

fall

2022

MONTANA
AUDUBON

TRACKING GLACIER'S GHOSTS

page 2

ANNUAL BIRDATHON:
**WE COUNT BIRDS,
BECAUSE BIRDS
COUNT ON US**

page 16



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.

fall 2022

- 2 Tracking Glacier's Ghosts
- 6 Legislative Preview
- 7 News from the Center
- 8 Conservation Briefs
- 16 Birdathon Returns

On the cover:
A Black Swift nests in
Glacier National Park
Bo Crees photo
Inset photo: Bob Martinka

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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

Every year our office is aflutter with planning the route for our annual Birdathon. What a joy to know that an activity we are passionate about, the pastime that makes all our lives more fulfilled, can actually help fund our work! Whether you're inspired by a love of birds or a concern for the environment, supporting our Birdathon is a great opportunity to do something positive for Montana birds.



The Montana Audubon Birdathon takes place over a 24-hour period, during which the staff and board go outside and count as many different bird species as we can. Whether you pledge an amount per bird (\$1 per bird) or a lump sum (\$100), every dollar we raise supports our critical work. From Yellowstone to Glacier, from Thompson Falls to Glendive, with your support, we protect birds and the habitats they need to thrive through bird science, public policy, and nature education.

Montana Audubon's on-the-ground actions to address the threats of climate change focus on conservation of Montana's working grasslands; bird research; preservation of bird habitat; educating youth and adults; and advocacy for strong climate policies at the local, state, and federal levels. A great example is our campaign over the last few years to support full and dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This effort paid off recently with the establishment of the Lost Trail Conservation Area, a new unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which will protect 38,052 acres of prime wildlife habitat in the northwest corner of Montana. We are now leading the effort in Montana to pass the Recovering America's Wildlife Act that 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.

Birdathon is Montana Audubon's largest fundraiser of the year and an important way to engage our supporters in the conservation work we're doing on behalf of birds and other wildlife in Montana. Our goal this year is to raise \$50,000, and thanks to a challenge from one of our donors, every dollar of the first \$10,000 we raise will be doubled! Please consider donating whatever you're able to give. Although we will spend 24 hours counting birds, it is the birds that are counting on us; we hope we can count on you to turn passion into support!

Yours in Conservation,



Larry Berrin
Executive Director



Montana Audubon Board Member Jim Rogers joins Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland at the dedication of the Lost Trail Conservation Area on August 20, 2022 in Marion, MT.

TRACKING GLACIER'S

GLACIERS

Thanks to New Federal
Legislation, Things Are
Looking Up for a Climate
Sensitive Species



Bo Grees



Montana Audubon
science team monitoring
Black Swifts.

It's another brisk morning in Glacier National Park as Montana Audubon's science team ascends up to Raven Quiver Falls in order to monitor the alpine nest of one of Montana's most elusive birds.

The Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*) is considered "Climate Endangered" according to Audubon's Climate Report because none of its breeding range is stable and more than 70% of its range is expected to disappear in this century. The anticipated loss of range is due to the fact that Black Swifts nest behind or near high elevation waterfalls. These delicate, cool habitats are created by runoff from glaciers found in what is known as the Crown of the Continent.

But it seems the "crown" may eventually lose its "jewels"; the alpine glaciers that adorn its mountains are disappearing due to climate change. Park rangers may have to update their interpretive talks to focus more on the park's glacially carved mountains than on its renowned alpine glaciers. One of those shrinking glaciers is near to our heart since it is named after the founder of the Audubon movement, George Bird Grinnell.

Thankfully, a federal bill may help turn the tide.

continued...

Bo Grees

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is the largest investment the U.S. has ever made to tackle climate change. The bill allocates \$369 billion towards investments in the clean energy industry, with a goal of a 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. On top of that, Montanans will also benefit from the Tribal Climate Resilience Program, climate-smart agricultural investments, and climate-focused wildfire protections. IRA represents the most important investment in climate solutions and science-based federal land management to date. We look forward to continuing to work with our congressional delegation and our agency partners to ensure that the goals of this new legislation are met. Making substantial investments in climate action and clean energy, while ensuring climate-smart forestry practices are used, will combat the climate crisis and reduce wildfire risk to homes, communities, and Montana's treasured landscapes.

The Inflation Reduction Act represents the most important investment in climate solutions and science-based federal land management to date.

Birds tell us that we need to act on climate change. A 2019 Audubon report found that two-thirds of North American bird species will be vulnerable to extinction if global temperatures are allowed to rise at the current rate. An important strategy in limiting the rise of temperatures is to implement clean energy programs across the United States. Estimates are that the clean energy tax credit extension and clean energy grants in the legislation will result in more rapid deployment of renewable energy with annual

solar projected to increase to 49 gigawatts per year. It is notable that the clean energy investments in this legislation are expected to reduce home energy costs as well as cut harmful emissions.

The IRA will also reduce emissions from greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide and methane, which will help alleviate some of the worst effects of climate change. The IRA includes funds for methane emissions monitoring and fixes and applies a fee on oil and gas operations of \$900 in 2024 (up to \$1,500 in 2026 and thereafter) per metric ton of methane emitted. Currently, companies are able to vent or flare excess methane on public lands without paying any royalty back to the public. As we address the need to account for climate change and the carbon pollution that contributes to it, these types of regulations are essential to reducing oil field waste and emissions. The legislation also provides funding through the Environmental Protection Agency to incentivize oil and gas facilities to better monitor emissions and adopt emission-reducing technologies. The IRA would also provide more than \$70 billion in new loan authority within the Department of Energy, which will help expand clean energy and transmission as well as update infrastructure to meet climate threats and ensure that new projects are designed with conservation of existing environments in mind.

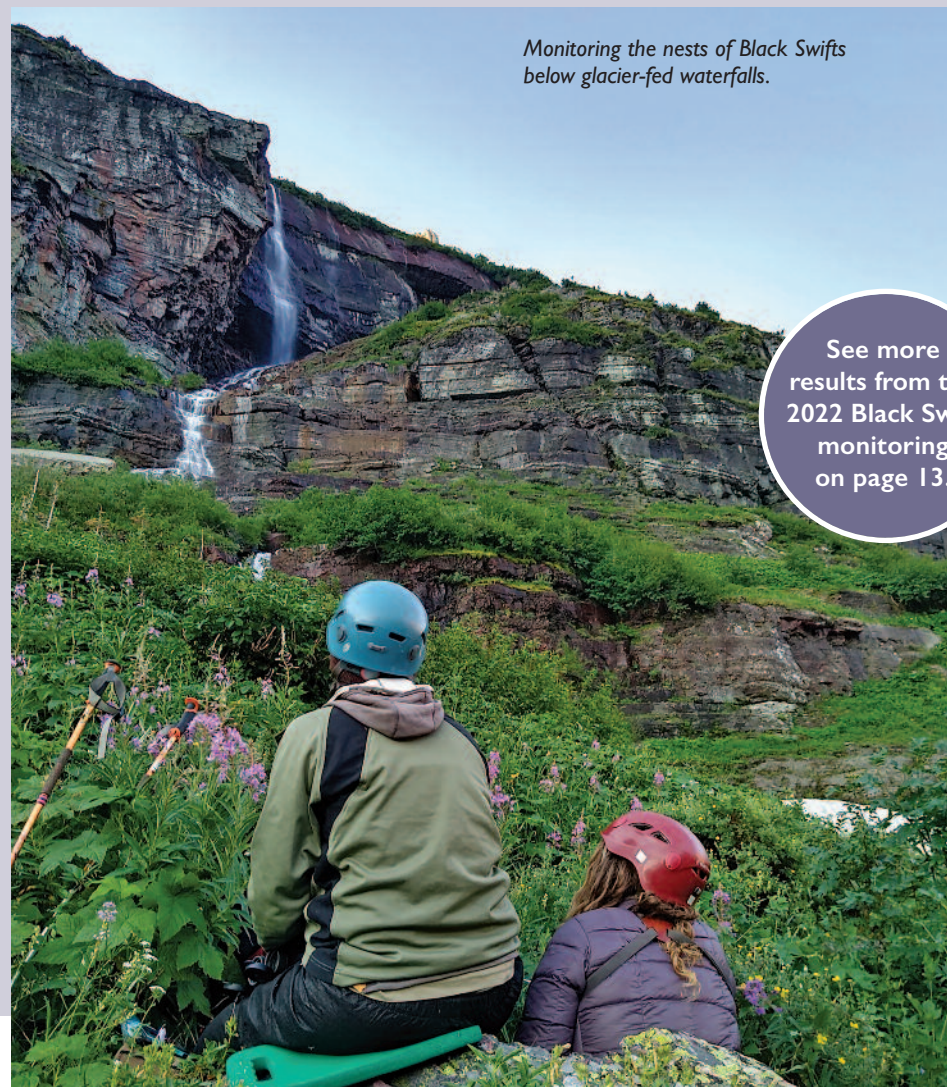
Finally, the IRA will invest in our forests and grasslands, crucial habitats for a bird's life cycle including nesting, breeding, and foraging. The new legislation will invest more than \$450 million to help private landowners manage

forests and to provide incentives that will help protect more forest ecosystems. \$20 billion from the IRA will help producers implement climate and habitat-friendly practices on their farms and ranches, protecting these critical grasslands. With an additional \$1 billion in Conservation Technical Assistance, these funds will help support programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture that have proven to work by incentivizing landowners to make habitat improvements that are better for farmers, ranchers, and grassland birds.

As the science team descends back to base camp to crunch the numbers for the night, hope fills

IRA will invest in our forests and grasslands, crucial habitats for a bird's life cycle including nesting, breeding, and foraging.

the tent. To date, 38 nesting waterfall sites have been discovered with Montana Audubon's help over the past nine years, adding much needed data for a species that is so dependent on glaciers that we have affectionately nicknamed it Montana's "Polar Bear," even though it is black not white! It is also a bird not a mammal but still one that Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks considers critical as both a species of concern and a species of greatest inventory need. Thanks to our continued research, and this new federal legislation, we hope those numbers only continue to grow.



Monitoring the nests of Black Swifts below glacier-fed waterfalls.

See more results from the 2022 Black Swift monitoring on page 13.

Bo Crees

BACK TO THE CAPITOL HALLWAYS

After the 67th's remote Legislative Session we are looking forward to returning in person to the halls of the State Capitol in 2023. Along with the biennial debate surrounding our state's budget, we anticipate changes targeting land-use planning regulations, zoning and subdivisions, and wildlife habitat and harvest. While a lot of bills passed in 2021 that loosened harvest regulations on wolves, elk, and black bear, we are hoping for more positive outcomes for wildlife this year; especially if the much-anticipated Recovering America's Wildlife Act can make its way through the federal process to bring much-needed funding to conserving Montana.

The potential that RAWA has for supporting Montana's wildlife and wildlife habitat is almost unmatched by any other piece of legislation since our 1976 start. Hopefully, the large financial boost will amplify funding that Montanans brought to wildlife through the passage of HB 701 last session—this bill targeted the adoption of the state's new recreational marijuana taxes. Under HB 701, up to \$650,000 per year is eligible for use by state parks, trails, recreation facilities, and wildlife protection.

As usual, maintaining both financial and legislative support for wildlife funding and management programs will take Montana Legislators coming together with wildlife advocacy groups to find solutions that work for all Montanans. In 2023 our voices will be more important than ever as we work to reauthorize funding for Habitat Montana, Upland Game Birds, Fishing Access Sites, Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), pollinators and their habitat, Greater Sage Grouse conservation, and more.

As we prepare for the session, we hope you are preparing to join us. By joining our online action network, you can help us speak up for the issues that matter most to birds and wildlife in our state this coming session. No matter the setting, our Action Alerts will be there to keep you informed of the issues coming forward.

Beyond funding we will keep a watchful out for topics that impact:
Our most important resource: water, Habitat and habitat management, Climate, energy and industrial development Biodiversity and pollinators.

The session starts January 2 so it's time to prepare now!

In 2023 our voices will be more important than ever.

A Tiny House for Big Ideas

The small things matter the most. Whether it be a warm smile on a cloudy day or the grasp of a child's hand in yours, these small gestures leave lasting impressions. We are fortunate enough to experience these powerful small things every day at the Montana Audubon Center's Fledglings Nature Preschool. This year, donations were generously given to build a new tiny house for our thriving preschoolers.

This tiny house, named **The Shepard's Field Station**, holds many possibilities, great power, and influence beyond the scope of relative size – instead it'll be measured in qualitative impact on all that cross its threshold. When asked what possibilities they envision for this new educational building, our staff said:

"The possibilities are endless! Excellent outdoor play is just a step away from either door." –Kylie Tiller, Teacher Naturalist, Fledglings Preschool.

"Separation from the main building will allow our youngest students to do their best learning without interruption, and proximity to the yurt will give our educators the opportunity to work more closely with one another to create the best experience for our students. The move to the tiny home also eliminates the danger of crossing the road to get to our friends at the yurt." –Sarah Chatwood, Fledglings Preschool Coordinator.

"Building the interior of the Shepard's Field Station has inspired new ideas and reignited a spark in me – getting me ready for another year of Kindergarten and community programs. It holds a lot of potential and I believe that the participants are the ones that will give the finishing touches." –Becca Mathias, Fledglings Teacher Naturalist & Community Programs Coordinator

While working on finishing the interior space, many staff and volunteers put down their phones and picked up their tools to make this dream a reality. Whether it was putting up wood ceiling panels, laying laminate flooring, or cutting plywood panels; they did it all with smiles on their faces and tools in their hands. This provided us the opportunity to come together to finish a project that will positively affect the lives of many humans for years to come. Even in the preparation for its use, the Shepard's Field Station is giving us a preview of its potential as a positive learning space. The room for growth within these four walls is truly boundless. It really is a tiny house for big ideas and we can't wait to witness all of the possibilities.

Thank you to all of our donors and supporters in this project. Your contributions are greatly appreciated and they will continue to leave lasting, positive impacts at the Center, in the Billings community, and beyond.



Getting to know Owen Sowerwine Natural Area

In the northwest corner of Montana, at the confluence of the Flathead and Stillwater Rivers, sits a site highlighted for its natural area values that has been supporting birds, and has bird data stretching back to when Montana Audubon started monitoring birds in 1976.

Its name came from the first chair of the Flathead County Park Board, Owen Sowerwine, who had been a member of the State Land Board, an avid local outdoorsman, and a civic and conservation leader in the community. Early on, he recognized the natural values of the 442-acre state school trust land tract, and its importance to vulnerable bird species like the Osprey, Bald Eagle, Pileated Woodpecker, and the other 165 species documented within the site. The exceptional diversity of birds has contributed to the site's management as both a natural area and an Important Bird Area as recognized by both Bird Life International, the National Audubon Society, and Montana Audubon.

The Flathead County Park Board managed the site from 1978 – 1995, helping fulfill state land obligations by paying the small annual lease fee of \$250 for maintaining natural area status.

The 442-acre Owen Sowerwine Natural Area is recognized for its importance to vulnerable bird species like the Osprey, Bald Eagle, and Pileated Woodpecker.

When prices increased beyond the volunteer board's capacity, Flathead Audubon Society stepped in to support the lease and management of the site. Over time, as fees continue to rise, Montana Audubon stepped in to co-support the site's maintenance. Since 2001, both Montana Audubon and Flathead Audubon Society have continued working with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to lease the site under a Special Recreational Use License.

During the past two decades of co-management, Flathead Audubon Society has contributed countless work hours to site improvements including: building bridges and trails for access, fighting back invasive weeds, monitoring cottonwood survival and regeneration, and providing site interpretation and education. The citizen science at the site started in 2008 when crews recorded habitat features and cottonwood regeneration. Montana Audubon and Flathead Audubon Society continue to welcome and encourage the community to support and enjoy the natural area features for which the site has always been recognized.



photo courtesy of Flathead Audubon Society

Rosy-Finch Monitoring: Citizen Scientists Needed!

With temperatures consistently staying in the 90s throughout Montana, it's easy to be jealous of Rosy-Finches, a species that resides in our highest elevations this time of year – where temperatures rarely climb above the mid-70s. Within the next 2 –3 months, as weather in the alpine zone becomes progressively harsher, these tough little finches will begin their seasonal elevational migration to Montana's foothills and lowlands. They'll congregate in flocks of dozens to hundreds of individuals and frequent backyard feeders in rural areas and mountain towns. It would be nice to monitor Rosy-Finch populations in their mostly inaccessible summer range, but obviously, it is much easier to wait for the Finches to come to us, where we may be able to learn more about them from the comfort of our porch!

With so many Rosy-Finches spending the winter around private yards and ranches throughout western and central Montana, it would be impossible to carry out effective monitoring without the help of individuals that live on the finches' wintering ground. Montana Audubon was excited to learn that two of the ranches that participate in our Audubon Conservation Ranching program, the Saddle Butte Ranch near the Highwood Mountains and the Birdtail Ranch on the east side of the Bears Paw Mountains have wintering flocks of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches. Without the help of caring individuals, many of our wintering flocks would remain overlooked.

Montana Audubon is collaborating with Utah's Sageland Collaborative in a multi-state effort to better understand population dynamics, movement, and



The five survey windows are from December 1 through April 30, with each month being a "survey window." We will be asking folks to do their best at surveying their preferred feeder once per month, for only 20 minutes, all five months (5 x 20 minute surveys – easy!) but incidental observations are also welcomed.

distribution of these uncommon, at-risk finches. Comprehensive understanding of Rosy-Finches' life history requirements will enable us to move forward with targeted conservation actions that will help these remarkable birds persist far into the future. We cannot accomplish this without reliable help from citizen scientists like you! Please consider helping the Rosy-Finch Project by carrying out simple 20-minute feeder surveys, once a month, from December to April. Keep an eye out for upcoming Montana Audubon announcements about how to get involved with this important project, or contact Bo, our avian specialist, at bcree@mtaudubon.org for more information.

Audubon Conservation Ranching – Field Season Bird Count Summary

The Montana Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR) program has certified approximately 92,000 acres across nine bird-friendly ranches. These ranches partner with Montana Audubon to implement adaptive habitat management plans to maintain, create, and enhance grassland bird habitat-critical work, due to the fact that grassland birds are imperiled. As value-added to the rancher, the Bird-Friendly Certification and seal conveys good land stewardship practices and empowers consumers to purchase meat products that support these practices.

To measure the efficacy of ACR land management on grassland bird communities, we conduct bird monitoring. From May-July, 2022, four Montana Audubon staff completed 22 bird surveys across nine ACR certified ranches – and one newly enrolled ranch. Staff completed 222 total, six-minute point-counts, using visual and aural cues, attempting to record all individuals of all species present.

Montana Audubon staff tallied 3,817 individual bird detections representing 132 total bird species. The top five species detected across all 10 ranches were Western Meadowlark (720 detections), Vesper Sparrow (255), Red-winged Blackbird (162), American Robin (149), and Brown-headed Cowbird (124). We detected 12 total species of the 17 ACR priority grassland species, including Vesper Sparrow (255 detections), Long-billed Curlew (72), Brewer's Sparrow (48), Bobolink (42), Grasshopper Sparrow (28), Upland Sandpiper (18), Burrowing Owl (4), Thick-billed Longspur (4), Loggerhead Shrike (3), Chestnut-collared Longspur (2), Ferruginous Hawk (2), Golden Eagle (2). MT ACR priority grassland species that we did not detect Baird's Sparrow,

Twelve of the 17 ACR priority grassland species were detected, including the Grasshopper Sparrow.

Greater Sage-Grouse, Lark Bunting, Mountain Plover, and Sprague's Pipit.

For smaller acreage ranches (less than 20,000 acres), Montana Audubon staff used a Montana Audubon Conservation Ranching/World Wildlife Fund (MTA/WWF) protocol. We conducted a total of 15 surveys on seven ranches using MTA/WWF protocol. These results will allow us to make inferences to diversity and occurrence of species, and how priority species respond to ranch-specific Habitat Management Plans. The MTA/WWF results will be sent to National Audubon so that they can provide a ranch-specific Bird Friendliness Index (BFI) for each ranch enrolled in the ACR program.

For larger ranches (more than 20,000 acres), staff used the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions (IMBCR) protocol for seven surveys on three ranches. The Montana IMBCR ranch-specific results will leverage statewide IMBCR results to generate occupancy and density estimates for species with adequate statewide detections.



Bob Marninka

Grant to Help Grassland Birds through ACR Program

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awarded Montana Audubon a three-year grant that will, combined with matching funds, provide \$1.1 million for the Audubon Conservation Ranching initiative. The growing effort, hatched by the National Audubon Society and implemented in Montana with leadership from Montana Audubon, is aimed at stabilizing declining grassland bird populations.

The NFWF award of \$488,000 comes through the organization's Northern Great Plains Program. By coordinating and leveraging matching funds, the grand total will be spent in on-the-ground ranchland habitat projects, ultimately improving grassland bird management across 300,000 acres for species like the Thick-billed Longspur, Lark Bunting and Greater Sage-Grouse.

The proposed habitat restoration projects on ACR ranches now include:

- In a large burned area- reducing the delivery of sediment to a creek by installing larger culverts with the capacity to handle increased runoff, building structures (or using fallen timber) to trap sediment, and stabilizing stream channels with large woody materials, hay bales, or other low-tech methods.
- In grasslands seeing woody encroachment and water degradation due to hoof impact- thinning a 230 acre parcel, using mastication (a mechanical process that grinds trees into fine mulch), and fencing off of a four-acre playa.
- In degraded pasture lands- planting of no-till cover-crop plantings on approximately 150 acres of pasture, and implementing beaver mimicry approaches to capture more natural water runoff.
- On a multi-pasture regenerative grazing system- water supply improvements that replace 25,776 feet of pipeline connected to the main water storage pit and reclamation of pipeline corridors to suppress recolonization of invasive or undesirable vegetation species.

Playback Surveys: a Lesson in Birding Ethics

When we conduct surveys in our Citizen Science programs or on partner ranches, the surveyor aims to capture all detectable target species while minimizing their own disturbance. The detectability of a bird, however, relies on their willingness to sing, drum, or present themselves out in the open.

Relying on a bird's willingness to be seen complicates the study of Montana's more secretive species of concern, like the Great Gray Owls, Black-billed Cuckoos, or elusive marsh birds. They certainly show up on projects with a "wide-net" like the Breeding Bird Survey, though they are often underrepresented when compared to vocal songbirds. To solve that problem, researchers rely on "playback surveys," where the surveyor

plays a recording of the target bird in suitable habitat to coax them out. While a useful tool, playback surveys come with several ethical questions. Is the survey stressful for the bird? Are we exposing the subject to predators by revealing them? Reflexively, does entering a bird's habitat for a conventional survey cause less disturbance? Some concerns are speculative due to little research on the topic, but they do challenge us to be conscious of the impact we have on birds in the wild. Useful tools like automated recording units used in the University of Montana bird ecology lab's Cuckoo project have allowed us to reduce our disturbance and increase accuracy. Thankfully, bird conservation is an ever-evolving field that continues to center the well being of its subjects.

Board Member Q&A

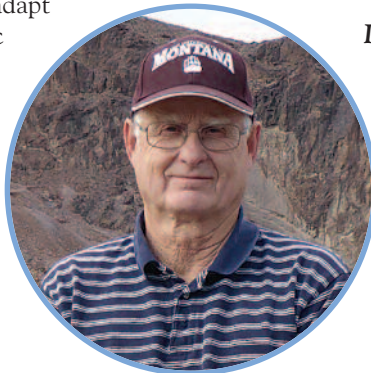
David A. Manuwal

Where are you from and what is your profession?

I was born and raised in South Bend, Indiana. I went to college at Purdue University and then to the University of Montana for an MS degree in Wildlife Management. I received a PhD in Zoology from UCLA and became a member of the Wildlife Science faculty at the University of Washington. I officially retired in 2008.

What about birds captured your interest?

I guess I liked everything about birds in the beginning. I was drawn to their bright colors when I was about 7 years old. Now I am impressed by their ability to adjust to extremes of weather. I am also amazed at how some species can adapt to humans and the drastic changes we have made in their environment. On the other hand, I see where some species cannot adapt to these changes and need our help to avoid extinction.



What is your favorite Montana bird species?

Swainson's Thrush

What is a conservation topic that you are passionate about right now?

Conservation of grassland species.

What is your favorite, funniest piece of wildlife trivia?

A group of crows is called "a murder."

What do you like best about Montana Audubon?

Even though I have yet to visit it, I like the idea that we have the Montana Audubon Center. I am also impressed that we are so active in bird conservation.

If you're a birder, where is your favorite place to go look for birds in Montana?

The prairies of eastern Montana and also the Elk Creek drainage of the Lubrecht Experimental Forest east of Missoula.

Staff Update

WELCOME TO OUR NEW EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Joanna Haddon comes to Montana Audubon with 14 years experience in the non-profit world. She is a native Montanan and a UM graduate. She has been married to her husband, Steve, for 37 years. Their 25-year-old son, Jackson, is an Air Force veteran and a Carroll College graduate. The family moved from Missoula to Helena in 2001. It was with the move to Helena that Joanna's interest in birds began to get serious – especially since their house backed up to the Helena Reservoir's regulating canal.



She discovered red-wing blackbirds flocked to nearby fields, and mallard ducks raised many broods of chicks in the canal every spring.

Joanna's career includes time spent in the legal and medical fields, but she has most enjoyed working as an Executive Assistant in the non-profit world. She is excited to be a part of Montana Audubon team and looks forward to learning more about birds!



Bo Creebs

2022 BLACK SWIFT MONITORING BY THE NUMBERS

- 26 Morning surveys at previously unsurveyed waterfalls
- 9 Morning surveys at previously surveyed falls where birds were seen for the first time
- 15 Habitat surveys at previously unsurveyed waterfalls
- 2 New nests found, and nine occupied nests recorded (including two nestlings)
- 6 Technicians trained, including three biologists from Idaho, helping them survey six waterfall locations and detect two new nesting sites.

2022-23 CITIZEN SCIENCE SURVEY CALENDAR

	November 2022 – April 2023 Project Feeder Watch			
			December 14, 2022 – January 5, 2023 Christmas Bird Count	
January 15–25, 2023 Climate Watch				
			February 17–20, 2023 Great backyard Bird Count	
	April 8 – May 31, 2023 Long-billed Curlew			

Bob Maranika photos

Thank You, Citizen Science Volunteers!

2022 Spring and Summer Volunteers

Payton Adams	Carol Fox	Janet Kempff	Blake Sexton
Paden Alexander	Brian Green	Jonathan Kempff	Darcy Thomas
Carla Belski	Mariah Hellebrandt	Libby Langston	Jeff Torano
William Crain	Liz Hiltunen	Jean Pocha	Jeff Van Tine
Blaine Doherty	Cindy Holder	John Pocha	Rod Walette
Steve DuBois	Tessa Jarden	Judith Strom	Pamelia Willison
Kaylie Durglo	Carolyn Jones	Barb Pitman	Jenna Zwanger
Keri Eneas	Ellen Knight	Nancy Roth	

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



Wildlife Grants Available

Montana Audubon will once again make available grants from the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment. The application deadline for the 2023 grant cycle is December 17, 2022. For information and a grant application, visit: mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants

Projects funded through this program in 2022 included supporting the Yellowstone Wildlife Sanctuary Wingspan mural, the Jewel Basin Hawkwatch, The Montana Moth Project, and Farm to School of Park County Native Pollinator Habitats.

BECOME A MEMBER OF MONTANA AUDUBON

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, discounts to programs, events and the annual bird festival, our 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.



Clark's Grebe

Bob Marinka

Join Merlin Birding & Nature Tours and Holbrook Travel

BIRDING ECUADOR

Cock-of-the-Rock

Chocó-Andes Region, February 27– March 9, 2023 (from \$3,975)

Ecuador has one of the highest levels of avian biodiversity in the world. Discover the amazing contrasts of cloud forest and high-elevation Andean landscapes on this 11-day birding extravaganza. Accompanied by an expert local guide, you'll observe resident and migratory avifauna. View the snow-capped Antisana Volcano, journey along the well-known Yanacocha and Quinde Eco-routes, and see 30+ tanager species and 40+ hummingbirds! Highlights:

- Numerous public and private reserves, including Alambi Cloud Forest Reserve, Sachatamia, Bella Vista Cloud Forest, Milpe Bird Sanctuary, Antisana Ecological Reserve, and more.
- Dozens of hummingbird species, including the Giant & Sword-billed hummingbirds, Violet-tailed Sylph, Booted Racket-tail, Shining Sunbeam, and others.
- Unique and rare target species, including Andean Condor, Black-faced Ibis, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Long-wattled Umbrellabird, Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, 6+ antpitta species, dozens of colorful tanagers, Andean Bear, etc.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION: Pair this trip with the following tour to experience even more of Ecuador's amazing avian diversity!

Amazon Rainforest, March 8–14, 2023 (from \$2,780)

Embark on an unforgettable journey into the Ecuadorian Amazon. From the foothills of the Andes Mountains at WildSumaco Wildlife Sanctuary, descend into La Selva Amazon Ecological Reserve's ecological reserve in the heart of the Amazon. Enjoy a variety of resident and migrant avian species, plus neotropical mammals, amphibians, insects, and more. In addition to a superb wildlife experience, you'll have a chance to connect with indigenous communities and learn about their close relationship with the surrounding forest. Highlights:

- Search for a mix of mid-elevation species in Sumaco, including the Coppery-chested Jacamar, Blue-rumped Manakin, and the endangered Military Macaw.
- Within the heart of the Amazon Basin, take a canopy walk to enjoy close views of Scarlet and Red-bellied Macaws, Many-banded Aracari, Paradise and Magpie tanagers, Gilded Barbet, Yellow-rumped Cacique, and much more.
- Canoe the flooded Amazon forest, watching for birds, monkeys, sloths, caimans, and more.
- Walk through the pristine lowland Amazon forest, containing orchids, bromeliads, palm trees and 150-foot kapok trees.

In addition to your expert Ecuadorian guide who will accompany you throughout this tour, Steve Hoffman, former Director of Montana Audubon, will serve as your US-based trip leader. These two tours are being offered in partnership with Holbrook Travel. For more information, please contact Steve at 406-461-5714, or swhoffman0322@gmail.com.

For information on other Merlin Nature Tours, visit merlinbirding.com



2022 BIRDATHON READY, SET, COUNT!



Short-eared Owl

Bob Martinka

It is time once again for our annual Birdathon, Montana

Audubon's largest and most important fundraiser of the year, and an important way to engage our supporters in the conservation work we're doing on behalf of birds and other wildlife in Montana.

A big THANK YOU for your past support of Montana Audubon! All of us greatly appreciate your contributions, without which we would not be able to make such a great impact.

Support throughout 2021, especially through Birdathon, empowered us to accomplish so much, including the following:

Grow our Audubon Conservation Ranching in Montana, a program designed to use market-based strategies to enhance bird and other wildlife habitats on Montana ranches. With your support we now have 92,000 acres of bird-friendly ranches in Montana!

Pass full and dedicated funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, with a strong coalition of Montana and national partners, which recently led to the establishment of the Lost Trail Conservation Area – protecting over 38,000 acres of prime wildlife habitat in the northwest corner of Montana.

Continue our work to pass the Recovering America's Wildlife Act to safeguard our fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation traditions, and their associated economic benefits.

Added a total of 38 additional Black Swift nest sites over nine years of research as we continue to gain a better understanding of this climate sensitive species.

Connect over 20,000 youth and adults with nature through the quality education programs provided at our Montana Audubon Center in Billings.

Individual donors are the financial backbone of Montana Audubon. Please help sustain all of our conservation efforts with a contribution to our 2022 Birdathon!
THANK YOU!

Our 2022 Birdathon will take place over a 24-hour period this fall with bird species to be recorded by Montana Audubon staff and board members. Giving to the Birdathon is easy. You can choose to donate on a "per-bird species" basis (we're hoping to spot 100 bird species this year!) or a lump-sum gift. Please see the enclosed response envelope for more details. Either way, you will help sustain our conservation work in 2022 and beyond!

The best part of giving to Birdathon this year is that your gift helps us double your impact. A generous donor has pledged up to \$10,000 in matching funds, one dollar for every dollar we raise will be matched from our much-appreciated supporters. Please consider a Birdathon gift that is personally meaningful to you... and double your conservation impact today!

This year anyone who donates a lump sum of \$100 or more, or pledges \$1 or more per-bird, will receive our newly published Montana Audubon Wildlife Guide or our popular Montana Audubon Bird Guide. Donate \$200 or pledge \$2/bird and get both!



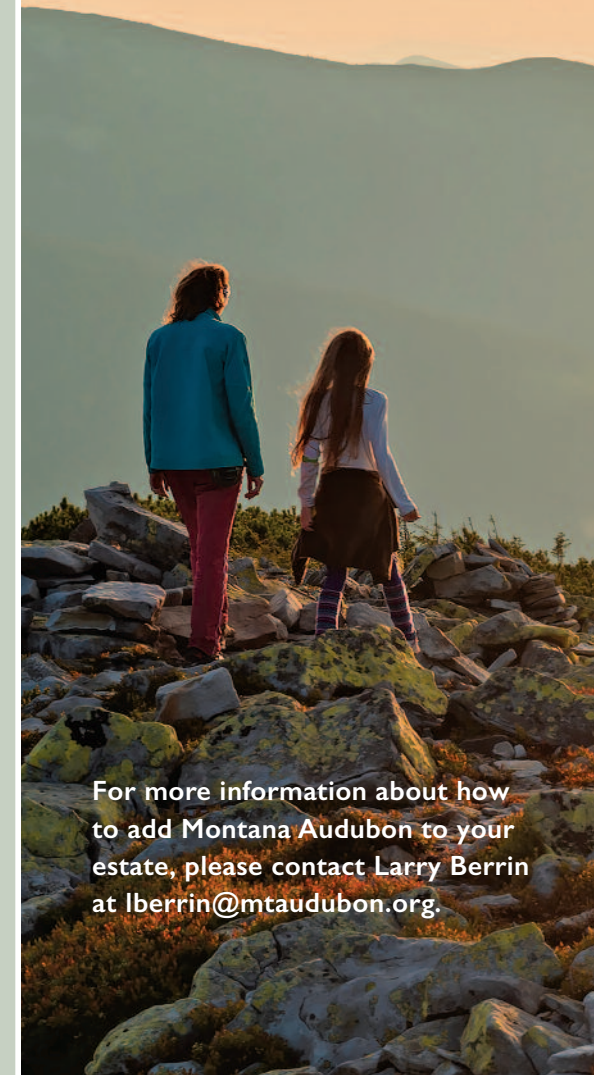
CREATING A CONSERVATION LEGACY

Protecting Birds Today and Beyond

Core to Montana Audubon's vision is that birds, other wildlife and their habitats in Montana will be protected for generations to come.

Planned gifts are instrumental in helping our organization achieve this goal and help you leave a lasting conservation legacy. Together we can ensure the long term sustainability of these precious Montana landscapes and wildlife.

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



For more information about how to add Montana Audubon to your estate, please contact Larry Berrin at lberrin@mtaudubon.org.

22ND ANNUAL MONTANA AUDUBON BIRD FESTIVAL

JUNE 9–11, 2023
HERITAGE INN,
GREAT FALLS

SAVE
THE
DATE

Montana Audubon will host its annual bird festival at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls next summer. This longstanding, community event celebrates Montana's native bird species and draws hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts from across the state and beyond.

Exciting field trips to iconic birding locations are currently being planned in addition to a keynote speaker, presentations, and all the other fun activities this festival is known for.

wings 
across the big sky

Keep an eye
on our website
for updates!
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