

fall

2025

MONTANA  
AUDUBON



CITIZEN SCIENCE SURVEYS:  
**CONNECTING  
PEOPLE AND  
CONSERVATION**

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**10 YEARS OF  
FLEDGLINGS  
PRESCHOOL**

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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.

## fall 2025

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On the cover:  
Long-billed Curlew  
Dan Ellison photo

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## THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

At Montana Audubon, we believe that everyone can play a role in protecting birds, other wildlife and the important habitats they depend on. You don't need to be a professional biologist to make a difference – sometimes all it takes is curiosity, patience, and a willingness to observe the world around you. That is at the heart of our citizen science program, and it's changing the way we understand and protect Montana's birds.

Our citizen science program gives everyday people the opportunity to contribute to real scientific research. By recording their sightings, these volunteers are creating valuable data that guide conservation decisions and help protect habitats across the state. From counting Long-billed Curlews in sprawling grasslands to observing elusive nightjars under the twilight sky, every observation adds to a larger picture of Montana's bird populations and the health of our landscapes.

What makes this work truly special is the connection it fosters – to nature, to community, and to conservation itself. Volunteers can experience everything from the thrill of hearing a Western Screech-Owl call from across a darkened creek to the quiet satisfaction of logging observations from their own backyard feeders. But whatever the experience, our citizen scientists can take solace in the fact that their small actions, like noting a single bird sighting on our Montana eBird website, collectively create powerful insights that guide conservation planning, habitat protection, and policy decisions.

In this issue, you'll read about the incredible contributions of citizen scientists this past season. With more than 200 participants surveying hundreds of miles across Montana, these citizen scientists documented thousands of detections of target species, helping researchers, agencies, and communities make informed conservation decisions. Their efforts demonstrate that protecting Montana's birds is not just the work of our staff biologists – it's a shared responsibility and a joyful opportunity for you to experience too. I hope this article inspires you to step outside, open your eyes and ears, and consider joining the growing community of Montana Audubon citizen scientists. Together, we can ensure that birds, and the habitats they depend on, will thrive for generations to come in Big Sky Country!

Yours in Conservation,

Larry Berrin, Executive Director



*The actions of our citizen scientists collectively create powerful insights that guide conservation planning, habitat protection, and policy decisions.*

# SCIENCE FOR ALL

## Connecting People and Conservation Through Citizen Science Surveys

It's late March, long after sunset, and you're standing on a gravel road beside Rock Creek, not far from I-90. The night air is cold, and you shove your hands deeper into your pockets, wishing you had grabbed warmer gloves. A thermos of tea waits back in the car, but for now you stay still, listening. This is your third survey stop of the night, with seven more to go. So far – silence.

You shift your weight, gravel crunching underfoot, then force yourself to be still again. With soft eyes you scan the trees for movement, for any hint of light. The rushing creek begins to sound like distant voices. Your senses strain to create meaning from the lack of light and strange noises in the dark.

And then – there it is. From across the creek comes the faint, bouncing-ball call of a Western Screech-Owl. A grin spreads across your face, and in the dim light you see your partners smile too. You whisper, “Finally! We got one!” The wait was worth it.

When the 10-minute survey ends, you linger a moment longer, hoping to hear the owl again, but it's silent. Cold fingers forgotten, you climb back into the car to log the sighting in the survey app – one more point added to Montana's growing map of screech-owl detections.

*continued...*

Western Screech-Owl

In 2025, Montana Audubon organized three statewide citizen science projects focused on Western and Eastern Screech-Owls, Long-billed Curlews, and nightjars (Common Nighthawks and Common Poorwills). Together, these projects involved 221 volunteers and surveyed 167 routes for a total of 1,287 miles across the state. They recorded 1,713 detections of target species.

All of these detections are entered into the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MNHP) database, which allows wildlife professionals from agencies and other organizations to access the data. These records help refine bird distribution maps in the Montana Field Guide and will be used by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) to help determine conservation statuses in the Statewide Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

“Citizen Science surveys are a fun way to help inform natural resource management, connect with the species around you, and spend some time with other amazing people who care about the things that make Montana a very special place!” said Bryce Maxwell, MNHP Project Coordinator.

To support participants, Montana Audubon provides comprehensive training – from species ID and survey protocols to data entry. “I love any excuse to be outdoors, and I have wanted to get involved with this sort of activity for some time now,” said Lisa Bruno, a volunteer with the screech-owl surveys. “It was really easy – Montana Audubon gave us all of the tools, a map with coordinates, everything we needed to use.”

“These surveys are a rewarding way to participate in science, spend time outdoors, and learn new things,” shared Kristen Bontadelli, a volunteer with the screech-owl surveys. “It is also beneficial for my kids to see that helping one’s community is good, fun, and can take many forms.”

### A season of citizen science surveys

#### March: Searching for Screech-owls

Montana is home to two species of screech-owls: the Eastern Screech-Owl, usually found east of the Missouri River, and the Western Screech-Owl, typically found to the west. Both are cavity nesters, relying on old-growth cottonwoods, conifers, and riparian areas for nesting. With ongoing development and habitat loss, combined with limited data on

*“That connection with nature is so special, and it was extra special knowing that logging that data point will help researchers and scientists and the owls.”*

population and distribution, both species are listed as Potential Species of Concern in Montana. The Western Screech-Owl is also designated a Species of Greatest Information Need.

To fill these data gaps, Montana Audubon launched the Screech-Owl Citizen Science survey project. After a successful pilot season in 2024, the 2025 surveys exceeded all expectations.

Between March 1 and April 30, 87 volunteers surveyed 58 routes, spanning cottonwood groves, conifer forests, and riparian roadsides from Troy to Miles City. Together, they recorded 24 Eastern and Western Screech-Owls, along with 48 Great Horned Owls, three Long-eared Owls, one Great Gray Owl, and five Northern Saw-whet Owls – a total of 81 owls across all species.

By comparison, the 2024 surveys involved just 19 volunteers covering 19 routes. That effort yielded eight Eastern and Western Screech-Owls, 24 Great Horned Owls, one Boreal Owl, one Northern Pygmy Owl, and five Northern Saw-whet Owls, for a total of 42 owls.

“After being out for a few hours and not getting any calls back, that moment when out of the darkness we heard a Western Screech-owl call back – that was so awesome,” said Bruno. “That connection with nature is so special, and it was extra special knowing that logging that data point will help researchers and scientists and the owls.”

#### April: Counting Curlews

The Long-billed Curlew is an icon of the Great Plains and America’s intermountain grassland basins. This football-shaped shorebird relies on short and mixed-grass prairies for breeding. As grassland habitat continues to disappear, a lack of national conservation efforts may result in irreversible population declines. The state of Montana designates the Long-billed Curlew as a Species of Concern. Montana 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.

Since 2012, the Long-billed Curlew Initiative has documented hundreds of Long-billed Curlews in the Helena, Blackfoot, and Mission Valleys.

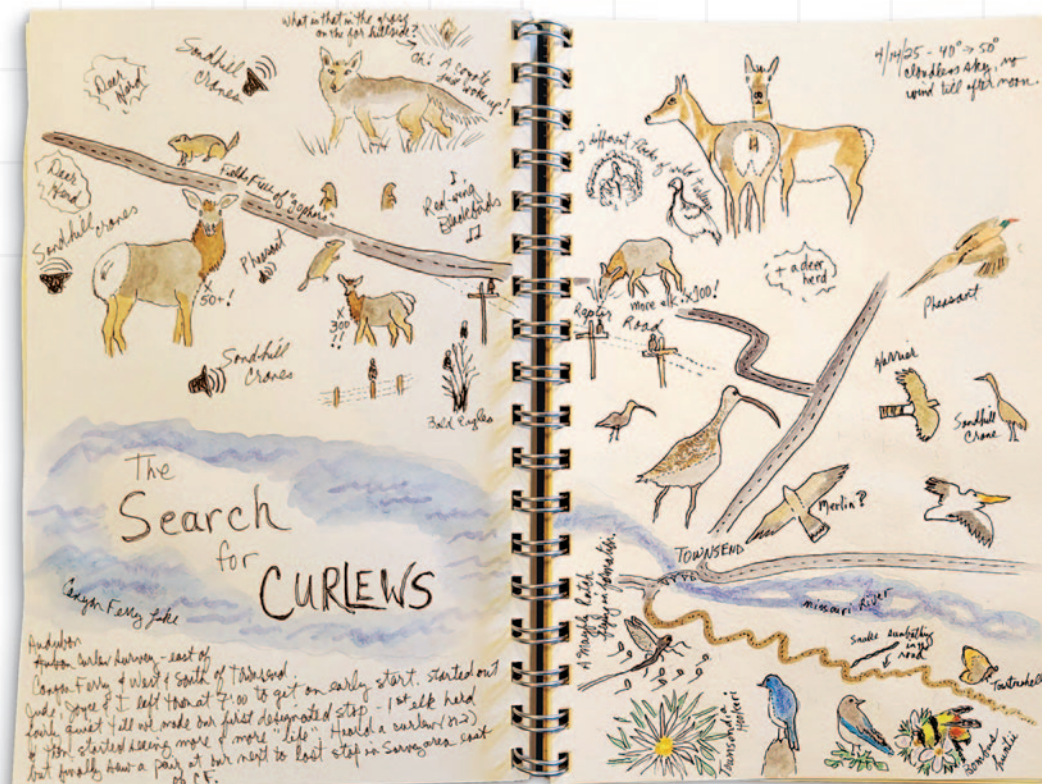
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*The football-shaped Long-billed Curlew relies on short and mixed-grass prairies for breeding.*



Long-billed Curlew chick





This collaborative effort is currently led by Montana Audubon, the Blackfoot Challenge, and biologists for the Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribe (CSKT).

This summer, 58 volunteers and partners conducted surveys in two key periods: April 8–May 7, when pairs are forming, and May 8–May 31, during the nesting season. Across 47 routes covering roughly 225 miles of potential curlew habitat, they recorded 67 curlew observations. These data inform conservation planning, help identify

priority areas for conservation easements, and support local organizations and communities in engaging with landowners to protect essential habitat.

“The recent curlew survey was a chance for me to learn more about this charismatic grassland bird in my backyard,” said volunteer Joyce Bateman. “Although Long-billed Curlews were the target species, the survey was also a motivator to explore some areas less familiar to me that were teeming with wildlife, not just curlews. [At one stop,] we watched with quiet

*Above: Pages from Connie Geiger’s nature journal, recording her experience on a Long-billed Curlew survey. About the experience, she shared: “Herds of deer, hundreds of elk in the fields, a coyote waking from a nap, Bald Eagles on posts and snags, Wild Turkeys, soaring pelicans, pheasants, Northern Harriers, the calls of Sandhill Cranes and a Merlin, even a mayfly hatch... but where are the curlews?! FINALLY, the last stop on our Canyon Ferry survey route... we saw two curlews!”*

expectation as a small herd of elk jumped over a fence. As the last animal cleared the barrier, I felt lucky to be out in great wildlife habitat while also contributing to the study of curlew numbers, behaviors, and habitats.”

### June: Swoops and Shadows

Common Nighthawks and Common Poorwills belong to the Caprimulgidae family, also known as “nightjars,” named for their distinctive, jarring vocalizations. Both species are masters of camouflage – their mottled brown feathers make them nearly invisible against tree branches or leaf litter. Common Nighthawks are most often seen swooping after insects at dawn and dusk. Common Poorwills are less common than nighthawks, and typically roost on the ground, disguised among the leaf litter.

Surveying these secretive, nocturnal birds is challenging. As a result, both species are listed as Species of Greatest Information Need in Montana. Common Poorwills, which are less abundant than Nighthawks and face threats from habitat loss and pesticide use, are also designated as a Potential Species of Concern.

In collaboration with biologists from MFWP, Montana Audubon launched new statewide surveys this year to gather more data on these cryptic birds. Survey routes focused on regions where the status of both species was uncertain. Between June 1 and August 10, 62 volunteers and 14 MFWP scientists surveyed 64 routes, recording 1,603 Common Nighthawks and 19 Common Poorwills.

### Looking Ahead to 2026

We are thrilled to report that MFWP has made a significant funding commitment which will allow us to expand our Citizen Science Program in the next two years. Building on our previous projects, we will continue our collaboration to identify other species of concern, design effective survey methods, and to conduct Citizen Science programs that deliver bird conservation in Montana. Stay tuned to Montana Audubon’s email newsletter and social media for upcoming citizen science opportunities in 2026!

To see reports from each project, visit the Montana Audubon Citizen Science website: [mtaudubon.org/2025-citizen-science-reports-now-available/](https://mtaudubon.org/2025-citizen-science-reports-now-available/)

**THANK YOU**  
to our funding partners L.E.A.W. Family Foundation, Tracy Aviary, and MFWP.



Common Nighthawk

Bob Martinka



## Wrapping Up A Swift Season

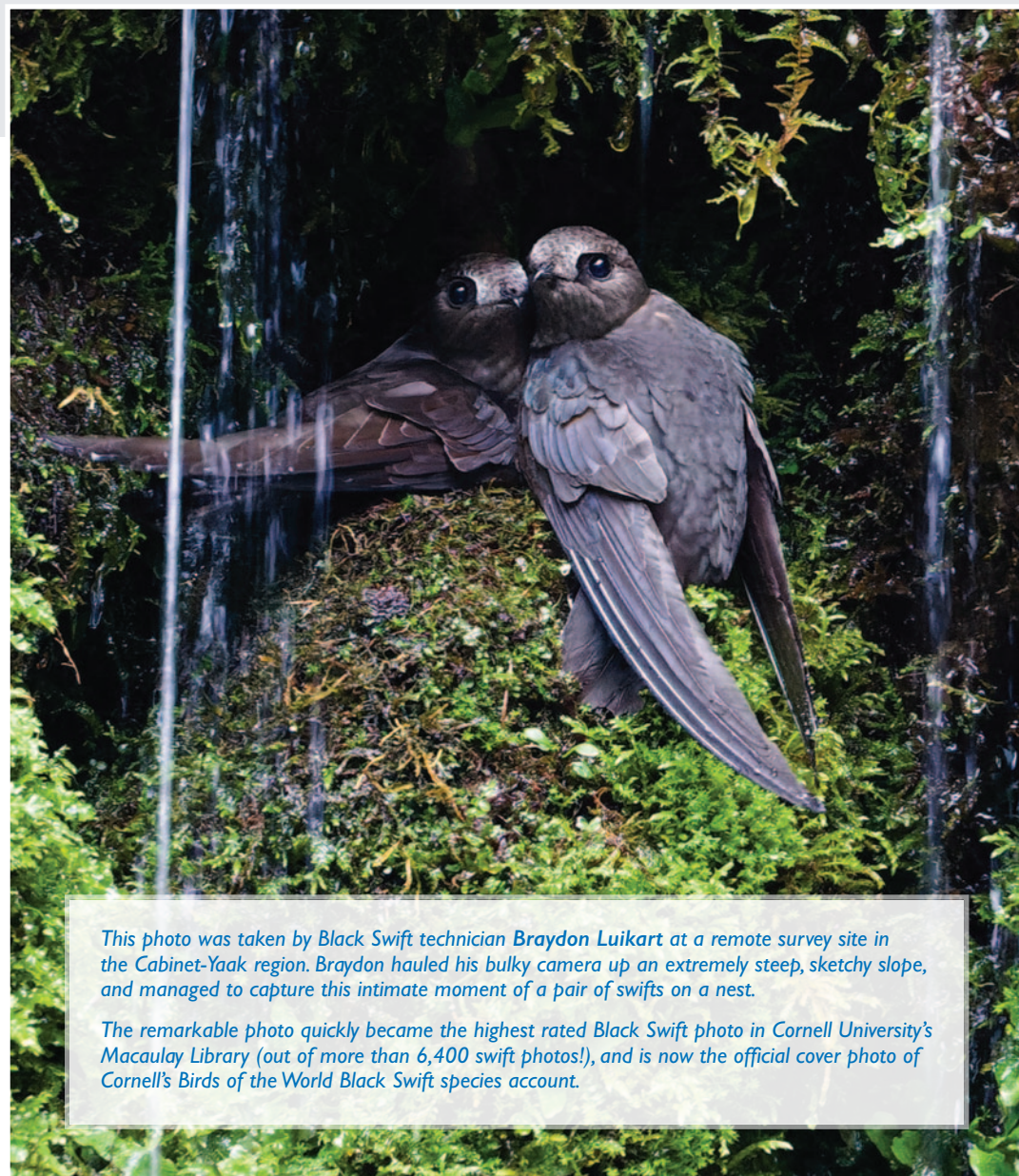
On August 21, 2025, Montana Audubon technicians carried out the last Black Swift survey of the season at Morrell Falls, near Seeley Lake. We are glad to report this survey season has turned out as well as we had hoped. Our crew of seven full and part-time technicians, several volunteers, and a handful of Glacier National Park technicians successfully surveyed 34 potential nesting sites a total of 82 times, detecting Black Swifts at half (17) of the sites.

Monitoring Montana's Black Swift population is important due to this species' small population size and extremely specific nesting requirements. Black Swifts nest exclusively in the spray zone of waterfalls, and many waterfalls are becoming smaller and drying up along with the dwindling snowfields which feed them. As a result, Black Swifts are extremely vulnerable to changing precipitation regimes. Since the beginning of the Black Swift project in 2012, Montana Audubon has been at the forefront of Black Swift research in the Northern Rockies. At the time, there were only four known nesting sites in the state. In collaboration with partners at Glacier National Park and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks,

our surveys have greatly increased the understanding of this species' numbers and distribution. We now know of more than 60 nesting sites in Western Montana. In the entire U.S., only Colorado has more nesting sites.

A recent analysis carried out by partners from Bird Conservancy of the Rockies has given us an important, first statewide abundance estimate of 454 Black Swifts. Even though we are expecting reduced survey efforts in the coming two to three years, we know the countless hours spent monitoring swifts in some Montana's most rugged backcountry have provided us with a solid understanding of the current state of this species, and a baseline that will be critical for assessing population and occupancy trends when we resume surveys in the future.

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



*This photo was taken by Black Swift technician Braydon Luikart at a remote survey site in the Cabinet-Yaak region. Braydon hauled his bulky camera up an extremely steep, sketchy slope, and managed to capture this intimate moment of a pair of swifts on a nest.*

*The remarkable photo quickly became the highest rated Black Swift photo in Cornell University's Macaulay Library (out of more than 6,400 swift photos!), and is now the official cover photo of Cornell's Birds of the World Black Swift species account.*



## Audubon Certified Ranching Expands Across Montana

The last few months have brought major milestones for the Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR) program. Food Alliance audits confirmed certification for six of seven new ranches, including three that supply beef to the regenerative meat company Old Salt Co-op. Together, these ranches represent some of the largest acreage in the ACR program nationally, and add 342,885 acres – more than doubling Montana's certified acreage from 2018–2024. With these additions,

Montana now has 28 Audubon Certified ranches covering 516,980 acres – over a half-million acres – in “bird-friendly” management!

This summer, our science team conducted 30 bird monitoring surveys on 13 ACR ranches. Across all surveys, they made 5,433 detections, representing 162 species and 17 priority grassland species for the program. This includes common grassland species like Western Meadowlark and

Vesper Sparrow, as well as Ferruginous Hawk, Upland Sandpiper, and a Sharp-tailed Grouse west of the Continental Divide! Some rare and elusive breeding birds showed up on surveys too, with surveyors detecting a Black-billed Cuckoo on one ranch, only to find another individual singing far away in an aspen grove later that morning.

Montana Audubon also sponsored and attended the Montana Grazing Lands Coalition Grazing Expo and the Western Sustainability Exchange's Expanding

**Montana now has 28 Audubon Certified ranches covering 516,980 acres in bird-friendly management.**



Markets Conference, strengthening connections between ranchers, markets, and the conservation community.

**Thank you to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Cornell Douglas Foundation for their support of Audubon Conservation Ranching in Montana.**



## Celebrating 10 Years of Fledglings Preschool

In the summer of 2015, the Center held an open house for families interested in the brand new outdoor preschool. Six families signed up that day to join the new adventure. From that initial group of six students in a single class, we've now grown to 64 students in eight classes, and added a kindergarten class. Over the years we have climbed countless trees, tromped through the mud, splashed in countless puddles, and slid down snowy hills. Along the way we've learned to make friends, make safe choices, and how to take care of ourselves, the planet, and others.



Though the path was not always straightforward, with time and reflection we landed on our current play-based structure, trusting that when we give children a chance they learn what they need to know in their own time and in their own way. Our teachers are continually amazed at what our little fledglings know and can figure out when they're given the space to try.

Together, we've built an amazing community of families and children that continues to grow and thrive even after our students 'leave the nest.' Please join us in celebrating 10 years and the teachers, families, and students who have made Fledglings Preschool into what it is now!

*Above: campers muck it up in Monster Mud. Left, following the map to "Pirate Booty."*



## Fledglings Preschool Traditions & Lore

### Monster Mud

The reputation of the mud around the Center is passed from student to student year after year. It usually includes a warning that your teacher won't save you if you get stuck!

### Pirate Day

Every year we 'happen' upon pirate maps that lead us into the canoes to search for gold. We paddle around following the maps to find treasure chests filled with Pirate Booty snacks, golden coins, shiny necklaces, smooth rocks, and shells.

### Winter Solstice

We celebrate by making lanterns, listening to stories in a darkened room with our lanterns and eating sun bread (bread baked to look like a sun) to welcome the sun back.

### Getting Their Wings

Every student who graduates from Fledglings Preschool gets a set of wings sewn just for them by their teacher. It's a labor of love, and a memorable final gift to students as they fly on to new adventures.



## The Ripple Effect: From Camper to Volunteer

With summer camp season wrapped up and the school year underway, we want to extend our deepest gratitude to the incredible youth volunteers who made this summer truly unforgettable. They didn't just lend a hand – they helped create moments of discovery, joy, and belonging that will ripple far beyond the season. Their willingness to step in and make a difference embodied the spirit of our mission: to inspire understanding and care for Montana's wildlife

and natural ecosystems so they can thrive for generations to come.

One of the most powerful things we witnessed this summer was the ripple effect of our programming. Many of our volunteers were once campers themselves, a fact that deeply enriches their commitment. They've experienced firsthand the impact of the Montana Audubon Center, and now they're paying it forward. This is the heart of our work –

creating an impact so profound that a new generation of leaders is inspired to give back and help others find their own connection to the natural world.

To all of you – Alex, Ramsey, Lillie, Emma, Rowan, and Knox – thank you for being such an important part of our summer. You helped create experiences and memories that will inspire our campers for years to come!

*High-fives all around from former camper Lillie during a summer camp session.*





## Celebration of Nature Under the Big Sky

This year's Evening Under the Big Sky in Billings was a truly unforgettable night of community, generosity, and celebration of nature. Ninety guests joined us for an evening brimming with energy as friends, families, and supporters came together to enjoy dinner, auctions, and great company under Montana's wide-open skies. For the first time, we also provided childcare for 16 families – complete with outdoor exploration, a movie under the stars, and every child's favorite food, pizza – making the evening more inclusive and welcoming than ever.

Thanks to the incredible support of our community, the event raised \$18,041 to benefit the Montana Audubon Center's environmental education initiatives. These funds will directly fuel hands-on, nature-based learning programs that connect children, families, and schools with the outdoors throughout the year.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who attended, contributed, and shared in our mission to inspire a lifelong love of nature. We can't wait to welcome you back for next year's event in September!



**A special THANK YOU to all who donated items for this year's Evening Under the Big Sky live and silent auctions**



## BECOME A MEMBER OF MONTANA AUDUBON

Your membership helps support core operations for one of the most effective conservation organizations in Montana!

Enjoy a year of benefits including: timely conservation updates; invites to special events; discounts to programs, events, and our annual birding festival; and two print newsletters per year (Spring and Fall) mailed directly to you.

As a Montana Audubon member, you'll be actively contributing to the protection of birds, other wildlife, and their habitats across our vast state.

For more information, see our website or contact Harrison Stasik at [harrison@mtaudubon.org](mailto:harrison@mtaudubon.org) or call 406-443-3949.



Swainson's Hawk

Bob Marinka

### 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](http://mtaudubon.org)



## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

# Joe & Lana Batts

At our 2025 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival, held this year in Missoula, Montana Audubon was honored to present Joe and Lana Batts with a Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of their unwavering dedication and generosity in the service of bird conservation in Montana.

Joe and Lana have quietly yet steadfastly supported Montana Audubon for years. Joe serves as an at-large Board member and has previously been Board President and Vice-President. Lana has served as a Board member and Chair of the Development Committee for Montana Audubon. Together, they are pillars of Montana's conservation community – more than just volunteers, they are true champions for wildlife and habitat protection. "Birds turned us into conservationists," says Joe.



Through their generosity and leadership, Joe and Lana inspire others to get involved and make a difference. They remind us that conservation is not just about saving a place – it's a shared responsibility and a collective effort.

Please join us in honoring Joe and Lana Batts for their tremendous contributions to conservation!

## STAFF UPDATES

### Welcome to our new Membership & Fundraising Specialist!

Born and raised outside of Milwaukee, **Harrison Stasik** carries on his family's passion for the outdoors as a third generation conservationist. His passion for the outdoors led him to graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a BS in Wildlife Ecology & Management and dual minors in Biology and Captive Wildlife. While attending UW-Stevens Point, Harrison was introduced to the world of conservation non-profit organizations. These organizations had such an impact on his life that he now finds himself living in Montana, striving to build upon these communities and inspire North America's conservationists the same way he was inspired.

When Harrison is not in the office he can be found recreating on public lands and surrounding himself with Montana's wildlife.



Despite his dedication to spending time in the field, he also enjoys world traveling, reveling in adrenaline-seeking activities, testing his culinary skills, and most recently training his black lab pup.

### Other Staff Updates

To better reflect her enhanced role and impact, we're excited to share that **Kate Karschnik** has recently been promoted to Education Programs Manager at the Montana Audubon Center. She's already embracing her new role, and we're excited for what the future holds!

## WILDLIFE GRANT APPLICATION PERIOD NOW OPEN

Since 1996, 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 application deadline for the 2026 grant cycle is Friday, January 16, 2026. To apply, visit [mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants](https://mtaudubon.org/about/wildlifegrants)



Elliot Ress

### UPDATES FROM 2025 GRANT RECIPIENTS

#### Flathead Audubon's Jewel Basin Hawk

**Watch** is currently in its 18th full monitoring season. In 2024, observers recorded a total of 4,139 individual birds of 16 raptor species (including Sharp-shinned hawk, pictured here) during 56 surveys – the second-highest total in the history of the count.

**Dalton Brantley** (left, pictured with fellow researcher Max Proctor en route to historical survey sites located in Glacier National Park) was able to survey 23 sites across the state for rare Gillette Checkerspot butterflies, including 11 sites with historical population data. Early results point to moisture availability and woody encroachment as key factors influencing population persistence.

**Arcata Leavitt** gathered about three TB of bioacoustic data across 14 sites in southwest Montana to find and monitor Great Gray Owls. Preliminary results suggest that these recording devices may be effective to monitor active nests.

**Jacob McArtor** visited 27 wildfire-affected forests in western Montana, collecting hundreds of samples of water, algae, and aquatic insects to better understand how wildfires are influencing aquatic ecosystems.

**Last Chance Audubon** worked with the City of Helena and the Montana Conservation Corps to do considerable clean-up work at K-Mart Wetlands, removing the overgrowth of Russian Olive and treating stumps to prevent regrowth.

**Montana Raptor Conservation Center** admitted their 200th patient at the end of September – a milestone they don't usually reach until closer to the end of the year. At this pace, 2025 will likely be their busiest year on record for raptor admissions.

**Montana Wild Wings Recovery Center** has seen an uptick in raptor admissions this year compared to last, and has been keeping detailed records, tracking species, location and symptoms, in order to help spot patterns and better understand the challenges raptors are facing out in the wild.

For more detailed updates and photos from each grant recipient, be sure to visit our website and social media. We are honored to support these organizations in their efforts to benefit Montana's native birds and wildlife!



Brandon Hanzel

# BIPARTISAN MOMENTUM FOR MONTANA'S WILDLIFE

The 69th Montana Legislative session is now in the rear-view mirror and certainly left many heads spinning. Over the course of four months, we witnessed an unusual bipartisan coalition form to pass key legislative priorities. Though bipartisanship primarily coalesced around property tax and judicial reform, this session strongly contrasts with how the 2023 session functioned under a super-majority. The 69th legislature had numerous examples of cooperation across party lines with a slate of popular conservation funding bills passing with large margins and bipartisan opposition to unscientific wildlife bills.

House Bill (HB) 932, one of our 2025 legislative priorities, stands out as a major victory for conservation this session. The bill secures long-term funding for Habitat Montana, strengthens the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), creates a Wildlife Highway Crossing account, and allocates \$2 million annually to the Non-game Program. Passing with broad bipartisan support, by a combined vote of 128-24, HB 932 settles the years-long debate over how marijuana excise taxes are spent on conservation, ultimately honoring the will of the voters expressed in 2020.

We successfully stopped many bills that threatened the scientific-management of wildlife. HB 57 would have removed California Quail and Gambel's Quail from the exotic prohibited species list without data to support such a decision. Anti-predator bills, another theme of the last few sessions, were a constant threat. HB 176, HB 222, and HB 258 extended seasons, removed quotas, or dropped bag limits for wolves, and failed by narrow margins.

*House Bill 932, one of our 2025 legislative priorities, secures long-term funding for Habitat Montana and strengthens the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program. It passed with broad bipartisan support.*



To read or download the voting record of your legislator, visit our website: [mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy](https://mtaudubon.org/conservation-policy)

Despite the many wins in 2025, we cannot ignore the key environmental protections lost this year: rollbacks to MEPA in HB 285, lowering clean air standards with HB 291, and the serious water quality implications associated with moving to a narrative standard. Primarily, we witnessed a strong reaction to the *Held vs. Montana* decision, which came in the final weeks of the 2023 Legislature.

Since "Sine Die," our policy staff focused on the implementation of bills at the commission level. At the August FWP commission meeting, we strongly supported the FY26 Non-game Workplan and the approval of habitat conservation leases, while advocating for adequate protections of wolves in the Wolf Management Plan. The significant Non-game program goes directly towards implementing the 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan, habitat restoration projects, and monitoring for Species of Greatest Conservation Need, in order to stave off federal listing of sensitive and threatened species.

As we have since 1983, we published a voting record to show you how your Representatives and Senators aligned with Montana Audubon's legislative priorities in 2025. The voting record shows how each legislator voted on our primary issues this session. This year's voting record has more parity than in years past, which is a reflection of the popular conservation legislation brought forth this year. We encourage you to get in touch with your legislator to express any concerns you may have with their votes and share your appreciation for when they stuck up for wildlife.

## BIRDING IN COSTA RICA & CUBA

### Birding Costa Rica's Hotspots

**February 2–13, 2026 • \$4,900 double occupancy**

Escape the cold by joining a maximum of seven other participants in stunning Costa Rica. You'll visit four of the top 15 eBird hotspots, enjoy delicious local cuisine, and see over 300 bird species. Likely targets include the endemic Coppery-headed Emerald, and Cabanis's Ground Sparrow, along with Scaled Antpitta, Baird's Trogon, American Pygmy Kingfisher, Spectacled and Crested Owl, and, of course, Resplendent Quetzal, among many others. Only four spots remain in this once-in-a-lifetime journey.

For more information, visit [merlinbirding.com](https://merlinbirding.com) or email [steve@merlinbirding.com](mailto:steve@merlinbirding.com).

### Birding Cuba

**March 21–29, 2026 • \$3,595 double occupancy**

Join us for an incredible 9-day journey led by expert guides, and the chance to spot breathtaking birds found nowhere else on Earth. With 28 endemic species, including the Cuban Tody and Zonzuncitio, along with the Bee Hummingbird, the world's smallest bird, you won't want to miss this rare opportunity to expand your life list in one of the world's most captivating destinations and cultural jewels!

For more information, visit [mariahtravel.com/all-tours/montana-audubon-cuba](https://mariahtravel.com/all-tours/montana-audubon-cuba) or email [info@mariahtravel.com](mailto:info@mariahtravel.com).



Cuban Tody

Courtesy of Merlin Birding Tours

## 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).

Montana Audubon is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Tax ID (EIN) is 81-0412530.

Western Kingbird



Bob Martinka

25<sup>TH</sup> Annual

# wings across the big sky

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Montana's Premier Birding Festival

JUNE 12–14, 2026  
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In 2026, Montana's premier birding festival is coming to Kalispell!

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Montana Audubon is partnering with Flathead Audubon Society 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 2026. To stay up-to-date, sign up for our email list or follow us on social media!



John Lambing

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