



Long-billed Curlew Survey Report 2024



Long-billed Curlew, Photo by Bob Martinka

Overview and Thank You

This report summarizes the efforts of Montana Audubon, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), Blackfoot Challenge, local landowners and birders.

And we would like to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to all of our wonderful volunteers, anyone who reached out with curlew sightings, and the CSKT biologists for partnering with us on this project.

Background

This year marks the 12th year of the [Long-billed Curlew Initiative](#), founded by the USFWS and the Bird Conservation Partners of Montana. The collaboration continues with the main goals of developing a conservation plan, identifying key parcels and areas for a conservation easement, empowering local organizations and community members to engage with landowners about conservation, and sharing findings and lessons learned across bird conservation networks. This initiative partnered with the Mission Valley, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfoot Challenge. For the past decade, our dedicated volunteers have conducted surveys to collect data on Long-billed Curlew presence and habitat across the Mission, Blackfoot, and Helena Valleys. Surveys consisted of 10 5-minute point counts along a transect.

About the Long-billed Curlew

America's largest shorebird and an icon of Montana's prairies, the Long-billed Curlew is a species facing threats of habitat loss and subsequent population decline. This charismatic shorebird spends most of the year at its wintering grounds along the southern coastlines of North America but migrates to the Northern Plains for the breeding season. As Montana expands its infrastructure and agriculture, our grasslands and prairies continue to dwindle. Along with this loss of vital habitat, the Curlews also have a low population growth rate, and face threats of increased wildfires, wildfire suppression, and climate change. The Long-billed Curlew is listed nationally as a species of Least Concern, but a lack of national conservation efforts and continued habitat reduction may result in irreversible damage to the species. The state of Montana designates the Long-billed Curlew as a Species of Concern and contains the largest area of breeding habitat in the United States, making it one of the most valuable places to collect data on this species.

What We Found

During the spring of 2024, we had 31 volunteers who completed at least one survey route. We had a total of 38 routes surveyed throughout the Mission, Blackfoot, and Helena Valleys, with a total of 534 stop point forms submitted.

Birds

From these 38 routes, a total of 92 curlews were observed, along with 38 incidental species, including: American Crow, American Kestrel, American Robin, Bald Eagle, Black-billed Magpie, Black-capped Chickadee, Brewer's Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, California Gull, Canada Goose, Common Raven, Eastern Kingbird, Eurasian Collared Dove, European Starling, Great Blue Heron, House Sparrow, Killdeer, Lark Sparrow, Mallard, Northern Flicker, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-winged Blackbird, Ring-billed Gull, Ring-necked Pheasant, Rock Pigeon, Sandhill Crane, Savannah Sparrow, Short-eared Owl, Sora, Tree Swallow, Vesper Sparrow, Violet-green Swallow, Western Meadowlark, Western Tanager, Wild Turkey, Wilson's Snipe, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

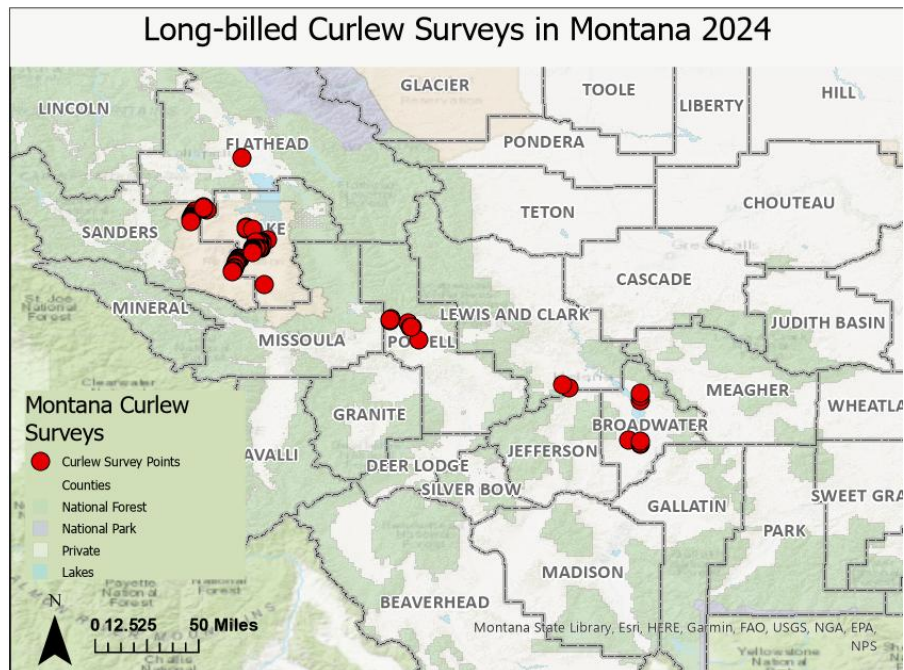


Figure 1. Shows the locations of Long-billed Curlew survey points completed by volunteers in 2024.

Habitat

From this data, we are also able to quantify how the land and habitats of the curlew sites are changing over time. The graphs and percentages below visualize the habitat types, primary land uses, and count quality (noise level), of each site observed this year. The habitat types and primary land uses of every 2024 site are also compared to 2024 sites that had curlew sightings. These statistics are vital to the conservation of Long-billed Curlews because they track the changes in suitable nesting habitats throughout the years, which steers the ship for assessing the specie's conservation needs.

Count Quality of All Sites

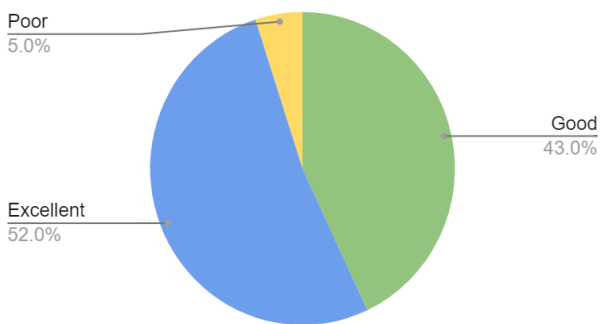


Figure 2: Count Quality of All Sites

52% Excellent
43% Good
5% Poor

General Habitat of All Sites

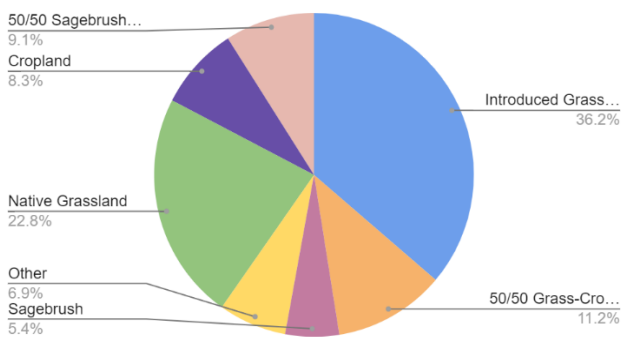


Figure 3: General Habitat Type of All Sites

36.23% Introduced Grassland
22.83% Native Grassland
11.23% 50/50 Grass-Cropland
8.33% Cropland
5.43% Sagebrush
9.06% 50/50 Sagebrush-Grassland
6.88% Other

Primary Land Use of All Sites

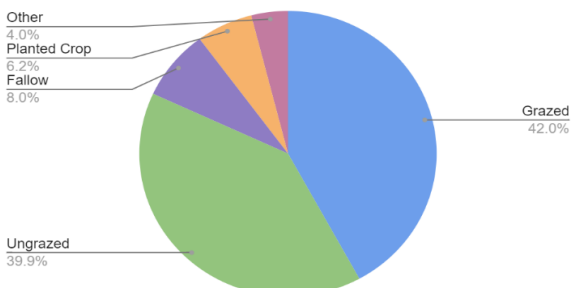


Figure 4: Primary Land Use of All Sites

42.03% Grazed
39.86% Ungrazed
7.97% Fallow
6.16% Planted Crop
3.99% Other

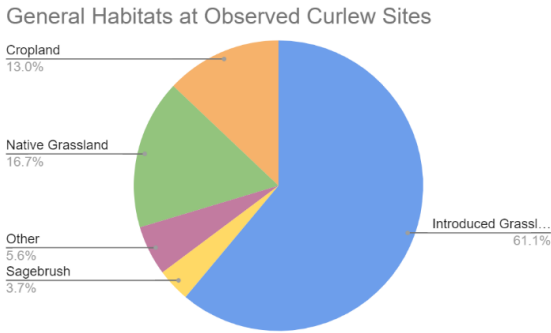


Figure 5: General Habitat Type at Observed Curlew Sites

51.56%	Introduced Grassland
14.06%	Native Grassland
10.94%	Cropland
3.13%	Sagebrush
4.69%	Other

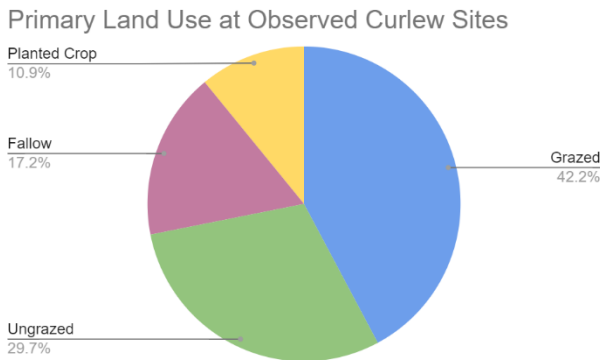


Figure 6: Primary Land Use at Observed Curlew Sites

42.19%	Grazed
29.69%	Ungrazed
17.19%	Fallow
10.94%	Planted Crop

What's Next?

We are excited to continue these survey efforts in 2025 in Western Montana. These surveys would not be possible without our dedicated partners and volunteers, and we will once again be looking for volunteers on this project. Keep an eye out on our eNewsletter and social media accounts for updates on this project!

Thank you to all who volunteered for this project in 2024! If you have any questions about this report or how to volunteer for this effort please contact Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org.