

spring

2025

MONTANA
AUDUBON

2024
ANNUAL
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OUR MISSION is to promote appreciation, knowledge and conservation of Montana's native birds, other wildlife, and natural ecosystems to safeguard biological diversity for current and future generations.

Founded in 1976, Montana Audubon seeks to create an environment in which all of Montana's native bird species have healthy, sustainable populations, ensured by long-term habitat security. Montana Audubon uses science, conservation education, and public policy work to protect our state's incomparable wildlife and landscapes.

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On the cover: Students from a local Billings school work on nature journaling during an Audubon Naturalist In The Schools (ANTS) field trip.

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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

A group of 4th graders joyfully tromping through the winter woods and the concentration on their faces as they stop to hear an Audubon staff describe the animal tracks in the snow; Fledgling preschoolers dipping their nets in the water to see what aquatic insects they might discover; or a group of summer campers, with binoculars strapped to their necks, gathering along the edge of the Yellowstone River identifying local waterfowl are all scenes that have played out repeatedly over the years at the Montana Audubon Center. We are so excited to bring you the story of what it is like to *grow up Audubon*. By hearing the stories from their perspective, we hope to learn what impact the Center is having on children in the Billings area.

Through their eyes you will see how the Montana Audubon Center has been a vital community resource for nearly two decades. We offer a unique blend of outdoor recreation, conservation education, and community engagement, fostering a sense of stewardship for the natural world. By providing access to nature and interactive experiences, our Center hopes to inspire individuals of all ages to appreciate and protect wildlife and their habitats. From preschool to school field trips to summer camps, we provide hands-on learning opportunities that make complex ecological concepts accessible and engaging for young learners. The benefits of these experiences also extend beyond education, encompassing physical and mental health benefits. Spending time in nature has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and boost cognitive function.

Furthermore, the Montana Audubon Center contributes to community resilience by fostering a sense of connection to the natural world and encouraging responsible stewardship. By empowering individuals with knowledge and skills, we hope to equip the community to address conservation challenges and create a more sustainable future. In essence, the Montana Audubon Center is more than just a building along the Yellowstone River but a dynamic hub that connects young people to nature and creates a culture of conservation in Montana's largest city.

Yours in Conservation,

Larry Berrin, Executive Director



By providing access to nature and interactive experiences, our Center hopes to inspire individuals of all ages to appreciate and protect wildlife and their habitats.

GROWING UP AUDUBON

Here, science, discovery, curiosity, and community shape future environmental stewards, and benefits of outdoor learning are seen every day: improved academic outcomes, stronger social-emotional development, increased physical activity, and a deep sense of connection to the natural world.

THE IMPACT OF THE MONTANA AUDUBON CENTER

As you turn onto the dirt road leading to the Montana Audubon Center, you're immediately invited to slow down. The short drive to the parking lot skirts two ponds, where you might glimpse ducks, geese, or a solitary Great Blue Heron. In the summer, the shores are ringed with muddy footprints as students crouch on the banks to study aquatic insects or navigate a canoe on their shallow waters. Though the traffic noises from the nearby interstate don't entirely fade, your attention shifts to more immediate sounds: bird chatter from the finches, robins, and sparrows at the feeders; the soft rustle of wind in the cottonwood trees; the joyful voices of children as they explore the landscape around them.

The Center building and grounds host almost-daily educational and volunteer activities, which reached thousands of children last year, making use of nearly every inch of the 54 acres of restored landscape and gardens. Here, science, discovery, curiosity, and community converse in a way that shapes future environmental stewards, and where research-backed benefits of outdoor learning are seen every day: improved academic outcomes, stronger social-emotional development, increased physical activity, and a deep sense of connection to the natural world.

As Ethan Chatwood describes it, he practically grew up at the Center.

Currently an undergraduate student at the University of Montana in Missoula, Ethan describes his time at the Center as "a quintessential experience."

"As a kid, spending time at the Center allowed me to learn how to approach problems from different angles, ask questions, and learn about consequences," he said.

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“The Center offered me a unique experiential learning opportunity that made me fall in love with the natural world.”

“One of my favorite stories about learning consequences was being told that if I walked through the mud with tennis shoes, I would end up with wet, cold, muddy feet, which would make walking a miserable experience. I didn’t believe that, and I went walking through the mud... and lost a shoe.”

Ethan is currently studying education and wildlife biology, and plans to pursue a career in teaching. “As a future STEM educator, I would like to provide my students with some of the same hands-on experiential learning as I got at the Audubon Center,” he said. “The Center offered me a unique experiential learning opportunity that made me fall in love with the natural world. The skills I learned there at a young age have helped me to excel in my ecology and biology classes in college, as well as prepared me for jobs such as wildlife technician positions.”

This summer, Ethan will be conducting surveys in the drainages of the Bitterroot Valley, “flipping rocks and searching for lizards” – an ideal job for someone who has long had a passion for herpetology.



“Some of the earliest memories I have are of macroinvertebrate labs on the shores of one of the Center’s three ponds, and learning about the frogs, snakes, and turtles native to Eastern Montana” he said. Lots of other kids his age were into things like video games, he remembers, but he’d, “go into school and talk about macroinvertebrates” and the hands-on experiences he had at the Center, catching insects and frogs in the ponds.

“The Center is where I learned how to be around wildlife and how to be respectful of nature,” he said. “It’s a unique place for experiential learning, and can have an immense impact on someone.”

While many programs make use of the Center property, the reach of the Montana Audubon Center ripples out far beyond the sight lines of the building. “The Audubon Naturalist in The Schools (ANTS) program has been going on since before the building was completed in 2009,” said Emily Chilcoat, the Center Director. “It’s the largest, and longest-running, educational program at the Center.”

In the 2023/2024 school year, 72 classes (a total of just under 3,000 students) from the Billings and surrounding areas participated in the ANTS program. 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.

The Montana Audubon Center stands as a vibrant, living classroom – one where muddy boots, curious minds, and hopeful futures take root.



Over the years, participating teachers have seen their students benefit in a multitude of ways from exposure to the program. One 4th grade teacher said that she noticed her students’ attitude towards the outdoors changed after a trip to the Center. Though they lived nearby, some of her students had never been to the Center or to the nearby Norm Schoenthal Island, part of Riverfront Park which provides access to the Yellowstone River. Through their visit, they learned just how accessible it really is to enjoy natural spaces.

Another teacher shared, “I know that many of my students have become more aware of conservation efforts, everything from recycling in our classroom to the fuel efficiency for their family vehicle. They have also shown an increased interest in outdoor activities and are more aware of how accessible those activities are to them in the Billings area.”

“I have a student who has a hard time with his peers and with his academics,” said another 4th grade teacher. “He was telling me that he is really smart when he comes ‘out here’ [to the Center]. He loves the ‘nature stuff,’ and he’s sure he could help others learn the material.”

The students feel the benefits too, and their feedback gives glimpses of a deeper connection to nature, a fostering of life-long

learning and curiosity, and boosted mental health. “Thank you for teaching us about animal tracks, erosion, and letting us wander in the juniper forest. It was super fun!” said one. “I hope we can come back again to discover new things!” shared another. “I also liked how we hiked down to the river because it was very peaceful. Thank you very much. I’m looking forward to our next field trip.”

Connie Michael, a 5th grade teacher at Crow Agency Elementary, has participated in the ANTS program since 2019. Each year, Michael observes powerful shifts in her students’ awareness of nature after each program. “One student shared, ‘I never thought about how the river changes over time,’” said Michael. “Another still speaks of the wonder of the bird nests and animal tracks he now notices, showing a newfound understanding of nature and a desire to find it.”

In addition to a field trip to the Center property, the Crow Agency students take a special trip to Pompey’s Pillar National Monument, a unique sandstone formation on the banks of the Yellowstone River. The monument is within the homeland of the Apsáalooke (Crow) tribe, and has been an important landmark for many tribes, with a record of human use going back over 11,000 years.

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“We’re tracing a line of opportunity that runs through a child’s entire education. It’s a continuum that builds future stewards, scientists, and leaders in conservation.”

“Our students had an unforgettable learning experience at Pompey’s Pillar through the Montana Audubon Center, in partnership with the BLM [Bureau of Land Management],” said Michael. “History, science, and conservation came to life in a way no classroom could replicate.” “Exploring this historic landmark, students connected with the ecological significance of the Yellowstone River ecosystem,” Michael said. “It created a powerful connection between history, science, and stewardship. This experience didn’t just teach them facts – it inspired them to care for the land and appreciate the animals and plants that are a part of it.”

Kira Hegg grew up in Billings, and was first introduced to the Center when her school participated in the ANTS program. In high school, she was a volunteer mentor with the Center’s Leadership Institute for Nature, Kids, and Stewardship (LINKS) program, which connects elementary-aged children in community after-school programs with high school mentors trained in outdoor education, team-building, and mentorship skills. LINKS mentors, with the guidance and support of Center staff, plan out eight weeks of programming for the after-school students. Once a week, the mentors and students spend about two hours exploring the Center property, together learning about the river ecosystem

on walks to the nearby Yellowstone River, canoeing, or learning about the native plants and animals they see around them.

Kira describes not only gaining skills in teaching and designing educational programs, but also in awareness and understanding of others. Many of the students in the LINKS program are from low-income families. Through the LINKS program, they have access to structured activities like canoeing and hiking, but also have a safe place for free-play, where they can safely explore the natural environment.

“Being able to watch that discovery was something that was really eye opening and amazing for me as a young high-schooler,” she said. “It taught me that nothing should be taken for granted and that everything can have magical elements to it if you look at it from the right perspective.”

After graduating with a degree in Anthrozoology from Carroll College in Helena, Kira started working at the Center as a Teacher Naturalist for summer camps. She currently teaches for various programs, including homeschool science field trips, private field trips, and ANTS. “Being a LINKS mentor allowed me insight into what outdoor education consists of, which has been greatly beneficial for my professional career,” said Kira. “I also learned how rewarding it is to work with children.”

The life-long impact of the Center’s programs continues in the newest program for high-school aged students, what is now called the Conservation And Research Experiences (CARES) program. The program, which is in its pilot year, is a partnership with BLM and started with a grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation. Currently, biology and environmental sciences classes from three Billings high schools participate. “The CARES program has been invaluable for my students!” said Erin Hall, a science teacher at Billings West High School.

Through a combination of classroom visits and field trainings, students learn about the importance of native pollinators and public lands while also learning monitoring and assessment techniques. “From fieldwork and citizen science data collection to guest speakers and independent research projects, my Honors Biology students have gained invaluable hands-on experience,” said Krista Cunningham, a science teacher from Billings Central Catholic High School. “The opportunity to apply scientific concepts in a meaningful way has been incredibly rewarding, and the depth of learning has made every moment worthwhile.”

“I have witnessed my students get excited about local ecosystems and dive into research with an enthusiasm that is not usual for high school students. Nothing can replace the learning that authentic field and research opportunities provide for students,” said Hall.

The program also connects students with staff and guest educators from local conservation-related career fields, including federal, state, and county agencies, exposing them to different career pathways.

“Through ANTS to CARES, we’re not just teaching science – we’re tracing a line of opportunity that runs through a child’s entire education. It’s a continuum that builds future stewards, scientists, and leaders in conservation,” said Chilcoat.

The Montana Audubon Center is more than a place – it’s a pathway. From the smallest “Fledgling” preschool explorers to high school CARES students gathering field data, each step builds on the last, creating a full-circle experience that grows with a child. The journey begins with wonder, deepens with knowledge, and often culminates in a commitment to conservation. In a world where connection to the natural world can feel increasingly rare, the Montana Audubon Center stands as a vibrant, living classroom – one where muddy boots, curious minds, and hopeful futures take root.

The reach of the Montana Audubon Center ripples out far beyond the sight lines of the building.





From Classroom to Conservation: Engaging Youth Through Citizen Science

Since announcing our 2024–2025 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Greening STEM Grant from the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF), our pilot program, *Fostering Environmental Stewardship Through Citizen Science*, has been in full swing!

This hands-on environmental education initiative engages students from three Billings high schools in monitoring pollinators and invasive species on local public lands. The program officially launched in September with classroom visits where BLM representatives joined us to introduce students to the importance of public lands, conservation careers, and the critical role pollinators – especially native bumble bees – play in ecosystem health. Students also learned about the Montana Bumble Bee Atlas and how their participation will directly contribute to this statewide citizen science initiative.

Shortly after the classroom visits, students participated in a full-day field training. Using standardized Atlas protocols, students learned how to catch, photograph, and identify bumble bees. This immersive experience helped build students' field science skills and prepared them for upcoming spring survey work.

During our second class visit, students explored the topic of invasive species and their impact on native pollinators. This lesson was enriched by guest educators from the Montana Department of Agriculture, the Yellowstone County Weed District, and AmeriCorps, introducing students to new partners in land stewardship who provided local perspectives on weed management and habitat health.



In a full-day field training, students learned how to catch, photograph, and identify bumble bees.

This spring, students will return to nearby public lands to apply their skills through bumble bee monitoring, vegetation assessments, and invasive species removal. These activities offer meaningful, real-world experience as students contribute valuable data to both the Montana Bumble Bee Atlas and inform BLM habitat management efforts.

A new partnership with MSU Billings further enhances the program by allowing students to deepen their understanding of native pollinators and their association with invasive plants by developing research posters. These posters will be presented at a STEM symposium on the MSU-B campus in May, providing a platform for academic growth and community engagement.

We are incredibly thankful to NEEF, BLM, and all our collaborating partners for making this pilot program possible. With strong interest from both teachers and students, we hope to continue and expand this impactful program – we are actively seeking additional funds to ensure its future through our new Conservation And Research Experiences (CAREs) program.



Special thanks to Wild Birds Unlimited for their support in keeping the Thoughtful Bird Feeding Station full of bird seed and high-quality bird feeding stations at the Center.

Special thanks to the Mary Alice Fortin Foundation for their continued support of the Montana Audubon Center.



Shepard Nature Playspace Revamp Play, Learn, and Explore: Exciting Changes at the Center!

Thanks to generous support from the Mary Alice Fortin Foundation and the O.P. & W.E. Edwards Foundation, we've been hard at work revitalizing Shepard's Nature Play Space – a beloved outdoor area designed to spark creativity and connection with nature, making it one of our favorite areas for program participants and their families to explore. Recent updates include:

- Enhanced drainage in the dry riverbed, complemented by a charming footbridge constructed by volunteer and Board member Bob Macken to prevent erosion along the trail.
- The transformation of a hill into a versatile flat area with sandstone boulders for climbing, sitting, and imaginative play.

- Replaced wooden boundary posts and cleared out the old rotating entry sign, preparing the space for a fresh look.

Looking ahead, we're working to:

- Transform the former entry sign into a welcoming bench, crafted by John Spencer, to greet visitors at the entryway.
- Add hand-painted decorative posts to enhance the space with vibrant color and create a safe, visually appealing boundary.

This upgraded natural play space helps foster curiosity, creativity, and a love of the outdoors – we invite you to come see the progress for yourself!



Tickets on Sale Now!

Evening Under the Big Sky

Montana Audubon Center's annual fundraising gala. September 13, 2025
Buy your tickets on the Montana Audubon Center website, or call 406-294-5099.



Audubon Conservation Ranching – A New Co-op of Ranches Joins the Flock!

We are thrilled to announce that the Montana Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR) program is now enrolling the ranches that make up the Old Salt Co-op!

In partnership with the ranchers, we are working to write customized “Bird-friendly” Habitat Management Plans (HMPs) for the four primary ranches that make up the Co-op, including: the Mannix Ranch in Helmsville, the Sieben

Livestock Company in Adel, the LF Ranch in Augusta, and the J Bar L Ranch based out of Melville, Montana. Once complete, Montana Audubon will submit the HMPs to our third-party auditor, the Food Alliance. This summer, the Food Alliance will visit the Old Salt ranches, and if all goes as planned, will award each ranch with Audubon “Bird-friendly” Certification. Separately, Montana Audubon staff will also visit each ranch to conduct bird surveys, creating a baseline inventory of bird species present on each property. The program uses

regular bird surveys, as well as monitoring vegetation change and soil health, to measure the effectiveness of regenerative grazing practices.

“Good Food Comes From Ecological Integrity”

The Old Salt Co-op is more than a meat company, but also a model of regenerative ranching and land stewardship, focused on both ecological health and returning value

to the people stewarding the land. ‘Land Is Kin,’ the Co-op’s motto, is the distillation of this shared set of values.

Each ranch in the co-op strives to deliver on these principles raising grass-finished, antibiotic-

and hormone-free livestock. The producers practice regenerative grazing management, which includes short duration, high stock density, and long pasture recovery, focusing on building biomass and diversity of species, including grasses and native plants, insects, birds, and other wildlife.

Beyond conservation, the Old Salt Co-op works to support viable ranching communities and connect the community, fostering a resilient regional food system.

Over 170,000 acres across 20 ranches in Montana are Audubon-certified! Find other Montana ranches online: www.audubon.org/marketplace/conservation-ranching-products



Since 2023, the Old Salt Co-op has celebrated their work and ranching communities by putting on the Old Salt Festival at the Mannix Ranch in Helmsville.

Beyond conservation, the Old Salt Co-op works to support viable ranching communities and connect the community, fostering a resilient regional food system. They own each stage of the process that brings their products to hungry customers, from the ranch to production and distribution.

Since 2023, the Co-op has celebrated their work and ranching communities by putting on the Old Salt Festival at the Mannix Ranch in Helmsville. National Audubon’s Director of Conservation Ranching, Chris Wilson, attended the inaugural Old Salt Festival in 2023: “It really struck me how the ranchers at Old Salt are blazing an important path between land conservation and the food we eat,” he said.

“Their focus on land stewardship and ecological health resonated with me and everyone in our circles. I know of no other brand that more perfectly aligns our values and ideals for ‘conservation ranching’ by demonstrating that cattle and ranching can be ecologically essential, environmentally beneficial, and

economically viable in ways that invest in local communities rather than extracting from them.”

Support bird-friendly ranching

To support the Old Salt Co-op and “bird-friendly” ranching, purchase their products online or in-person at The Union in downtown Helena. The Union is both a butcher shop and a sit-down restaurant (and, a finalist for the 2025 James Beard Award for Best New Restaurant!). Or for a more casual dining experience, head across the street to the Old Salt Outpost for a burger and beef tallow fries.

If you’re looking for live music, amazing food, conservation discussion, and family-friendly activities, join us at the Old Salt Festival, June 20–22 at the Mannix Ranch in Helmsville. This year, OSF is donating 10% of every ticket sale to Montana Audubon when you purchase tickets with our custom code – and, you’ll get \$5 off! Enter MTAUDUBON at checkout. We hope to see you there!





New Statewide Nightjar Surveys!

The arrival of warm summer nights in Montana also brings two expertly camouflaged and bat-like fliers to Montana's grasslands: Common Poorwills and Common Nighthawks.

Common Poorwills are a Species of Greatest Inventory Need and a Potential Species of Concern in Montana and Common Nighthawks lack statewide population and distribution data and are declining across their range nationally. To help address this, Montana Audubon is excited to announce the launch of our newest citizen science surveys!

Thanks to funding from the Tracy Aviary, we are collaborating with Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks to gather data on the population and location of these two species. We are looking for volunteers to conduct surveys across the state from June 1 to August 1. No experience is necessary, and all the resources you need



Bob Martinka

Common Nighthawk

to participate, including a recording of the virtual training, can be found on our citizen science website.

Collecting data on these species will allow scientists and conservationists to more accurately assess the conservation status and needs of Poorwills and Nighthawks, which would not be possible without citizen scientists like you!

For more information and to sign up to volunteer, visit our Citizen Science website: montanabirdsurveys.weebly.com/nightjars or email Gwynne Rodhe at gwynne@mtaudubon.org.

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR MONTANA'S WILDLIFE

At Montana Audubon, we believe in protecting birds, wildlife, and wild places for generations to come. One powerful way to support this vision is through a planned gift.

By including Montana Audubon in your estate plans, you help ensure a lasting conservation legacy – preserving the landscapes and habitats that make our state so special.

Your future gift will have a lasting impact on Montana's native birds and the ecosystems they rely on – today, tomorrow, and for years to come.

For more information, please contact Larry Berrin at lberrin@mtaudubon.org



Watch the documentary on Montana Audubon's YouTube page



New Documentary: Seeking the Elusive Black Swift in Montana

For over 10 years, Montana Audubon has been monitoring Black Swift populations across the western portion of the state. These birds can be a challenging species to observe and monitor. They are aerial insectivores that tend to feed at high altitudes, and they nest in remote, hard-to-access locations: behind snow/glacial-fed waterfalls.

In this new documentary, Montana Audubon's Director of Conservation, Christian Meny, and Avian Specialist, Bo Crees, share the story of Black Swifts in Montana, and Montana Audubon's effort to monitor them.

"The Black Swift is a really unique species, there's basically nothing like them in North America," said Crees. Because these birds are so aerial, the only time effective surveys can be conducted is at dawn or dusk, when the birds fly in and out of their nests before or after foraging. "One of the things that makes our surveys challenging is that we're trying to see a bird that flies around 90 mph, 100 mph, coming to a nest in low light conditions, around dark cliffs, when it's dark outside, the bird itself is black, and if you blink for a second there's a good chance you miss the bird."

"Of all species in the world, the Black Swift may be more directly impacted by climate change than any other."

One of the biggest threats to Black Swifts in the Northern Rockies is the loss of glacier-fed waterfalls due to climate change. Already designated as endangered in Canada, Black Swift populations have declined by at least 50% since 1973. Montana Audubon's Black Swift project informs conservation and supports the advancement of climate strategies and solutions on this species' behalf.

"The story of the Black Swift is an important one: of all species in the world, the Black Swift may be more directly impacted by climate change than any other," said Meny. Later, he adds: "We may be documenting the decline of a species in real time, and that's a really important story to tell."

Special thanks to our funding and conservation partners: the Cross Charitable Foundation, Tracy Aviary, the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, the Black Swift Monitoring Network, the many volunteers, and the biologists at Glacier National Park.

Voices for Wildlife: Montana Audubon's Legislative Efforts in Action

Since the opening of the State Legislative Session on January 6, Montana Audubon staff have been hard at work at the Capitol, advocating for sound wildlife and environmental policies.

The 69th legislation featured many familiar bills threatening wildlife management practices, MEPA, water quality, and conservation funding. We also saw new fights, like House Bill 57, a bill that would have reclassified exotic California Quail and Gambel's Quail as upland game birds. Proponents of the bill argued that reclassifying the species could open up new parts of Montana to Quail hunting i.e. encourage the introduction of novel populations. Montana Audubon successfully ran a campaign to defeat the bill on second reading in the Senate. We stood strongly by Montana's current law, which dictates that a thorough scientific review must be conducted to determine potential impacts of introduction.

In every session since 2021, conservation groups and the public have passionately defended consistent funding for the Habitat Montana program through marijuana excise taxes. This session has seen several competing bills aiming to change the funding

mechanism, with the only bill that would take away all conservation funding dying mid-way through the session. At the time of writing, several pieces of legislation that secure this funding, expand the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program, and maintain funding for nongame wildlife, parks, and trails have a chance to make it through both houses. Other bills increasing hunting license fees (primarily non-resident) that would secure funding for the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program and the wetland restoration account look safe as well.

One final proactive piece of legislation, HB 477 passed both houses, and directs DEQ to create a program to phase out single-use styrofoam containers in Montana. This bill aims to reduce polystyrene pollution and the negative health impacts on humans and wildlife, while allowing DEQ to work with businesses to use a slow approach and issue exemptions if needed.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has contacted their representatives, shared information, attended rallies, and participated in other public events. Earlier this year, Montana Audubon helped to plan and supported the Public Lands Rally, which filled the Capitol with hundreds of people, and co-hosted several conservation lobby days to increase public engagement with the legislative process. Your dedication and hard work are vital to shaping the environmental future of our state!

Montana Audubon helped to plan the 2025 Rally for Public Lands on February 19, which filled the Capitol with hundreds of people.

To read past Action Alerts, visit our website: mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy/action-alert/



2025 Wildlife Grant Awards

Since 1996, Montana Audubon has awarded grants in support of research and education projects directed toward wildlife habitat conservation. Funds are awarded from earnings generated by the Audubon Wildlife Fund of Montana, a permanent endowment.

In 2025, seven grants were awarded:

Dalton Brantley, PhD student in the Division of Biological Sciences at the University of Montana
Project: Expanding a decades-long monitoring of the Gillette Checkerspot, a vulnerable butterfly species endemic to the Rocky Mountains, by resurveying 14 populations first monitored in the 1980s and 2000s, assessing population persistence and habitat changes.

Arcata Leavitt, master's student in Ecology at Montana State University
Project: Evaluating bioacoustic methods for detecting and monitoring active Great Gray Owl nests, and assessing the habitat characteristics of active nest sites.

Jacob McArtor, master's student in the Systems Ecology program of the Franke College of Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana
Project: Studying how heavy metals released by wildfires impact aquatic insect communities over time in streams across western Montana.

THANK YOU to Gary Buchanan for his generous donation of a truck to the Montana Audubon Center, supporting our conservation and education efforts in the field for years to come!



Flathead Audubon
Project: Supporting the Jewel Basin Hawk Watch, a long-term annual raptor monitoring effort of a key migration monitoring site in the Flathead National Forest.

Last Chance Audubon
Project: In partnership with the City of Helena and Montana Conservation Corps, a big spring clean up to improve habitat and mitigate Russian Olive and other plants at the K-Mart wetlands area, a local birding hotspot.

Montana Raptor Conservation Center
Project: Providing raptor rescue, rehabilitation, and conservation education.

Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center
Project: Documenting and tracking raptor rescue locations, injuries, and admission causes, with particular focus on lead poisoning and avian influenza. This data will be used to pinpoint areas where these issues are most prevalent, in order to understand patterns and potential causes and possible areas to focus public awareness campaigns.

EXPANDING OUR FLOCK



Chase McCafferty, Programs Manager

Originally from Texas, Chase has pursued his passion for environmental education nationwide, working in museums and zoos. As Program Manager at the Montana Audubon Center, he combines his wildlife conservation background with a love for nature.



Kate Karschnik, Youth Programs Coordinator

Kate is a South Dakota native who moved to Montana in 2018 to pursue her love of mountains and outdoor adventure. With a background in Natural Interpretation and Guiding, she's passionate about nature, learning, and exploring.



Halei Akins, Membership & Events Coordinator

Halei grew up in South Carolina and fell in love with Montana after a summer in Glacier National Park. With a B.A. in Biology focused on marine life, she's passionate about connecting people with nature and building community at the Montana Audubon Center.



Bo Morris, Facilities & Grounds Coordinator

A Billings native, Bo started as a Teacher Naturalist and now serves as the Facilities and Grounds Coordinator. Keeping the grounds in top shape, assisting with conservation initiatives, and leading community service projects.



Kira Hegg, Teacher Naturalist

Kira, a Billings native, developed a deep love for the outdoors early on, which led her to earn a degree in Anthrozoology from Carroll College. She joined the Center as a summer camp counselor and is a Teacher Naturalist, sharing her passion for Montana's wildlife.



Katie Jenö, Teacher Naturalist

Katie grew up in western Montana and now lives near Billings. After teaching high school science, she returned to school to study land resources and environmental science while teaching programs at the Center, where she blends her background in science education with a passion for the outdoors.



Sarah Schultz, Teacher Naturalist

Sarah, originally from northern Michigan, moved to Montana in 2015 and quickly fell in love with the Montana Audubon Center. She's proud that all four of her children attended Fledglings Preschool and is excited to share that experience with others.



Colin Borgen, Big Sky Watershed Corps Education & Land Steward

Colin brings a background in Fish and Wildlife Biology and creative writing to his work in stewardship, outreach, education, and water quality. He's excited to hands-on experience through new and ongoing projects.

Birding in Ecuador and South Africa

With Merlin Birding & Nature Tours



Ecuador: Birding the Southern Highlights

January 28 - February 9, 2026 • From \$5,525

Southern Ecuador has been relatively overlooked as a birding destination, yet teems with avifauna. Join us on this 13-day adventure- highlights include: Visiting diverse habitats at varying elevations in protected reserves (Cajas & Podocarpus National Parks as well as Manglares Churute, Buenaventura, Jorupe and Tapichalaca reserves). Endemics/rarities may include: Horned Screamer, Tumbes Swift, El Oro Parakeet, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Black-cowled Saltator, Pacific Royal-Flycatcher, Tumbesian Tyrannulet, Yellow-tufted Dacnis, Spectacled Prikeltail, White-capped Tanager, Guira Tanager, as well as the critically endangered Jocotoco Antpitta and Blue-throated Hillstar – and so much more!

A Taste of South Africa

March 16 - 30, 2026 • From \$6,900

Embark on an unforgettable journey through South Africa, a country renowned for its breathtaking landscapes. Ascend to the iconic Table Mountain National Park. Immerse yourself in an all-day cultural experience. Bird the enchanting Kirstenbosch Gardens, where migratory birds add to the stunning resident species. The adventure culminates with four exhilarating days of safari at Welgevonden Private Game Reserve, where you'll have the chance to witness the "Big Five" up close and add numerous life birds, all while enjoying the intimacy of a private lodge dedicated to our group.

Lilac-breasted Roller

For more information on these and other tours, visit the Merlin Birding Tours website or contact Steve Hoffman at 406-461-5741.



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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



2024 Accomplishments

THANKS TO YOU, Montana Audubon continues to impact the conservation of native birds, other wildlife, and their habitats across Montana.

2024 was full of new beginnings and continued growth, advancing bird conservation, citizen science, and environmental education across the state. From starting new citizen science surveys to expanding bird-friendly ranching and empowering youth through hands-on science, our collective efforts are making a measurable impact on wildlife and communities alike.

Some highlights from 2024:

Citizen Science & Bird Research

- **Continued long-term Citizen Science surveys** for Long-Billed Curlew, Chimney Swift, and Climate Watch species, and piloted a new project focusing on Western and Eastern Screech-owl surveys. Over 50 volunteers participated across all projects.

- **Conducted Black Swift monitoring** at 33 waterfall sites across western Montana and in Glacier National Park. Data inform statewide abundance, occupancy and density estimates for this species.
- **Our research added enough data** to the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission's Statewide Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) to move the Black Swift from the designation of "Species of Greatest Information Need" to a "Species of Conservation Need."

- **Produced a short documentary film** on our Black Swift project: "Seeking the Elusive Black Swift in Montana."

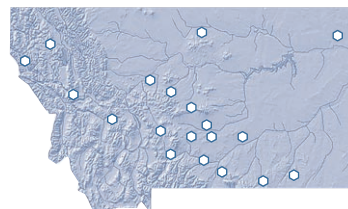


Black Swift

Bo Crees



Eastern Screech-owl

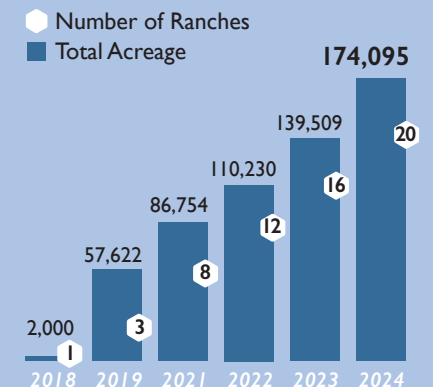


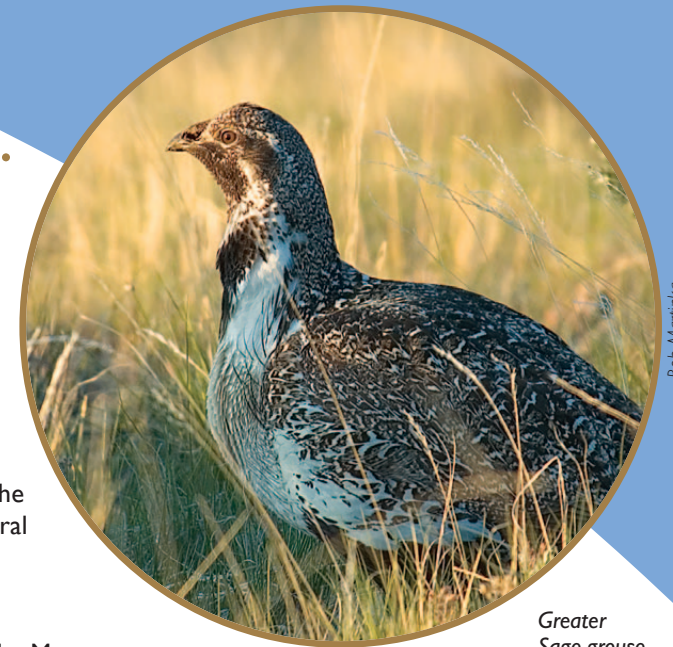
ACR ranches as of 12/24

Conservation Ranching

- **Certified four new ranches**, increasing the number of Audubon Bird-Friendly Certified ranches in Montana to 20, totalling 174,095 acres.
- **Supported ranch infrastructure projects** on seven ranches, including: wildlife-friendly fencing, riparian restoration, native re-seeding, and stock water delivery systems.
- **Conducted 19 biological surveys** at eight ranches, testing the efficacy of our Habitat Management Plans.
- **Detected a cumulative total** of 100 different bird species at one single ranch for the first time in Montana's ACR program.

ACR enrollment as of 12/24





Bob Martinka

Greater Sage-grouse

Education & Outreach

MONTANA AUDUBON CENTER

- **Awarded 73 scholarships** to Audubon Adventure Camp participants.
- **The Fledglings preschool program** reached capacity with a waitlist for 2024, and expanded with a new afternoon class that increased student reach.
- **Audubon Naturalist in the Schools (ANTS)**, our largest and longest-running program, continues its growth thanks to our partnerships with Indian Education for All and the Bureau of Land Management.
- **Received a 2024–2025 Bureau of Land Management Greening STEM Grant** from the National Environmental Education Foundation, engaging high school students in hands-on training to monitor native pollinators and manage invasive species on local public lands.

- **Engaged students and volunteers** to survey over 700 trees with our tree inventory project
- **New efforts in habitat restoration**, including willow planting, snapping turtle nest protection, and invasive plant removal, are improving biodiversity and youth engagement in habitat management at the Center.

OTHER OUTREACH

- **Brought together 171 attendees** at the 23rd annual *Wings Across the Big Sky* Birding Festival in Helena.
- **Sponsored and attended the Old Salt Festival** at the Mannix Ranch in Helmsville, MT.
- **For the second year in a row**, sponsored the Western Sustainability Exchange's Expanding Markets Conference.

Policy & Advocacy

- **Submitted comments** on the Bureau of Land Management's updated Greater Sage-Grouse Regional Management Plans and urged the State of Montana and the Federal Government to move forward with implementation.
- **Filed an amicus brief** with the Montana Supreme Court supporting the youth plaintiffs in *Held v. State of Montana*. We honored these 16 young people with the Montana Audubon Conservationist of the Year award to recognize this great accomplishment – the world's first winning youth-led constitutional climate lawsuit!
- **Participated in** the Fish, Wildlife, & Parks drafting process for Montana's Grizzly Bear Management plan by advocating for the continued use and funding of non-lethal management techniques.



Financials

THANKS TO YOU, Montana Audubon has maintained a strong financial position which empowers us to continue our work on native birds, other wildlife and their habitats across Montana.

You make this possible through your much-appreciated support of our vital conservation work. Thank you!

Statement of Financial Position

Unrestricted Net Assets	\$ 975,066
Board Designated Net Assets	\$ 2,820,525
Restricted Net Assets	\$ 67,407
Total Net Assets	\$ 3,862,998

12-month Fiscal Year Ending 9-30-24

Expenses

Programs	\$ 1,146,147	
Administrative	\$ 245,327	
Fundraising	\$ 192,142	
Total	\$ 1,583,616	

Revenue

Grants & Contracts	\$ 669,753	
Contributions	\$ 651,187	
Earned Income	\$ 348,347	
Investment Income	\$ 110,954	
Total	\$ 1,780,241	

Montana Audubon is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization under 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Financials are being audited by the accounting firm Amatics CPA Group. The above financials were not audited in time for this publication.

Thank You for Supporting Montana Audubon

Thanks to generous donors – like you! – we are able to continue to achieve our mission to promote appreciation, knowledge, and conservation of Montana’s native birds, other wildlife, and natural ecosystems for current and future generations. Without you, our work would not be possible.

The following people generously contributed \$100 or more between March 2024 and February 2025. Special thanks to those who made gifts in honor or in memory of friends and loved ones.

\$2,500 & Up

- Joe & Lana Batts
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& Joanne Pawlowski



IN HONOR

We are grateful to donors who recognize the following individuals through gifts made in their honor:

- Michael Becker
Stephanie Becker
Deb Hoagland
Fischer Plath
RJ & Natalia’s Wedding

IN MEMORY

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

- Helen Carlson
Helen Cummins
Rodney Davidson
George & Laurene Engler
Tim Garcia
Shirley Holden
Barb Jaquith
Helen Murray
Robert N. Reynolds
Jean Setter
Nadia

Mountain Bluebird

Bob Marinka

Please note: Due to space constraints, we are only able to list donors who gave \$100 or more. We want to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all of our donors, as every donation makes a difference. Also, this list does not include event registration fees, sales, auction purchases below fair market value, or endowment gifts. If you notice any inaccuracies, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Special Thanks

We extend our deep appreciation to the following foundations, agencies, corporations, and organizations – through your financial support, our work and impact are amplified.

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Agencies

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Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
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Montana Native Plant Society
National Audubon Society
Piikani Lodge Health Institute
University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab
Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society
Yellowstone River Parks Association

Thank you to our dedicated volunteers!

Thank you for your incredible generosity and dedication. Your time, energy, and expertise have been essential in helping us achieve our mission.

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MSU-Billings
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STEER Corp
West High School
Yellowstone County 4-H
Youth Services Center

We count birds because birds count on us!

It's time once again for our annual Birdathon, Montana Audubon's largest fundraiser of the year.

What is Birdathon?

For a 24 hour period, starting at 6 p.m. on June 25 and ending at 6 p.m. on June 26, Montana Audubon staff will spread out across the state to count and record as many bird species as possible. We're hoping to spot 100 bird species this year!

Giving to the Birdathon

is easy. You can choose to donate on a per-bird species basis, or a lump-sum gift. See the enclosed Birdathon return envelope, or make a donation online. To make a pledge per bird, return your donation envelope to us in the mail, or email your pledge information to info@mtaudubon.org.

However you choose to give, your support will directly benefit Montana's native birds and their habitats.

Double your conservation impact!

The best part? Thanks to a generous donor, your gift will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$10,000. This means that your donation to Birdathon will have double the impact! Whether you give \$25 or \$250, every donation will be doubled to help support our conservation programs across Montana.

And, for anyone who donates a lump sum of \$100 or more, or pledges \$1 or more per bird, will receive their choice of the laminated Montana Audubon Bird Guide or Wildlife Guide. Donate \$200 or pledge \$2 per bird and get both!



Bob Martinka

Common Yellowthroat



Individual donors are the financial backbone of Montana Audubon. Please help sustain our conservation efforts with a contribution to our 2025 Birdathon!



Red-necked Grebe

Bob Martinka

24TH Annual

wings across the big sky

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Montana's Premier Birding Festival

MAY 30–JUNE 1, 2025
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There's still time to register! Join birders from across the country in Missoula for the 24th annual *Wings Across the Big Sky* Birding Festival, hosted by Montana Audubon and local partner Five Valleys Audubon Society.

The weekend features 30+ birding trips, two dinner banquets, a keynote presentation by local Osprey researcher Dr. Erick Greene, and more! Student scholarships available.

Visit the Festival website to learn more and register online!

We can't
wait to see you
in Missoula!

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