLANNED GIFT

Core to Montana Audubon's vision is that birds and other wildlife will be protected for generations to come. Planned gifts are instrumental in helping our organization achieve this goal and help you leave a lasting legacy. Together we can ensure the long term sustainability of our conservation programs.

Please consider Montana Audubon in your estate planning. Your generous gift will benefit Montana's native birds, other wildlife, and their habitats today and into the future.

For more information and to pledge your support please contact Joanna Haddon at [joanna@mtaudubon.org](mailto:joanna@mtaudubon.org).



Bob Martinka



# 21<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL MONTANA AUDUBON BIRD FESTIVAL

JUNE 3 – 5, 2022  
YOGO INN, LEWISTOWN

Join us June 3–5 for the annual Wings Across the Big Sky. Registration is now open so call or visit our website to save your space for this signature annual birding event.

Our keynote this year will be Chris Wilson, Director of Audubon Conservation Ranching, as he shares this exciting new market-based approach to protecting grassland birds.

Our lead sponsor this year is the American Prairie which will offer discounts on pre- and post-festival lodging options so you can explore America's Serengeti on your own. While you're in town, be sure to visit their new National Discovery Center, a mere walk from the historic Yogo Inn. Not to mention the myriad of exciting field trips available to satiate all your birding needs.

*wings*   
*across the big sky*

Visit  
**mtaudubon.org**  
for detailed field  
trip information  
and to register for  
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experience.

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