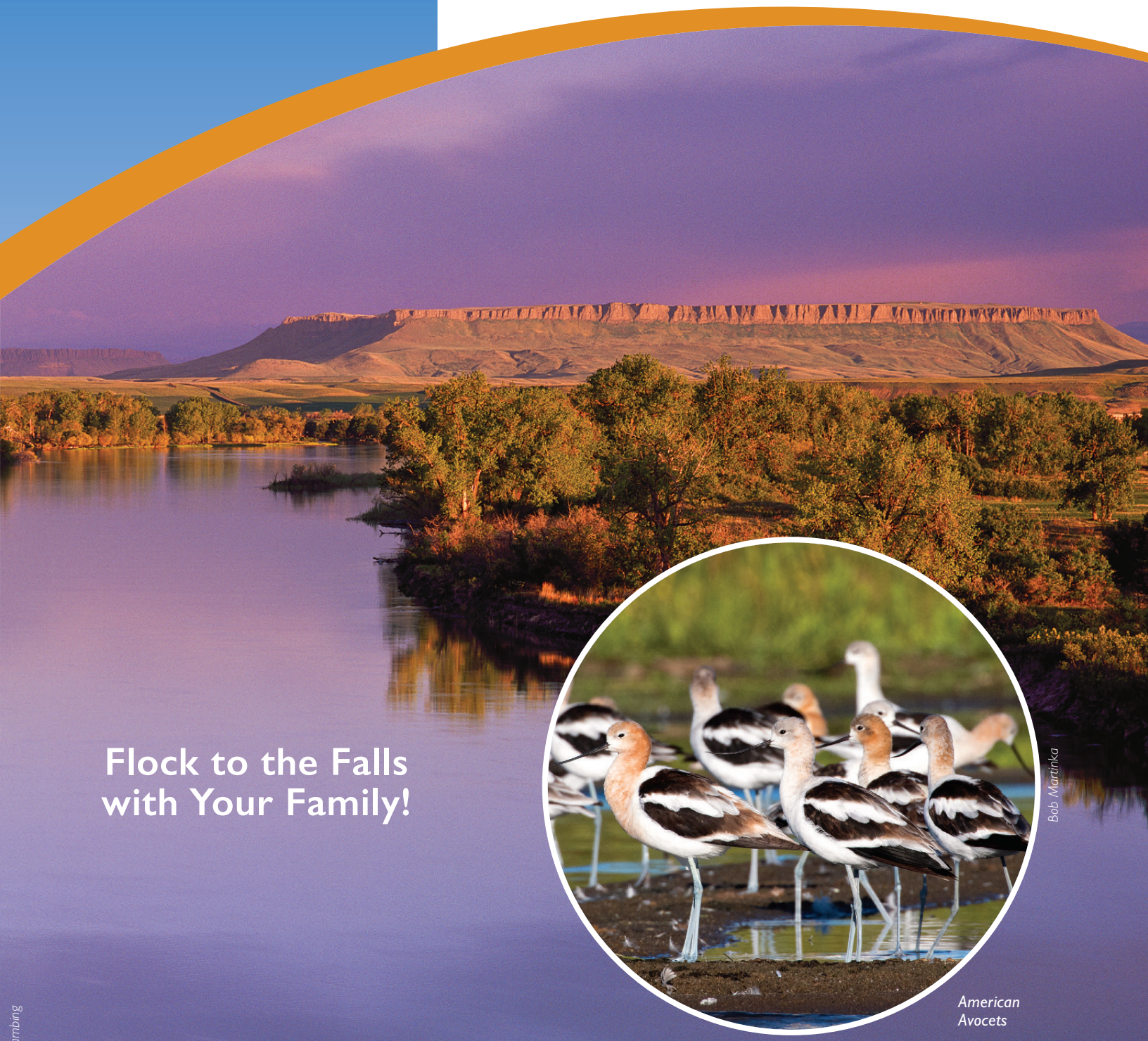
JUNE 9 – 11, 2023
HERITAGE INN,
GREAT FALLS

22ND ANNUAL

wings across the big sky

MONTANA AUDUBON

Montana's Premier Birding Festival



Flock to the Falls with Your Family!

Bob Martinka

American Avocets

John Lambing

welcome

Dear Friends,

For the 22nd year, Montana Audubon is pleased to present *Wings Across the Big Sky,* Montana's premier birding festival, June 9-11. This year's event is based in Great Falls along the "Mighty Mo" or the "Big Muddy," also officially known as the Missouri River. This year's local co-host is the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon.

New to the festival, our theme is *Flock to the Falls with Your Family!* We hope that more families will join us this year so that the legacy of birding and outdoor recreation continues well into the future, thereby fostering the next generation of conservation-minded citizens in Montana and beyond.

Festival headquarters is the Heritage Inn on the western side of Great Falls. Registration starts at 3pm on Friday, followed by dinner and a keynote address.

Numerous field trips will explore wildlife-rich landscapes of this historic and adventure-filled part of the state. Read on for more information, including festival highlights, field trip schedule, and local points of interest in and near the Electric City. We hope you have a great time birding with us!

Yours in Conservation,

Larry Berrin, Executive Director

FRIDAY	3:00 pm	Registration Opens
	4:00 pm	Social with Cash Bar
	5:00 pm	Welcome; Buffet Dinner
		Keynote Presentation by Sneed Collard III
		Montana Audubon Conservation Awards
SATURDAY	5:45–7:45 am	Buffet Breakfast
	6:30 am	A Field Trips Depart
	7:15 am	B Field Trips Depart
	8:00 am	C Field Trips Depart
	2:00 pm	Field Trips Return (approximate)
		Take Your Pick:
		Bird Counts!
		Snacks and Refreshments
		Bird Activities with Your Brood
		Visit and Support Our Local Sponsors
	4:00 pm	Social with Cash Bar
	5:00 pm	Buffet Dinner
		State of the Birds Address by Larry Berrin
		Cakes for Conservation -
		A Dessert Auction for the Birds
SUNDAY	5:45–7:45 am	Buffet Breakfast
	6:30 am	A Field Trips Depart
	7:15 am	B Field Trips Depart
	8:00 am	C Field Trips Depart
		Field trips do NOT return to the hotel.

presentations

Friday evening, June 9

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION: A FATHER-SON DECADE OF BIRDING

Sneed B. Collard III
Author and Speaker

An acclaimed author, Sneed has written more than ninety books for young people including *Beaks!, Fire Birds – Valuing Natural Wildfires and Burned Forests, Woodpeckers – Drilling Holes and Bagging Bugs, Waiting for a Warbler,* and his newest picture book, *Border Crossings*.

His first book for adults, *Warblers and Woodpeckers: A Father-Son Big Year of Birding,* recounts the adventures of he and his son Braden during their 2016 Big Year – including epic trips to Arizona, Texas, and Galápagos. Sneed is a popular, award-winning speaker, and has spoken at numerous birding festivals and events. Sneed lives in Missoula, Montana.

About the Program
Sneed recounts the entertaining adventures behind his humorous, award-winning memoir *Warblers and Woodpeckers: A Father-Son Big Year of Birding* (Mountaineers, 2018) and other bird books and articles. Along the way, participants will travel to some of America's best birding hotspots as well as South America, the Galápagos, the Middle East and, covid willing, Japan. Sneed will share highlights of his son's and his "accidental Big Years" of 2022 starring Pinky, America's most famous flamingo.

To learn more about Sneed, visit his websites ***www.sneedbcollardiii.com*** and ***www.FatherSonBirding.com***.

Saturday evening, June 10

STATE OF THE BIRDS

Larry Berrin, Montana Audubon
Executive Director

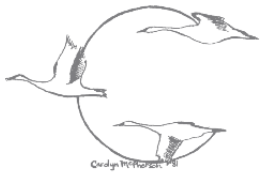
Founded in 1976, Montana Audubon works to promote appreciation, knowledge, and conservation of Montana's native birds, other wildlife, and natural ecosystems and to safeguard biological diversity for current and future generations. We work to meet our mission through our core areas of science, conservation, policy and education. Join our Executive Director as he shares the state of our critical work to protect bird populations and conserve native wildlife habitat in Montana.

Saturday evening, following presentation

CAKES FOR CONSERVATION – A DESSERT AUCTION FOR THE BIRDS

A fun and delicious way to support Montana's birds and wildlife habitat is to partake in the Cakes for Conservation dessert auction, which concludes the Saturday evening banquet at the festival. Lively bidding on a variety of creative cakes and other sweet treats culminates in a sweet dessert for all, with proceeds to be split between Montana Audubon and this year's local festival host chapter, Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon.

The Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon is the National Audubon Society chapter in Great Falls. Formed in 1980, the chapter promotes birds and birding, protects bird habitat, and educates people on birds and wildlife, aiming to conserve bird diversity in north central Montana for many years to come.



Upper Missouri Breaks
Audubon Society

GREAT FALLS AREA POINTS OF INTEREST

Giant Springs State Park Shannon Newth

Museums

If you're looking to learn while visiting Great Falls, several museums are at your fingertips, including The Children's Museum of Montana, CM Russell Museum, First People's Buffalo Jump State Park, The History Museum, Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, and The Ursuline Center.

Waterfalls

Five beautiful falls adorn the area, including Black Eagle Falls, Colter Falls, Rainbow Falls, Crooked Falls, and The Great Falls, all of which are 30 miles or less from the aptly-named city.

State Parks and Glacier National Park

The Great Falls area is blessed with several state parks, including Tower Rock State Park, Smith River State Park, Sluice Boxes State Park, First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park and Giant Springs State Park. Iconic Glacier National Park is only 2.5 hours from the city.

On the Water

The Great Falls area showcases several popular river recreation areas, including the Missouri River Canyon below Holter Dam, the Sun River, and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

For Families

If you're looking for places where your family can have fun beyond birding together, Great Falls does not disappoint. Riverside Railyard Skate Park is one of the five best skate parks in the Pacific Northwest. Electric City Water Park is open from June to August. Gibson Park features a cabin built in 1884, a garden, play structures, birds the kiddos can feed and Gibson Glass, with statues of historical figures. Additional places to explore include The Great Buffalo Hunt, Giant Springs Fish Hatchery, Wheels of Thunder, Brush Crazy, and more.

For more information, go to *VisitGreatFallsMontana.org*

FESTIVAL HEADQUARTERS AND LODGING

The Heritage Inn is located on the west side of Great Falls and is easily accessible off of I-15, exit 278, and by Highway 87. The hotel is near many food and shopping locations and has an onsite restaurant, sports bar and casino. Amenities include a heated pool, hot tub, sauna, fitness center, cable TV, wifi and more.

Heritage Inn
1700 Fox Farm Road
Great Falls, Montana 59404
406-761-1900
gfheritageinn.com

Locally owned and operated!

Book your room by May 25 for a special rate of $124 per night plus tax.

field trips

Please review each description and choose your trip preferences, using the codes provided, on the registration form, marking your first, second and third choices for both Saturday and Sunday.

The majority of trips are offered on both days, however, some may only be offered on Saturday or Sunday. See the Field Trip Key below for the trip schedule.

Sack lunches are provided for each trip. Saturday trips will return to Heritage Inn around 2:00 pm, while Sunday trips will not return as a group.

What to Bring
Good walking/hiking shoes, water bottle, sun protection, raingear, binoculars, bird guide, camera, and other personal items.

NEW THIS YEAR, staggered departure times will help the mornings run smoothly and allow adequate birding time during all trips based on their distance from Heritage Inn; i.e. further trips depart earlier, as follows:

A trips depart at 6:30 am

B trips depart at 7:15 am

C trips depart at 8:00 am

FIELD TRIP KEY

SATURDAY 6:30 am		SUNDAY 6:30am	
Antelope Lake and Butte	SatA1	Antelope Lake & Butte	SunA1
Arod Lakes	SatA2	Arod Lakes	SunA2
Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge	SatA3	Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge	SunA3
Bluebird Trail Stanford/ Judith Mountains	SatA4	Bluebird Trail Stanford Judith Mountains	SunA4
Choteau Loop	SatA5	Choteau Loop	SunA5
Freezout Lake	SatA6	Freezout Lake	SunA6
Little Belt Mountains	SatA7	Little Belt Mountains	SunA7
Raptor Tour	SatA8	Raptor Special	SunA8
Sun River Canyon	SatA9	Sun River Canyon	SunA9
Thain Creek	SatA10	Thain Creek	SunA10
SATURDAY 7:15 am		**SUNDAY 7:15 am**	
Bluebird Trail Logging Creek	SatB1	Bluebird Trail Logging Creek	SunB1
First People's Buffalo Jump	SatB2	First People's Buffalo Jump	SunB2
Giant Springs State Park	SatB3	Giant Springs State Park	SunB3
Sulphur Springs	SatB4	Sulphur Springs	SunB4
SATURDAY 8:00 am		**SUNDAY 8:00 am**	
First People's Buffalo Jump	SatC1	First People's Buffalo Jump	SunC1
Giant Springs State Park	SatC2	Giant Springs State Park	SunC2
		Malmstrom AFB	SunC3

Family Friendly Trip

ANTELOPE LAKE AND BUTTE
SatA1 • SunA1

Rocky Mountain front grassland, easy prairie grass walking, 2 miles; have lunch on a ridge overlooking Pine Butte Swamp – in addition to Long-billed Curlews, you could see moose, deer or even bears. Stop at an historic Blackfeet Golden Eagle catch site. Thick-billed Longspur nest in the area. Red-necked Grebes nest at the lake. Learn about the connection of Limber Pine and the Clark's Nutcracker. Learn about the birds, mammals, plants, geology, history and archeology from a retired ranger/wildlife biologist.

AROD LAKE
SatA2 • SunA2

This 800-acre wildlife management area is also a Montana IBA. It consists of three main lakes. This water and grassland habitat hosts nesting colonies of American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorants, California Gull in addition to numerous other waterfowl. The grassland is home to Ring-necked Pheasant, Gray Partridge, Long-billed Curlew, Western Meadowlark, Yellow-headed Blackbird and Wilson's Snipe. In addition to the birds, you will learn about the more than several Indian teepee rings and plants that are on the WMA. Walking without elevation gain is through grassland with cactus.

BENTON LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
SatA3 • SunA3

Located eight miles north of Great Falls, Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge is an Important Bird Area, and was set aside as a refuge and breeding ground for birds in 1929. The prairie marsh and grasslands provide prime habitat for Chestnut-collard Longspur, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Marsh Wren, Eared Grebe, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Forster's and Common Terns, White-faced Ibis, Yellow-headed Blackbird, American Avocet, and in some years, Burrowing Owl and Black Tern.

Marsh Wren

Bob Martinka

BLUEBIRD TRAIL – LOGGING CREEK

SatB1 • SunB1

A scenic drive to view mountain bluebirds along a nesting box trail in the Little Belt Mountains east of Great Falls. Not only are there nesting Mountain Bluebirds but Mountain Chickadees, Tree Swallows and House Wrens also find the accommodations welcoming. This trail has more than 100 houses. You pass through foothills and the edge of the Little Belts. The trip ends at the Sluice Boxes for an optional extra birding experience.

BLUEBIRD TRAIL – STANFORD/JUDITH MOUNTAINS

SatA4 • SunA4

The Bob Neibuhr Bluebird Trail starts at Stanford and travels a variety of habitats from grassland, conifer, aspen forest, creek bottom and wetlands. (Travel on Dry Wolf Rd and Running Wolf Rd). Not only are you seeing birds you will learn pre-European history of the area, how George Bird Grinnell and Lewis and Clark played a part in the area, and be ready for a "quiz". Target birds – American Three-toed Woodpecker and American Dipper. A real learning experience.

CHOTEAU LOOP

SatA5 • SunA5

The route through ranchlands near the Rocky Mountain Front offers views of grassland birds such as Long-billed Curlew, Thick-billed Longspur and Chestnut-collared Longspur, Golden Eagle, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Bobolink, and Sprague's Pipit. We will bird from the road along the Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte Swamp Preserve looking for Sandhill Crane, Lazuli Bunting, Clay-colored Sparrow, American Redstart, and flycatchers.

FIRST PEOPLES BUFFALO JUMP

SatB2 • SunB2 and ***SatC1 • SunC1***

First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park and National Historic Landmark is an archaeological site with possibly the largest bison cliff jump in North America. Native peoples used this site for at least a thousand years before Lewis and Clark. The bison jump site consists of a mile-long sandstone cliff; there are remnants of drive lines on top of the cliff and there are up to 18 feet of compacted buffalo remains below. You might see/hear Rock Wren, Say's Phoebe, Long-billed Curlew, Upland Sandpiper, Black-headed Grosbeak, Violet-green Swallows, warblers and flycatchers among the rock slopes, mixed grass prairie, and, as time allows, nearby riparian areas. We will also visit a Prairie Dog town for a chance at seeing the elusive Burrowing Owl.

FREEZOUT LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

SatA6 • SunA6

Located 48 miles northwest of Great Falls, this 11,350-acre prairie marsh and substantial grassland attracts American White Pelican, Clark's, Western and Eared Grebes, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Franklin's Gull, Marsh Wren, Say's Phoebe, Wilson's Phalarope, Forster's and Common Terns, White-faced Ibis, Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Black Tern. This trip involves driving and stopping.

GIANT SPRINGS STATE PARK and Local Birding Hot Spots

SatB3 • SunB3 and ***SatC2 • SunC2***

Giant Springs was documented by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805 and is one of the largest freshwater springs in the country. The springs are the site of the Roe River, once listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's shortest river. Large trees and Missouri River riparian habitat make this a dependable place to see birds near Great Falls. Bullock's Oriole, House Wren, swallows, kingbirds, Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, and American White Pelican are the usual species seen, and perhaps a Great Horned Owl. Great for beginners and families. You can continue to explore the River's Edge Trail upstream from Giant Springs. This trip is family friendly.

LITTLE BELT MOUNTAINS/ SLUICE BOXES

SatA7 • SunA7

Set in a transition zone between the high plains and the Little Belt Mountains, Sluice Boxes State Park has a wide range of habitats. We will find cool, shaded rock walls and Belt Creek riparian areas. Wildflowers abound in early summer. An easy walk in the Sluice Box canyon will include White-throated Swift, Calliope Hummingbird, Spotted Towhee, American Dipper, and Warbling Vireo. Along the Dry Fork of Belt Creek, expect to see Red-naped Sapsucker and Mountain Chickadee. At higher elevations, as time and snow level allow, we will look for Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Swainson's Thrush, Gray Jay, Mountain Chickadee, and Clark's Nutcracker. Includes the Izaak Walton Spring rest stop, Sluice Boxes and possibly Dry Fork Rd/Hughesville Rd.

MALMSTROM AIR FORCE BASE

SunC3

Join the base biologist to explore habitat that is usually off limits to civilians. This trip is for families. They will explore the pond and fields and learn the important role of a biologist on an Air Force Base. You will not only find waterfowl and grassland birds but should be able to find nesting Swainson's Hawks and Burrowing Owls.

More trips next page

Burrowing Owl

Bob Martinka

RAPTOR TOUR
SatA8 • SunA8
This trip takes you along the Smith River, the high plains between Cascade and Ulm then finally along the Missouri River. The corridor is filled with raptors during migration and nesting raptors in the summer. In between are various pockets for songbirds and waterfowl. It's different every trip. Nesting Red-tail, Swainson's, Bald Eagle, Kestrel and Ferruginous Hawks is possible.

SULPHUR SPRINGS
SatB4 • SunB4
Leaders from Audubon and the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center will highlight birds, plants, and Lewis and Clark history on this moderately easy 3.6-mile round-trip walk-through yucca, grasslands and coulees. The hiking trail is along a relatively remote stretch of Missouri River to the cold springs. Water from Sulphur Springs proved vital in treating Sacagawea's illness during the 1805 portage at Great Falls. The interpretive signs along the trail offer information regarding the Lewis and Clark expedition. Expect to see Lark Sparrow, Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Bullock's Oriole, American White Pelican, Spotted Towhee, Rock Wren, Yellow Warblers, Brown Thrasher, Common Nighthawk and possibly Yellow-breasted Chat.

SUN RIVER CANYON/ WAGNER BASIN
SatA9 • SunA9
We will hike along aspens, cliffs, fen, forest, wildflowers, and a few ancient pictographs on the Rocky Mountain Front west of Great Falls. Overall, the mileage is only a couple of miles with a bit of scrambling off-trail for roughly one-half mile gaining enough elevation (about 600 feet total gain) to have a nice overview of the area and look for bighorn sheep. We will seek Hairy Woodpecker, Clark's Nutcracker, Townsend's Solitaire, Pine Siskin, Mountain Bluebird, Dusky Grouse, Golden Eagle, Prairie Falcon, and Great Horned Owl. Bring bear spray, lunch, windbreaker and hiking boots. No restrooms (although we'll stop either in Augusta or at an outhouse along the drive to the trailhead). Returning mid-afternoon.

THAIN CREEK TRAIL
SatA10 • SunA10
In the Highwood Mountains east of Great Falls, we will bird along the road through grassland and riparian habitat, and time permitting, take a moderate two-mile round-trip hike through conifers. Expect to see Lazuli Bunting, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Red-naped Sapsucker, Mountain Chickadee, Warbling Vireo, Red Crossbill, various warblers, kinglets, flycatchers and Spotted Towhee.

CANCELLATIONS AND REFUNDS

If you have registered for the festival and need to cancel, please notify Montana Audubon as soon as possible.

Refunds of 50% will be issued if notice of cancellation is received a minimum of 14 days in advance, by May 25. Refunds will not be issued after May 25. Contact us if you'd like to discuss the option of converting your registration fee to a donation toward our mission.

Montana Audubon reserves the right to cancel the festival or individual field trips. If Montana Audubon cancels the festival, you will be notified and a full refund will be issued within two (2) weeks of the cancellation date.

Not Just a Festival – It's Also a Birdathon!

White-faced Ibis

Did you know that since the 1970s, our country has lost three billion birds? This is an alarming trend, but hope is still alive. Did you know that YOU are part of the solution this weekend? How, you ask? Simply by birding with us. No donation required. Pretty great, right?

Here's how it works: For each unique bird species you identify here at the festival, between Friday at 6 pm and Saturday at 6 pm, you not only have lots of fun and get the kudos, but money is raised for Montana Audubon's critical bird and wildlife habitat work.

Birdathon is our biggest fundraising event of the year, so we hope you will join our loyal donors by pledging an amount per bird species found during the 24-hour period. Thank you for spotting those birds and helping us raise money for our vital conservation work. Every bird counts!

Bob Martinka

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS AND SPONSORS

Black-bellied Plover

Bob Martinka

MONTANA'S OUTDOOR LEGACY FOUNDATION

VISIT Great Falls MONTANA

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

WESTERN SUSTAINABILITY EXCHANGE

Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society

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Heritage Inn The Power of Independence Locally Owned & Operated

INTERMOUNTAIN WEST JOINT VENTURE

conserving habitat through partnerships

MONTANA AUDUBON

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22ND ANNUAL WINGS ACROSS THE BIG SKY BIRD FESTIVAL

JUNE 9 – 11, 2023
HERITAGE INN,
GREAT FALLS

Flock to the Falls with Your Family!

Looking for a fun, healthy activity for your family? Look no further.

Flock to the Falls with your family for *Wings Across the Big Sky* and bird with your brood!

Second only to golf, birding is the fastest-growing outdoor activity in America. Why? Because it combines the best of human experiences – time outdoors, ease of sharing with others, discovery, learning, a spiritual connection to our environment, and physical activity, all culminating in a healthier participant and an enhanced conservation ethic.

For the first time in festival history, children under the age of 18 receive a discounted registration rate. Experience the excitement and enrichment that birding offers – and share it with your loved ones.

Join us at *Wings Across the Big Sky* to discover your passion for birds and conservation in Montana!

Register today– deadline is May 25

Bob Martinka

Wigeons