

fall

2024

MONTANA  
AUDUBON



**PERMANENT  
PROTECTION  
FOR OWEN  
SOWERWINE**

page 2



**A BANNER  
YEAR FOR  
BLACK SWIFTS**

page 8



**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 2024

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On the cover: American Bittern  
Bob Martinka photo  
Inset: Black Swift  
Bo Crees photo

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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**

Back in 2017 when I was just hired as the new Executive Director of Montana Audubon, I remember making a trip up to Kalispell for my first board meeting and a tour of two local Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The two could not be more apart as far as protection status: Glacier National Park IBA and Owen Sowerwine IBA. We all know that Glacier is protected in perpetuity thanks in part to the founder of the Audubon movement, George Bird Grinnell, who championed the establishment of this national park more than a century ago. He wrote, "far away in northwestern Montana, hidden from view by clustering mountain-peaks, lies an unmapped corner – the Crown of the Continent." And thanks to him, what still stands today is a place called Glacier and organization called Montana Audubon. But unfortunately, protection of this smaller IBA was still not established.

As I walked along the trail at the Owen Sowerwine IBA with our local chapter, Flathead Audubon, I couldn't help but notice how the confluence of the Stillwater and Flathead rivers created a unique riparian habitat and how the protection of this IBA, like these interwoven channels, could only be possible through the coming together of many partners who cared about this special place on the outskirts of town. So, we dedicate this issue to the hard work that all these partners put in over the years to help us protect this IBA in perpetuity.

With the approval of a permanent Conservation Easement for the Owen Sowerwine property, we can all rest easy knowing that the work we put in paid off and highlighting this area, as part of our IBA program, was a worthwhile endeavor. The conservation of birds and their habitats across the state is a major goal of ours, so as we celebrate the protection of this IBA, we quickly turn our attention to the next challenge that might be just around the corner. And as we learned in this successful effort, nothing will be accomplished without working together with local community organizations and members that share in this passion to protect these significant places and the beautiful things with wings that animate them.

Yours in Conservation,

Larry Berrin, Executive Director



*We dedicate this issue to the hard work that all these partners put in over the years to help us protect the Owen Sowerwine IBA in perpetuity.*



After nearly 50 years, this Important Bird Area is now protected under a permanent conservation easement.

# Owen Sowerwine

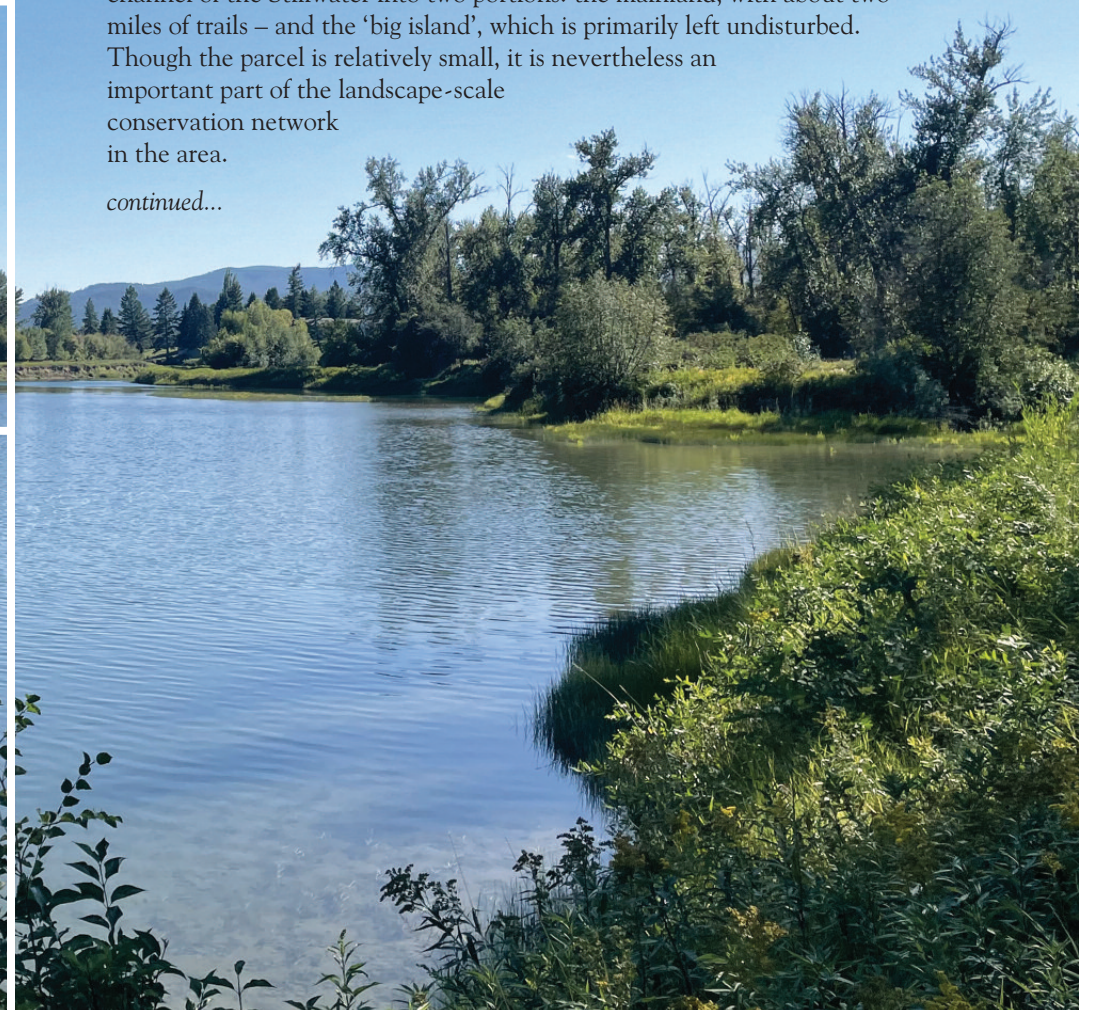
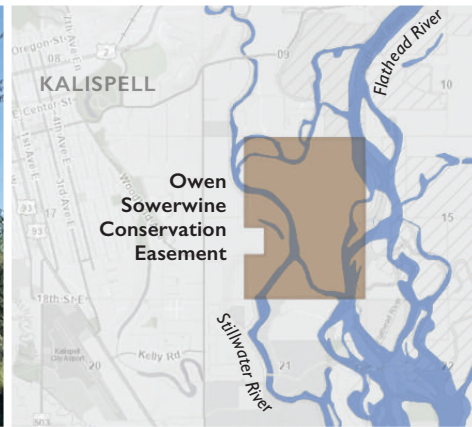
Courtesy of Flathead Land Trust



**When you arrive at the Owen Sowerwine property,** the entrance seems unassuming. There are three public entrances, located on different residential side streets off of Willow Glen Drive, each with minimal parking – the Treasure Lane access only has room for three cars. But once you walk through the gate, it feels like you’re a world away. It’s easy to let the distant traffic noises and overhead airplanes fade into the background as you stand shaded by the trees, listening to the shrieking calls of Osprey, cheery ‘dees’ of Black-capped Chickadees, or the trilling high-pitched ‘screees’ of Cedar Waxwings.

This area, newly protected by a permanent conservation easement, encompasses about 405 acres of riparian forest, give or take depending on ever-changing water levels, along the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers. The area is divided by the main channel of the Stillwater into two portions: the mainland, with about two miles of trails – and the ‘big island’, which is primarily left undisturbed. Though the parcel is relatively small, it is nevertheless an important part of the landscape-scale conservation network in the area.

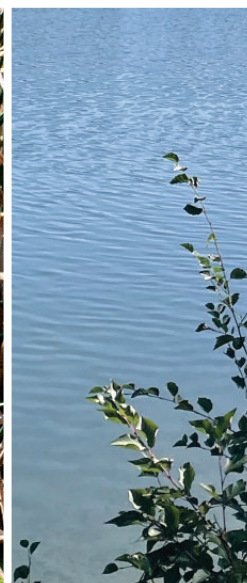
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Above: A group of 8th grade students look for birds during a field trip to the Owen Sowerwine property.

Right: American Bitterns are one of the nearly 200 bird species that have been documented along the adjacent Stillwater River.

Bob Martinka





**A short distance** down the section of ADA-accessible path, Pam Willison pointed down to the slough, an overflow of the Stillwater River. Willison is the Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) vice president and chair of the FAS Owen Sowerwine Committee. “I was in here one spring and saw the first, and the only, American Bittern I’ve ever seen,” she said. “It was very exciting for me.”

American Bitterns are one of the nearly 200 bird species that have been documented on the property or along the

adjacent Stillwater and Flathead Rivers. This list is updated by FAS, based on regular surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, and eBird data. The Owen Sowerwine property was designated by Montana Audubon as an Important Bird Area in 2010, one of only 42 such sites in the state.

Many visitors come to the property to birdwatch or hike on the trails, enjoying this easy access to nature

right on the edge of town. Laura Katzman, Land Protection Specialist at the Flathead Land Trust, likes to use the trail with her own family. While it’s great for anyone, she highlights the pluses for young kids: it’s a relatively short and mostly flat hike and a short drive to get to, but with lots to explore and see in any season. And, she said, “there’s the reward of the [Stillwater] river at the end.”

*“This project really showed a collaborative effort, and the foresight of many individuals.”*

– Laura Katzman, Flathead Land Trust

Public access to the property also includes hunting and fishing, and the conservation easement ensures public access to enjoy the natural area in perpetuity.

All visitors are required by the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) to have a Montana Conservation License, as well as any applicable hunting or fishing licenses as required by the state.

As you walk the trails at the Owen Sowerwine property, you get the feeling that it’s a place where you might find an uncommon bird just around the

bend. The trails are minimally maintained, and there’s a sense of wilderness that FAS deliberately works to preserve. This means that you’ll see downed tree branches and rotting logs, which invite you to pause and look closer, studying the insects and woodpecker holes, running your fingers softly over the whorls in the grain of a fallen cottonwood tree, tracing lines that mirror the ripples and eddies in the Stillwater River waiting at the trail’s end.

When you walk the trails, you may see all sorts of wildlife, including white-tailed deer or even bears. “Last year, with all the chokecherries we had, we had a momma grizzly and two cubs in here,” said Willison, gesturing to a dense thicket near the trail. “They were very respectful – they came over here to the mainland at night to eat the chokecherries, and then went back over to the island during the day.”

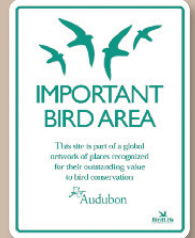
“We saw lots of scat, which made for good conversation when we had school groups in,” she added.

**FAS runs a number of education programs** on the property, primarily on an education trail they have developed over the years. The trail features numbered stops associated with an interpretive guide and two observation points, with wildlife blinds made of brush piles. The interpretive guide created by FAS is a great resource for visiting teachers and educational groups. “Education is an extremely important aspect of Flathead Audubon, and has been for a long time,” said Willison.

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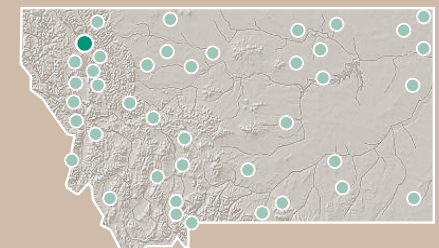
## THE IBA PROGRAM

The conservation of birds and their habitats across the state is a major goal of Montana Audubon, and central to this goal is the Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program, which works to identify and conserve key bird habitats. In order for an area to be designated as an IBA, it must meet one of the following criteria: support bird species of high conservation priority; have exceptionally high numbers of birds; or have a high diversity of bird species. As of 2024, there are 42 IBAs in Montana.



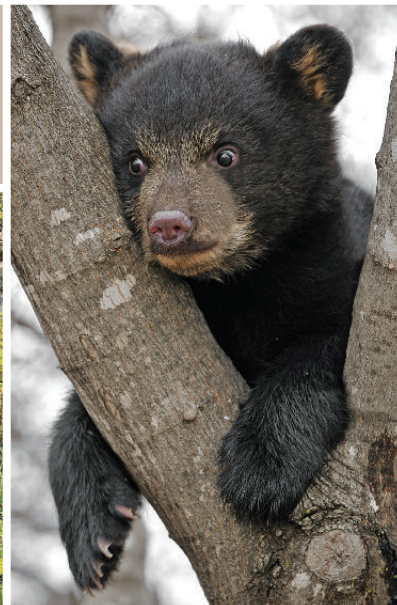
Once an area is classified as an IBA, the program can be a valuable tool to help set conservation priorities. By identifying areas that sustain healthy populations of birds (usually species of conservation concern), IBAs help focus attention on these sites so they can be conserved through acquisitions or easements, voluntary management agreements, or other protective measures (IBAs are not legally binding).

Successful IBA conservation takes effort, ingenuity, and strategy from diverse volunteers and stakeholders. The Owen Sowerwine property is a great example of how this program can lead to successful conservation and protection of critical habitats in our state.



● The Owen Sowerwine property was designated by Montana Audubon as an Important Bird Area in 2010, one of only 42 such sites in the state.

*FAS deliberately works to preserve a sense of wilderness... you’ll see downed tree branches and rotting logs, which invite you to pause and look closer. When you walk the trails, you may see all sorts of wildlife, including white-tailed deer or even bears.*





## A LEGACY OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION

The Owen Sowerwine property was first nominated for protection in 1974, though it has taken since then to find a permanent solution. Owen Sowerwine, whose name the area carries, helped champion the efforts to protect the area. He was a dedicated conservationist and civic leader who served on the Flathead County Park Board, and the area was christened in his honor in September 1978.

FAS has been involved with site management since 1994, paying the increased lease fees after they became too much for the Flathead County Park Board to cover. In 1999, due again to rising fees, Montana Audubon joined FAS to negotiate a long-term, affordable fee, and to jointly support the property, with FAS handling on-site responsibilities. When the second 10-year lease was set to expire in 2021, it was clear that a more permanent solution was needed, and local groups banded together to figure out what that could look like.

One challenge in seeking permanent protection was that the parcel is State School Trust Land administered by the Montana DNRC, which means that by

state law it must generate income for Montana's schools. Typically state law does not allow for School Trust lands to be placed in conservation easements, but in 2001, legislation was passed to allow a nonprofit to hold a conservation easement specifically on the Owen Sowerwine property (MCA 77-2-101 (e) (iii)). Through our policy work in Helena, Montana Audubon was instrumental in crafting the wording of this legislation.

"I'll get calls from other land trusts, asking for guidance on how to work with DNRC," said Katzman, "and I say, 'well, this is really unique.' What we have is really special, and we could do what we did because of a very extraordinary set of circumstances."

Before the conservation easement could be purchased, an immense fundraising effort was undertaken by the local community to raise nearly the \$1 million needed. Donations from over 300 individuals, along with support from foundations and other grants, demonstrated the enormous outpouring of support. Finally, in December 2023, the State Land Board granted unanimous approval for a purchased conservation easement on the property.

*Through our policy work in Helena, Montana Audubon was instrumental in crafting the wording of legislation allowing a nonprofit to hold a conservation easement specifically on the Owen Sowerwine property.*

## MAKING A PLAN

Another step of the conservation process was to develop a management plan for the Owen Sowerwine property. Willison estimates she and other stakeholders attended probably three or four meetings a month toward the end of the process, she said.

One challenge: the variable nature of free-flowing (and flooding and branching) rivers. In some documents, you'll see the acreage listed with a +/- to indicate that, from year-to-year, the amount of land vs. river may change. "Those were expensive surveys," said Willison of the complicated land surveys required to establish the boundaries of the property.

After months of meetings, eventually a plan was finalized, with the responsibilities of each participating organization clearly laid out. Flathead Land Trust holds the easement, and FAS is a third-party cooperator to manage the area, in agreement with Flathead Land Trust and Montana DNRC.

Per the management plan, FAS is responsible for ensuring that all activities protect the conservation values of the property. This includes coordinating all educational group use; preserving native species and wildlife (and managing non-native invasive plants – Willison is a fount of knowledge on spotted knapweed, Russian thistles, and more); ensuring low-impact public access by maintaining trails and other minimal structures such as the two footbridges and bench; and by ensuring the property contains undeveloped open space as a wildlife corridor, which is especially important for migrating birds.

"This project really showed a collaborative effort, and the foresight of many individuals," said Katzman, stretching back to Owen Sowerwine and the Flathead County Park Board in the early 1970s. "So much was done in the 50 years prior to the completion of the conservation easement that will protect the Owen Sowerwine property in perpetuity – we stood on the shoulders of giants to get to where we are today."

Courtesy of Flathead Land Trust



*Left: Pam Willison, FAS Vice President (Center), and Larry Berrin, Montana Audubon Executive Director (right) after FAS and Montana Audubon were presented with the Flathead Land Trust's Conservation Leadership Award.*

*Right: FAS's Gael Bissel is presented with a framed photo of Owen Sowerwine as a token of her decades of unwavering dedication to seeking permanent protection for Owen Sowerwine.*

Courtesy of Flathead Land Trust



Cedar Waxwing

Learn more about OSNA or plan your visit on the FAS website: [flatheadaudubon.org/conserve/owen-sowerwine/](https://flatheadaudubon.org/conserve/owen-sowerwine/)

Bob Martinka



# SEARCHING FOR GLACIER'S GHOSTS

## 2024 was a banner year for Black Swift monitoring

This year, the Black Swift Research Team surveyed 33 different waterfalls for nesting Black Swifts, and recorded 31 individuals total across those sites. Very few people have the opportunity to observe these incredible birds as they settle down to nest on the safety of the slippery, vertical ledges behind some of Montana's most breathtaking waterfalls.

In addition, this year we worked with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (BCR) to adopt a standardized survey protocol and a more statistically-significant study design. This protocol was designed by the Black Swift Working Group, and is used across the US and Canada. Once BCR has finished analyzing the data, we will have a better understanding of Black Swift population sizes, where they are found, and more valuable information that can be used to understand how habitat and management affect Black Swift populations across North America.



Bo Crees photos



But, at the end, the Team was rewarded by finding two occupied nests, which offered unparalleled, seldom-seen views of incubating Black Swifts.

*Accessing one waterfall, visited in early July, included bushwhacking through dense alder, stinging nettles, and devil's club, followed by a short but very steep slog up a talus slope covered in fallen trees and loose dirt. All in the pre-dawn dark, while also keeping an eye out for mountain lions (the Team actually encountered one while driving back to camp after a survey!) and other large predators.*

*Surveying for Black Swifts isn't (just) a walk in the park. Though some of the sites were in Glacier National Park frontcountry, most involved quite a bit of effort to reach.*





## 2025 Legislative Session Preview

Though the tone of the 2025 Legislative Session will remain a question mark until after the elections on November 5, we expect legislation impacting water quality, environmental protections, and habitat funding to be at the forefront.

During the 2023 Legislative Session, we saw severe rollback of environmental regulations, wildlife protections, and public involvement across the board. Notable fights include the state’s grizzly bear and wolf management plans; the battle over Senate Bill 442 – a bill that would have appropriated millions of dollars for the Habitat Montana program; and an unprecedented attempt to weaken the Montana Environmental Policy Act. In 2025, we hope to see more accountability for lawmakers to craft sound policy and listen to Montanans.

Despite playing defense for most of the 2023 session, conservation groups scored major wins by securing wildlife funding in the state budget, and defeating bills that would have loosened hunting and trapping regulations to the detriment of

wildlife. As always, we spent a great deal of time on bi-annual debate over the state’s budget, securing programmatic funding for habitat and wildlife management as we did in 2023 with the Upland Game Bird program, Fishing Access sites, and invasive species management programs. This summer’s debate over the Bureau of Land Management’s Sage Grouse Management Plan and Public Lands Rule could help us advocate for better state management of the species and support Montana’s Sage Grouse conservation lease program.

As we gear up for the 2025 session, we hope that you will join us in protecting Montana’s wildlife and natural resources. By joining our Action Network, you can follow along and learn about opportunities to advocate for the issues that matter most to birds and wildlife in Montana. We can’t wait to go to work for you in the halls of the Capitol!

Sign up for  
email Action Alerts  
on our website:  
[mtaudubon.org/  
conservation-policy/  
action-alert/](https://mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/action-alert/)

## BLM’s Public Lands Rule: Putting Conservation on Equal Footing

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages nearly 8.1 million acres in our state, including some of Montana’s most iconic open areas and pristine grasslands. These public lands support surrounding economies, provide a habitat for birds and other wildlife, ensure access to the outdoors, and safeguard treasured landscapes for future generations to enjoy.

That’s why we support BLM’s recently finalized “Public Lands Rule.” Specifically, this rule clarifies that managing BLM land for conservation fits squarely within the agency’s legal mandate, and that

conservation sits on equal footing to other uses such as extraction and other commodity-driven development. We believe that conservation can be valued while not disrupting working lands.

Thank you for speaking out – there were over 150,000 public comments on the rule, with 92% in support. Considering that 95% of Montanans visited national public lands in 2023 and 78% of Montanans think that more emphasis should be placed on conservation-related land uses, the Public Lands Rule is a major win for all of us!

## Montana Audubon Recognizes Trailblazing Youth Climate Advocates

At our 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, held this year in Helena, Montana Audubon was honored to present the Conservationist of the Year Award to 16 youth plaintiffs of the Held v. State of Montana lawsuit in recognition and honor of their historic, winning, youth-led constitutional climate lawsuit.

In 2020, 16 young people from across Montana filed a lawsuit against the state of Montana. This lawsuit ultimately successfully argued that the state’s fossil fuel energy system degrades and depletes Montana’s constitutionally protected public trust resources, including the atmosphere, rivers, lakes, fish, and wildlife. This case is the world’s first, winning, youth-led constitutional climate lawsuit.

This decision led to the injunction of two laws passed during the 2023 legislative session, which severely weakened public involvement in the Montana Environmental Policy Act and prevented the state from collecting and analyzing greenhouse gas emissions.

But the wins from this historic trial are not set in stone. In September 2023 the State appealed the decision, and Montana Audubon joined together with other conservation organizations in filing an amicus brief in support of the youth plaintiffs. The Montana Supreme Court heard oral arguments in July of this year, but did not indicate when they would issue a ruling.

Montana Audubon Executive Director Larry Berrin poses with Claire (middle) and Olivia (right), two of the 16 Held vs. Montana youth plaintiffs, after the group was awarded Conservationist of the Year.







## Where's the beef... and bison?

### Buying meat raised on bird-friendly ranches in Montana

When you hear the name 'Audubon' you may not think about cattle or bison, but the Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR) program is working to change that. In an effort to help declining grassland bird populations, ACR supports Montana ranchers who implement regenerative grazing and other conservation ranching practices, which help preserve and improve grassland habitat. The Audubon "Bird-friendly" certification recognizes ranches that promote diverse bird habitat, healthy soil, abundant pollinators, and cleaner waters. Next time you're at the grocery store or farmer's market, keep an eye out for the green Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal. It lets you know that those beef or bison products come from lands managed for birds and biodiversity.

Montana is largely a cow-calf state, where ranchers sell calves into a food system that is primarily owned by large meat companies that generally source grain-finished beef from feedlots. For ranchers to use the Audubon seal on beef and

bison products, they need to finish their animals on grass (as well as follow other animal health & welfare guidelines, such as no hormones or antibiotics).

To put a grass-finished, bird-friendly steak on a dinner plate requires deliberate effort by ranchers to find processors and markets for these value-added products, which is why the ACR program recognizes the importance of making market connections for Audubon-certified producers. To date, products from Audubon Certified bird-friendly land are available at grocers, national and local online retailers, and direct in-person sales. But, by and large, bird-friendly ranchers in Montana sell their products online. As the program works to expand market opportunities, keep an eye out for the Audubon label!

### Where To Buy

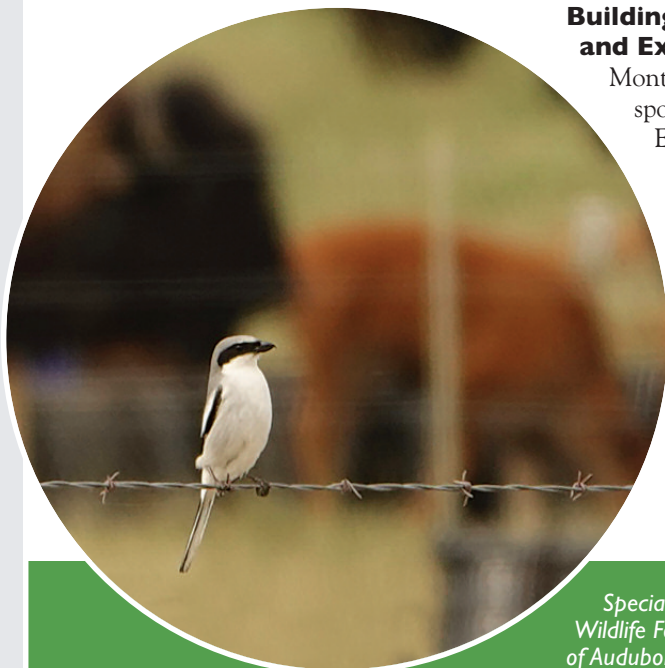
To buy beef and bison products – from Montana and beyond – from Audubon Certified bird-friendly land, visit Audubon Conservation Ranching's interactive retail map: [www.audubon.org/marketplace/conservation-ranching-products](http://www.audubon.org/marketplace/conservation-ranching-products)

### Building Partnerships and Expanding Markets

Montana Audubon was proud to again sponsor the Western Sustainability Exchange's Expanding Markets Conference in late September, held in Billings. The focal topic was "The Rising Tide of Consumer Demand is Propelling Regenerative Agriculture Markets," and the conference began with a tour of a local Audubon-certified ranch.

Loggerhead Shrike

*Special thanks to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for being the lead supporter of Audubon Conservation Ranching in Montana.*



## 2024 Citizen Science Summary

By definition, all of our Citizen Science surveys depend on volunteers. We extend a sincere THANK YOU to all of our dedicated volunteers and partners who made these surveys possible! We had a great turnout for our citizen science

projects this year, with a combined total of 53 volunteers across three projects, resulting in 66 surveys completed across Montana. Full reports for each project will be available on our website soon, but here are some quick stats:

### Chimney Swift Surveys

In partnership with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks staff and four volunteers, we were able to collect occupancy and nesting data at nine sites across Eastern Montana. We also hosted an in-person Swift Night Out training and survey in Havre, MT.

- 9 sites surveyed
- 1 occupied site
- 18 Chimney Swifts flying overhead
- 4 Chimney Swifts entering chimneys



### Screech-owl Surveys

In 2024, we piloted a new statewide survey of Eastern and Western Screech-owls. 19 volunteers were able to locate eight Screech Owls and four other owl species, totaling 42 owls observed across 19 survey routes.

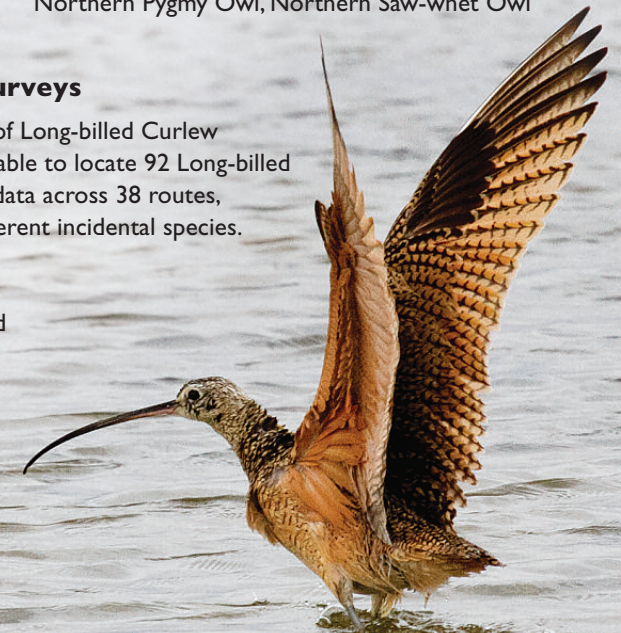
- 19 volunteers
- 195 survey forms submitted
- 42 owls observed, including:
  - 8 Western and Eastern Screech-owls
  - Other owl species: Great Horned Owl, Boreal Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl



### Long-billed Curlew Surveys

April marked our 10th year of Long-billed Curlew surveys. 31 volunteers were able to locate 92 Long-billed Curlews and record habitat data across 38 routes, additionally recording 38 different incidental species.

- 31 volunteers
- 38 routes surveyed
- 534 survey forms submitted
- 92 curlews observed
- 38 incidental species observed





## Indian Education For All Partnership with Montana Audubon

### Weaving Together Science and Cultural Learning with ANTS

The Audubon Naturalist in The Schools (ANTS) program is both the largest and the longest-running educational program at the Montana Audubon Center in Billings – 16 years and counting! ANTS is at the heart of our educational offerings, serving students in Billings and surrounding areas with hands-on, nature-based learning experiences that leave a lasting impact. Over time, ANTS has grown from fewer than 10 participant classes in the 2008–2009 school year to 72 classes in 2023–2024. This remarkable growth would not have been possible without our dedicated staff, the support of our community, and the enthusiasm of the students and teachers who have joined us on this journey.

At its core, ANTS is a celebration of interdisciplinary learning, weaving together science education and Indian Education For All (IEFA), and bringing to life the richness of Montana’s landscapes and cultural heritage. Since the creation of the ANTS program, the Billings Indian Education For All department and School District 2 Curriculum Coordinators have been an ever-growing partner. Together, we’ve worked hard to deepen our staff’s knowledge and understanding of how to thoughtfully present American Indian culture, as well as implementing this

knowledge into other programs at the Center beyond the ANTS program. Each year, Center staff participates in IEFA trainings and conferences to expand their knowledge and improve how we integrate American Indian history, culture, and perspectives into ANTS lessons. This collaboration has enriched our curriculum in profound ways, and we are excited to continue learning and growing together.

### Examples of how ANTS curriculum has evolved to incorporate IEFA

- **Canoeing:** This past year, new lessons were developed that integrated the Center’s popular spring canoeing activity with the cultural history of the Wadopabina people (Canoe Paddler People) of the Nakoda tribe, and their construction and use of Bull Boats. This lesson also includes a moment of reflection and giving thanks to the water as it carries students along during the activity.

- **Reciprocity Activity:** Each spring, ANTS students participate in a restoration activity on the Center grounds. Recently, instructors and IEFA staff discussed how this activity reflects the act of reciprocity, or giving back in thanks for what one has taken or used from the earth. Many Montana tribes believe that all nature is living and have rich cultural traditions of reciprocity. With this in mind, we revamped the existing restoration activity, incorporating tribal cultural history, and renamed it the “Reciprocity Activity.” The lesson now includes a timeline starting when the Center was first established by dedicated community members and educators and continues to today, where students connect their school’s name to the Center’s legacy.

*This past year, new lessons were developed that integrated the Center’s popular canoeing activity with the cultural history of the Wadopabina people (Canoe Paddler People) of the Nakoda tribe.*



## Fostering Environmental Stewardship: New Program Engages Billings Students

Over the summer, we were thrilled to announce that the Center received a 2024-2025 Bureau of Land Management Greening STEM Grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF)!

This year’s pilot program, “Fostering Environmental Stewardship Through Citizen Science,” is designed to engage high school science students in hands-on STEM activities focused on monitoring pollinators and invasive species. Students will contribute data to the Montana Bumble Bee Atlas citizen science initiative, utilizing protocols from the Atlas project to monitor native bumble bees on public lands and at the Center. Students will have the opportunity to connect with professionals in the conservation field, thanks to our partnership with Billings-based Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff. This experience will provide practical, real-world context as students explore local conservation efforts and public lands, ultimately deepening their understanding of ecological systems and conservation practices in the greater Billings area.

Three Billings high schools are participating in this year’s pilot program, involving six

science classes and approximately 120 students. The curriculum includes in-class training, which complements two field survey sessions. Interest in this program—and others like it—far exceeds this year’s funding, motivating our team to explore future funding efforts to make similar experiences accessible to even more students next year and beyond.

We are incredibly grateful to the Billings BLM staff and NEEF for providing this opportunity to bring an innovative and engaging experience to local high school students and their dedicated teachers. Follow the Montana Audubon Center on social media or sign up for our email newsletter for project updates!



*This year’s pilot program is designed to engage high school science students in hands-on STEM activities focused on monitoring pollinators and invasive species. Students will contribute data to the Montana Bumble Bee Atlas citizen science initiative.*



## WILDLIFE GRANT APPLICATION PERIOD NOW OPEN

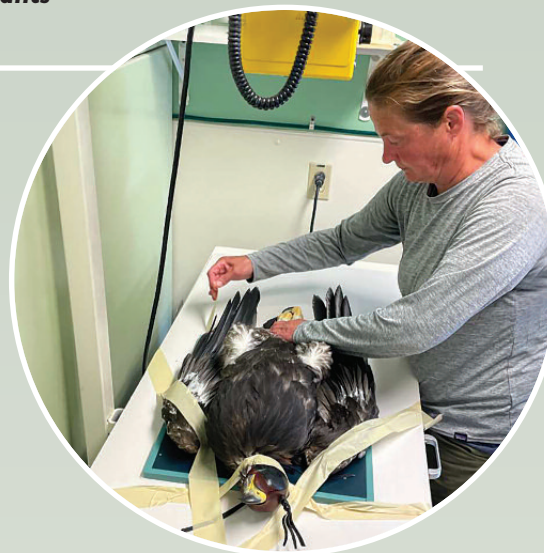
For more than 25 years, Montana Audubon has awarded grants to organizations in support of research and education projects that focus on conservation, enhancement, and public appreciation of Montana's wildlife and natural communities. Funds are awarded from earnings generated by the Audubon Wildlife Fund, a permanent endowment.

The 2024 grant recipients were the Montana Raptor Conservation Center and the Park County Environmental Council's Livingston Loves Trees project.

The application deadline for the 2025 grant cycle is January 15, 2025. For more information and to apply, visit [mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants](https://mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants)

### Updates from the 2024 Audubon Wildlife Fund Grant recipients

As of August 2024, the **Montana Raptor Conservation Center** has had 126 raptors come through the Center for assessment and treatment. In total, they released 31 raptors back into the wild this year! Audubon Wildlife Grant funds were put towards their costs, which include \$1,033 spent on medications; \$6,764 on food for patients; and \$727 on veterinary care.



A Golden Eagle being X-rayed at the Montana Raptor Conservation Center

Students from Park High School's climate-centered Green Initiative Club take a day off from school to give back to their community and learn what it takes to plant a tree.

**Park County Environmental Council's Livingston Loves Trees** project planted 102 trees (including multiple native species) throughout Livingston in the 2024 planting cycle, which ended in May. Early surveying showed a sapling mortality rate of less than 5%, well below average.

Montana Audubon is honored to support both of these organizations in their efforts to benefit Montana's native birds and wildlife!



Courtesy of Park County Environmental Council

Courtesy of Montana Raptor Conservation Center

## BIRDING IN COSTA RICA & ECUADOR



Baird's Trogon

### The Path Less Traveled Costa Rica February 8–22, 2025 • From \$4,700

Join this venture to bird hot spots less frequented by other trips. Your group is limited to eight participants, increasing the quality of your bird sightings. Rarities include Rosy Thrush-Tanager, White-crested Coquette, Yellow-billed Cotinga and many pelagic species.

### Ecuador's Cloud Forest & Amazon Rainforest February 21-28 2025 • \$4,295 (min. 6 participants)

Embark on an unforgettable journey into the Ecuadorian Amazon. Enjoy a variety of spectacularly-colored tanagers, hummingbirds, toucans, cotingas, trogons, parrots, warblers and manakins, plus observe neotropical mammals, amphibians, and more. You'll meet indigenous community members and learn about their special relationship to the surrounding forest.



For more information on these and other exciting trips through Merlin Birding & Nature Tours, visit [www.merlinbirding.com](https://www.merlinbirding.com), or contact Steve: 406-461-5714, [steve@merlinbirding.com](mailto:steve@merlinbirding.com).

Courtesy of Merlin Birding Tours

### 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)



### CREATING A CONSERVATION LEGACY

Montana Audubon's vision is that birds and other wildlife are protected for generations to come.

Planned gifts are critical to helping our organization achieve this future, and help you leave a lasting conservation legacy. Please consider Montana Audubon in your estate planning. Your generous gift will benefit Montana's native birds, wildlife, and their habitats today and into the future.

For more information please contact Larry Berrin at [lberrin@mtaudubon.org](mailto:lberrin@mtaudubon.org).



Bob Martinka



24<sup>TH</sup> Annual

# wings across the big sky

Montana's Premier Birding Festival

MAY 30–JUNE 1, 2025  
HOLIDAY INN,  
MISSOULA

**SAVE  
THE  
DATE**

In 2025, Montana's premier birding festival is coming to Missoula!

Montana Audubon is partnering with the local Five Valleys Audubon Society chapter to present this long-standing community event, dedicated to celebrating Montana's native bird species, wildlife, and stunning landscapes.

Join birders and wildlife enthusiasts from across the state and beyond for a weekend filled with captivating field trips, a riveting keynote speaker, and engaging presentations. We already have an exciting lineup of field trips in the works, so stay tuned for more details!

Be on the lookout for registration brochures in March 2025. To stay up-to-date, sign up for our email list or follow us on social media!



John Lambing

  
MONTANA  
AUDUBON

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