



Spring 2006

Volume 15, Number 1

"for the conservation of native birds, other wildlife, and their habitats..."

Montana Audubon's Bird Festival in Glasgow June 2 – 4



The 2006 Montana Audubon Bird Festival will be held June 2 – 4, 2006 in Glasgow, located in northeastern Montana. The festival will focus on

the rich assortment of prairie birds in Montana that are found in the area's wetlands, rivers, and grasslands. Field trips include canoeing the Missouri River, visiting area grasslands and wetlands, and a beginning birding class. Almost 140 bird species were observed during Glasgow's 2005 Bird Festival.

The festival starts Friday, June 2, with an evening event and social at the Fort Peck Interpretive Center, and a program by Chrysti Smith, from public radio's *Chrysti the Wordsmith* program, who will explore the rich history of words relating to birds.

Saturday kicks off with half-day field trips in the morning. On Saturday afternoon, speakers will present short talks on raptors, Mountain Plovers, and prairie, sagebrush, and wetland birds. Saturday night will include a banquet, as well as a program by Ed Harper, drawing from his incredible bird photographs and extensive knowledge of bird behavior

and natural history. Ed grew up in Montana; he is a frequent speaker at bird festivals, symposiums, civic clubs, and Audubon societies.

All-day field trips will be featured on Sunday. Additionally, a special 2-day trip will be offered to Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge and the Westby area for Sunday and Monday.

The Glasgow Chamber of Commerce is partnering with Montana Audubon for this conference. Registration packets should in the mail soon. You can also get information by calling or writing the Montana Audubon office in Helena.

Montana Audubon Releases Wetlands Report: Stream Development Puts Montana Waters At Risk

Montana's streams and wetlands are increasingly being filled and lost to development, without the kind of mitigation and restoration required by the Clean Water Act, according to a report released last fall by Montana Audubon.

"Wetlands and streams are protected by law for good reason — they buffer us from floods, keep our water clean, and provide the most productive wildlife habitat in Montana," said Dr. Jack Kirkley, Professor of Biology at UM-Western in Dillon. "Montanans should stand guard to make sure we do not destroy this important natural resource, piece by piece."

Under the federal Clean Water Act, the US Army Corps of Engineers must approve any plan to fill streams or wetlands with rock or soil. The formal

OK is called a "Section 404 permit." The overall goal of the program is to have "no net loss" of wetlands by requiring mitigation or restoration of wetlands equal to any significant loss.

The Audubon study, *Impacts of the 404 Permit Program on Wetlands and Waterways in Montana and Recommendations for Program Improvement*, looked at all of the stream and wetland-filling permits issued by the Corps in Montana from 1990-2002. The report concludes that the Corps:

- Approved 99.8% of requests to fill or develop wetlands (6,261 permits were issued; 11 denied).
- Authorized degradation of almost 180 miles of streams and rivers (14 miles/year)
- Authorized the filling of almost 900 acres of wetlands (70 acres/year).

- Documented mitigation for only 2.4 percent of the projects that impacted streams and 41.3 percent of the projects impacting wetlands.

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Magpie Muse

From the (Acting) Executive Director...

These are exciting times for Montana Audubon. We are in the process of hiring a new Executive Director (see page 5), and we just adopted a new strategic plan (see page 8). Our new Executive Director will be able to lead implementation of our strategic plan, which establishes a clear and focused direction for Montana Audubon for the next 5 years.

That being said, I also want to take this time to explain why you haven't seen a newsletter from us for awhile. Although things are going well now, we have had some rough sledding in the last two years. Our problems have primarily been financial, and some restructuring was necessary. Consequently, our newsletter was temporarily cut. However, through much hard work from Board members and staff alike, we have turned the corner in this chapter of our history; we now have a plan in place that will allow us to continue our high quality work—and we are pleased to report that implementation is going well.

One additional organizational issue that we have been involved in over the last two years is our relationship with the National Audubon Society (NAS). During our discussions with NAS, both organizations decided that a slightly more distant relationship was appropriate and that this new relationship would actually remove confusing obstacles to our conservation work. Although we continue to maintain a close working relationship to NAS, in April 2005, Montana

A u d u b o n reestablished itself as an independent Audubon state program.

And finally, on a personal note, even though Montana Audubon is hiring a new Executive Director, I wanted to let people know that I will be continuing to do the advocacy/public policy work of the organization—which includes lobbying the Montana Legislature. If you know me at all, you know that my heart is in working on conservation policy issues on behalf of Audubon. Although I believe in all of Montana Audubon's programs, I also know that the work I need to do to stay happy and productive is focused on policy issues: representing Audubon before state and federal agencies, the Montana Legislature, and local governments.

So, I'm excited to be back in communication with you through this newsletter. If you have questions or suggestions concerning our programs or direction, please call. And when you see our Spring appeal letter, any extra help you can give us—especially this year—will be GREATLY appreciated.



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A Conservation Education Program for Billings

Since 1999, a group of dedicated teachers, community leaders, and students have been diligently transforming a landscape, from gravel pit to wildlife habitat, providing kids with an alternative to video games and television, and giving them an outlet to learn from and explore wild places. What also is emerging is the long-term dream to develop a staffed Nature Center, with a growing list of educational programs offered throughout the year.

Montana Audubon is working in partnership with the Yellowstone River Parks Association (YRPA) to develop a conservation education program in Billings. The site for these programs borders the Yellowstone River. The Billings Conservation Education Center (CEC) is a place for students, families, and the community to observe wildlife and learn about the natural history of the Yellowstone River and surrounding region.

Last summer, Montana Audubon hired—for the first time—a Teacher-Naturalist to support current and new programming at the CEC. Carol Ward joined Montana Audubon after many years of environmental teaching in federal parks, schools, the YMCA, and Zoo Montana. Carol spent her time working for Audubon with project partners organizing school field trips, developing 2 teacher training workshops, helping with the site's pond/wetland restoration, networking in the community, and developing education units for the CEC programs. In total, we served over 500 students and 20 teachers last summer and fall on CEC field trips. We want to take this time to thank the **Charles M. Bair Family Trust, Yellowstone Valley Audubon**, and numerous donors, who made our first year of regular programming possible.

more *Billings Education*, page 4

Memorial Benches Dedicated

Last fall, two memorial benches were dedicated to two remarkable women at the Billings Conservation Education Center site along the Yellowstone River:

Bebe FitzGerald (1916 – 2000) of Billings joined Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society in 1972. She immediately became an active member, serving for 28 years as a member of the Board of Directors, Secretary, Membership Chair, Vice-president, and President. Throughout her involvement with Audubon, she gave numerous talks about Montana birds to area school children. For 24 years, she also co-taught bird identification classes for the Billings community. Bebe was instrumental in establishing Montana Audubon as a statewide organization, and served as one of its first presidents. She also was a founding member of the Montana Bird Records Committee. Bebe committed much of her time over 28 years to the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society, and to getting volunteer bird watchers to share their passion for birds by keeping careful records to increase our understanding of the state's bird populations.

Mildred Carolyn Furniss Murray (1903 – 1973) was an Iowa woman who loved history, birds, and the West. She and her husband, Bill Murray, made their life together in Ames, where they raised children David, Jean, and John. She had a lifelong interest in birds, for whom she loved to create habitats. It was her flying lessons as a pioneer woman pilot that led her west, where she found Long's Peak, Colorado, a place she visited every summer she could. She was ever happiest on the mountaintop or coming down to feed birds on the deck of her cabin. During the last years of her life, she and her husband dedicated themselves to founding Living History Farms in West Des Moines. Although she didn't personally know Montana, she was brought here by her daughter who loves this state, along with her own Colorado, and who made in her mother's name, in honor of the centennial of her birth, a contribution to the creation of the Montana

Audubon/YRPA Conservation Education Center on the Yellowstone River.

Peg and Bebe would have enjoyed each other as kindred spirits—their side-by-side benches at the Education Center site memorialize these two remarkable women.



FitzGerald family members gather at Bebe's memorial bench at the CEC in September.



Wetlands, continued from page 1

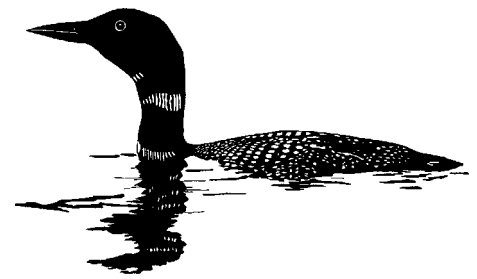
“Montanans are losing wetlands and streams, without the kind of replacement and mitigation required by law,” said Janet Ellis of Montana Audubon, author of the study. “Projects that result in more than minimal impacts are supposed to be mitigated. But that’s not happening in Montana.”

Development impacted some of the most treasured and storied rivers in Montana, including the Yellowstone, Missouri, Musselshell, Ruby, Clark Fork, Big Hole, Bitterroot, Sun, and Flathead. The Corps approved stream and wetland destruction in all 56 Montana’s counties. The counties with the most impact to streams include Madison, Yellowstone, Park, Cascade, Sweet Grass, Gallatin, Lewis & Clark, Flathead, Lincoln, and Powell. The counties with the greatest impact to wetlands include Gallatin, Big Horn, Ravalli, Madison, Yellowstone, Phillips, Flathead, Roosevelt, Glacier, and Stillwater.

“We do not have to stand by and watch our streams and wetlands be destroyed,” said Ellis. “Montana needs a strong wetland and stream mitigation program.

Without changes, Montana will continue to lose these important areas.”

The report is available through Montana Audubon's Helena office or website: www.mtaudubon.org.



Top 10 Streams with Bank Stabilization authorized between 1990 and 2002

| Stream | Bank Stabilization Miles | Restoration Miles |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Yellowstone River | 15.5 | 0.4 |
| Missouri River | 8.4 | 0.1 |
| Musselshell River* | 5.1 | 0 |
| Ruby River* | 5.0 | 0 |
| Clark Fork River* | 4.3 | 0 |
| Big Hole River* | 4.0 | 0 |
| Bitterroot River | 3.5 | 0.1 |
| Careless Creek (Golden Valley County)* | 3.4 | 0 |
| Sun River* | 2.8 | 1.1 |
| Flathead River (no Forks)* | 2.7 | 0 |

TOTALS **54.8** **1.7**

* Only projects greater than 500 feet are required to be reported to the Corps on these rivers.

Billings Education, continued from page 3

YRPA and the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society continue to invest time and money in developing the CEC. The CEC restoration efforts are returning a denuded site along the Yellowstone River into habitat for birds and wildlife thanks to the dedicated work of YRPA volunteers. In September, Yellowstone Valley Audubon members put together their annual *Pancakes at the Ponds* event to raise awareness and support for the CEC. This event promises to be an annual opportunity for the community of Billings to come and enjoy the exciting developments of a dream come true. In conjunction with the *Pancakes at the Ponds* event, last September a bench overlooking Schoenthal Island was

dedicated to long-time Audubon activist Bebe FitzGerald (see sidebar, page 3).

Currently we are working to raise the funds needed to hire a Teacher-Naturalist for a second year to continue building this program. To learn more about our program in Billings or to volunteer as a community naturalist at the CEC contact Audubon’s Director of Education, Paul Belanger.



Teachers participate in an Audubon workshop at the CEC last fall.

Montana's Important Bird Areas Program

In August 2005, through a memorandum with the National Audubon Society, Montana Audubon became the lead organization designated in Montana to develop Important Bird Areas (IBA) in the state. The IBA Program is a global initiative to identify, monitor, and protect a network of sites that are critical for the conservation of birds. This program will play a key role in Montana Audubon's work to protect birds and their habitat.

Currently, Montana has 26 identified IBAs approved by the Montana IBA Committee. Within the next few months, 4 new sites will be nominated. Three of the sites focus on cottonwood riparian forests (Clark Fork/Grass Valley, Madison Valley, Tongue River), and one is a major wintering area for Trumpeter Swans (Hebgen Lake). The riparian sites are significant because they represent our first IBA efforts directed toward private lands. In addition, the Tongue River project is our first collaborative effort with a Native American tribe; most of the nominated lands are on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

Additional details on these sites will be provided in a future newsletter.

The IBA program works with many project partners. Work on Montana's newest sites included partnerships with **Five Valleys Audubon**, **Five Valley Land Trust**, **Luzenac America**, the **Madison Valley Ranchlands Group**, **Northern Cheyenne Tribe**, **BirdLife International**, **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**, and **Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks**.

Clark Fork IBA Brochure Available

A new brochure has been developed for the Clark Fork-Grass Valley IBA. Copies can be obtained from the Five Valleys Audubon website: <http://www.fvamisoula.org/>



Director of Bird Conservation Receives National Recognition

Last summer, Montana Audubon's Jeff Marks was elected a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union. The honor is given "for exceptional and sustained contributions to ornithology and/or service to the Union." Congratulations to Jeff for this recognition!

Montana Audubon to Hire Executive Director

Montana Audubon is looking for a new Executive Director to develop and manage our programs for the conservation of native birds and their habitats. If you (or anyone you know) are interested in that position, please consider applying.

Duties include overseeing fundraising, including writing grants and soliciting major donors; developing programs to implement the strategic plan; coordinating public relations; and overseeing day-to-day operations. Qualifications include 3 - 5 years of management level experience, excellent oral and written communication skills, and stellar fundraising and grant writing skills. Compensation will be from \$45,000 to \$55,000, depending upon experience.

To apply, send a resume, cover letter, answers to supplemental questions (posted on our website), and three references to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624; or cobryant@mtaudubon.org.

For more information, visit www.mtaudubon.org.



Montana Audubon Elects Officers

Montana Audubon’s current officers were elected at our June Board meeting: **Betsy Griffing**, President; **Larry McEvoy**, Vice President; **Elsie Tuss**, Secretary; and **Bob Lopp**, Treasurer.

Betsy is a lawyer who is teaching at the University of Montana Law School in Missoula. Before her current teaching job, Betsy lived in Helena and was an active member of Last Chance Audubon. Larry McEvoy is a retired physician living in Clancy; he, also, has been active with Last Chance Audubon. Elsie Tuss is a past-president of Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon; she is a farmer/rancher who lives in Floweree. Bob Lopp is planner with Jane Lopp and Associates LLC; he is currently president of Flathead Audubon. All officers are working hard—the Board has just adopted a new strategic plan that will guide Montana Audubon for the next 5 years.

We want to take this opportunity to thank our outgoing president **Jim Brown** and Treasurer **Bill Ballard** for all their hard work!

• Memorial Gifts •

Few tributes are as lasting as a gift that helps preserve Montana’s birds and their habitats. We owe a special thank you to those of you who have recently made a gift in memory of:

- Margaret Adams
- Bebe FitzGerald
- Mary Katsaros
- Bernard Shephard
- Jamie Turner
- John Henry Youngbauer

License Plate is for the Birds!

As the State of Montana issues new license plates this year, why not take this opportunity to purchase the beautiful Montana Audubon license plate instead? By doing this, you can show your support for birds and donate to Montana Audubon! The image features an American Avocet, Ruddy Duck, Lewis’s Woodpecker, and a trio of Black-billed Magpies, all set against the Rocky Mountain Front near Bynum.

As with all specialty plates, the cost of the plate is added to your current vehicle registration fee. The initial cost for the *Bird Habitat* plate is \$35, with an annual renewal rate of \$20. Your \$20 is tax deductible and goes directly to support bird conservation through Montana

Audubon’s education, science, and policy programs. Personalized plates can be ordered; these plates feature any custom text you wish, from 2 to 6 alpha-numeric characters (no fewer than 2 characters, no more than 6) (EXAMPLES: “BIRDER”, “WREN”, or “MAGPIE”).

Your *Bird Habitat* license plate will show your support for the protection of birds and their habitats throughout Montana. Thanks for your support!



Changes in Montana Audubon Staff

Cynthia O’Bryant joined Montana Audubon last January as our office manager. She is the delightful person who greets you when you call the office. She is also the person who does our bookkeeping, updates changes in membership, tracks donations, and ensures that the office runs smoothly. We are very lucky to have hired someone as dedicated as Cynthia. Not only has she risen to the challenges of the day-to-day job, she has also taken her first bird identification class from the local Audubon chapter. Cynthia is a wealth of information; she can help you with everything from questions about your membership to field trips offered at the Bird Festival.

Paul Belanger was promoted to Director of Education, replacing Bob Petty. Paul’s responsibilities include developing a Billings education program (see page 3), working with chapters on education projects (such as with Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon’s Community Naturalist Program (see page 9), and spearheading the Bitterroot bird monitoring project in burned forests (see page 7), a project that he did for his recently completed Masters Degree in Science Education from the University of Montana. Although **Bob Petty** no longer works for Montana Audubon, he is currently employed by the National Audubon Society, working on two projects in Montana: the first is an education program in Seeley Lake; the second project involves bird conservation in the Bitterroot Valley.

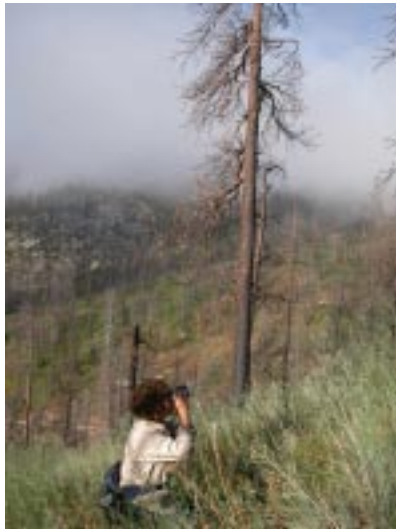
Bitterroot Project Monitors Rare Birds in Post-Fire Habitats

In 2002, Montana Audubon initiated a 5-year pilot study called the Bitterroot Ecological Monitoring Project (BEMP) as a way to address the contentious issues surrounding post-fire management on public lands. The need for this program emerged from the flames and smoke that engulfed the Bitterroot Valley and adjacent Bitterroot National Forest in 2000. Audubon got involved because of the importance of post-fire forests as critical habitat for bird species of conservation concern such as the Lewis's Woodpecker, Black-backed Woodpecker, and American Three-toed Woodpecker. We developed the BEMP to meet multiple objectives: monitor the status of rare birds, use monitoring results to develop public outreach material, and—ultimately—use project information to protect critical habitat.

Project work has focused on several demonstration sites, including burned logged and burned unlogged forests. These sites are located within the proposed Blodgett Fire Important Bird Area, and in the upper Rye Creek drainage within the Skalkaho/Rye fire of 2000. From 2003 to 2005, volunteers monitored nesting behavior of 16 species of cavity-nesting birds on 200 nests.

Since 2002, Montana Audubon has reached more than 600 children and adults through 30 different fire ecology education programs; engaged 45 community volunteers who completed bird monitoring training and donated over 1,200 hours of field research for the BEMP; completed a two-day fire ecology

education training workshop attended by 12 Bitterroot valley educators; installed a *Life from Fire* interpretive sign for Blodgett Canyon Overlook trailhead; distributed the *Birds and Wildland Fire* curriculum to 30 grade 3-8 classroom teachers; produced a Blodgett Fire interpretive brochure; involved 15 Corvallis High School students in bird monitoring on the Blodgett Fire; worked with more than two dozen state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations (nonprofits), K-12 classrooms, University classes, and professional individuals; co-sponsored a 'Citizen Science Summit' attended by more than 30 individuals representing nonprofit organizations, public agencies, volunteer groups, and University staff; and completed qualitative evaluations of the program.



Through participation in the BEMP, volunteers increase their awareness and appreciation for the ecological role of fire, as they develop or improve wildlife observation and field research skills, and strengthen their connection to the landscape through the careful observations of a forest and its wildlife adapting to change. Volunteers also said that their experiences as 'citizen scientists' excited and empowered them to engage in discussions with families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors about the important role of forest fires and habitat.

more *Bitterroot Project*, page 8

Thanks!

Thanks to the following citizen scientists for their help in the 2003-2005 Bitterroot Ecological Monitoring Project:

Carin Kistler, Audubon Intern
 Greg Vranizan, Audubon Intern
 Michelle Brown, Audubon intern
 Tami Brunk, Audubon intern
 Bob Conway
 Janis Cooper
 Jill Davies
 Bob Deeds
 Sarah Faulkner
 Patrice Favreau
 Clare Fitzgerald
 Kay Fulton
 Charles Hackett
 Margot Higgins
 Emma Laughlin
 Patty Laughlin
 Pam Lea
 Kim Livezey
 Louise Marquardt
 Campbell Massey
 Charles Miller
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 Mel Mooers
 Tiffany Olsen
 Stacy Peas
 Ruth Peterson
 Tom Potts
 Jenny Rasche
 Jeremy Roberts
 Rebecca Sharp
 Jesslyn Shields
 Jim Sieg
 Mary Thomas
 Carol MacIntyre Thurlkill
 Diance Tidwell
 Patrick Toomey
 Talyn Villasenor
 Joe Vranizan
 Whitney Warren
 Krystal Weilage
 Brian Williams
 Dustin Wood
 Dean Young
 Evan Youngblood
 Meghan Zimmerman



Montana Audubon Adopts 5-Year Plan

With so many bird-conservation projects to work on, a big state, and limited resources to work with, Montana Audubon recently adopted a new 5-year plan. This summary highlights the main directions outline in that plan.

To begin, our new mission statement will guide our conservation work on a day-to-day basis: “Montana Audubon promotes appreciation, knowledge and conservation of native birds, other wildlife, and their habitats.”

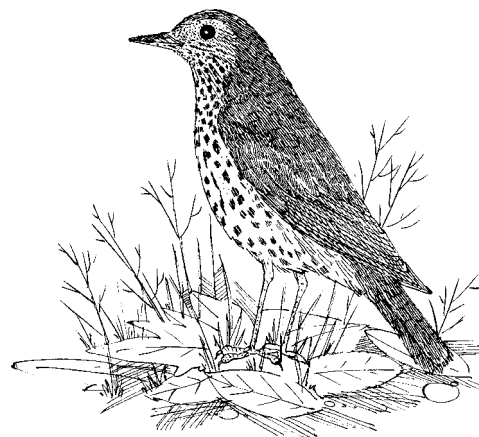
In keeping with our mission, Montana Audubon developed the following 5-year strategic directions to:

- Protect and enhance Montana’s wetland and riparian habitats, and Central and Eastern Montana’s prairie grasslands habitats, through programs that integrate educational, scientific, and public policy strategies.
- Provide leadership in bird monitoring and conservation projects where Montana Audubon can make a unique and significant contribution.
- Strengthen communication and build trustworthy and reciprocal relationships among Montana’s Audubon chapters, Montana Audubon, and National Audubon so that each organization may grow, prosper, and effectively carry out their interconnected missions.
- Increase and sustain Montana Audubon’s funding to a level that ensures its ability to successfully implement programs, hire and retain outstanding administrative and program staff, engage its chapters, and accomplish its goals and mission for many years to come.

- Raise the public profile and name recognition of Montana Audubon through improved branding, marketing and communications, and media strategies.
- Develop Montana Audubon’s human resources by (1) encouraging staff team building and professional development; (2) developing Board commitment, leadership ability, and fundraising skills; and (3) creating opportunities for members and families to participate at the chapter and state level.

Specific goals and objectives outline how we will accomplish our strategic directions annually. We also have outlined a process to regularly monitor and evaluate our progress in implementing the plan. Although strategic planning isn’t for everyone, the Board and staff are excited to have a new 5-year plan in place—a tool that will help us immensely with our conservation work for the birds.

For a complete copy of the strategic plan, contact Montana Audubon’s Helena office.



Bitterroot Project, continued from page 7

The ultimate goal of this project is conservation of habitat. Towards this goal, Montana Audubon staff, Bitterroot National Forest biologists John Ormiston and Dave Lockman, and Region 1 biologist Skip Kowalski completed a preliminary ephemeral Important Bird Area (IBA) concept paper that was sent to Forest Supervisors of the Bitterroot, Lolo, and Flathead National Forests. The concept, based upon recent studies, shows that the value of burned forests for woodpeckers changes over time (being highest 2-5 years after a burn). It also described the need to identify a system of IBAs whose locations change as their suitability for woodpeckers changes through the years. Ultimately, our goal is to work with forest managers to identify new ephemeral IBAs each time a stand-replacement fire occurs across the landscape. The concept of an ephemeral IBA in burned forest is new, and if we are successful, we envision that the identification of ephemeral IBAs in burned forests could be adopted by national forests throughout the West. This pilot project is being used to further the conservation of burned forests.

We want to take this time to thank the following supporters of this project: the **National Forest Foundation, Charles Engelhard Foundation, Annie Maclay Leffingwell Foundation, Weeden Foundation**, and countless other private donors. Through this work, Montana Audubon is showing communities the important role that citizen science can play in wildlife habitat management issues in Montana. For a copy of a report on the Bitterroot Ecological Monitoring Project, contact Director of Education Paul Belanger.

Two New Bird Species for Montana!

The Montana Bird Records Committee (MBRC) has officially accepted two new state birds for Montana, Ross's Gull and Eastern Towhee, bringing Montana's official bird list to a total of 417 species!

Currently, all reports of rare birds must be reviewed and accepted by the MBRC before they are added to Montana's official bird list. "Rare birds," as defined by the MBRC, are identified as birds that have been seen in the state fewer than 20 times. In order to be accepted, rare bird sightings need to have: a specimen, a definitive photograph, or independent documentation by two or more experienced birders

The MBRC held its latest annual meeting in Great Falls in October 2005. Highlights also included acceptance of the

second records for Yellow-throated Vireo and Curlew Sandpiper, the latter report constituting the first fully documented occurrence of the species in the state (photos and multiple observers), and the second and third records for White-tailed Kite. Montana Audubon maintains the records for the MBRC. The committee is composed of **Dan Casey (Chair)**, **Jeff Marks (Secretary)**, **Chuck Carlson**, **John Carlson**, **Bob Eng**, **Harriet Marble**, **Terry McEneaney**, **Fritz Prellwitz**, and **Dan Sullivan**. For more information on all of the records evaluated during the year, as well as a photo gallery of some of Montana's rare birds, visit our website <http://mtaudubon.org/html/science_MBRC7.htm>.

PPL Montana Supports Great Falls Community Naturalist Program

Thanks to the generous support of PPL Montana, Montana Audubon and the Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society (UMBAS) are working together to implement the Classroom FeederWatch curriculum in 3 Great Falls classrooms. Classroom FeederWatch is a program developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to engage students around the U.S. in documenting winter birds commonly found at feeders. Students spend the year learning about local birds—their habits, identification, and proper feeding—and record the birds visiting their school feeders. This data is submitted by the students to Cornell and used by researchers for analysis of winter bird populations.

Ms. Swartz and Ms. Houge's 5th grade students at Lewis & Clark Elementary, and Ms. Rearden's 5th grade gifted education students at West Elementary, are enrolled in the program this year. **Mary Fay** and **Arla Eckert**, both of from UMBAS, are spearheading efforts to organize chapter community naturalists to help with classroom and field trip instruction. Participating teachers also receive bird feeding supplies, the Classroom FeederWatch curriculum, and other bird education resources through their participation.

This program is just one small example of how, with teamwork and volunteers, Audubon can make a difference in the development and education of the next generation of birdwatchers and community leaders. In fact, Ms. Swartz, who participated in the program last year, said that many of her students continued with their birding through the summer.



Chickadee by Katie, Grade 5 Lewis & Clark School, Great Falls



Photograph taken near Frenchtown of a Ross's Gull, one of two birds recently added to Montana's state bird list.

Auction Items Needed

Donations of Silent Auction items are needed for Montana Audubon's Bird Festival/Feather Fest, to be held June 2-5 in Glasgow. In the past, people have donated artwork, pottery, books, bird feeders and houses, and homemade cookies, preserves, etc.

Donations may be delivered to a Montana Audubon office, or brought with you to the bird festival. Thanks in advance for your generous contributions!



Monitoring Rare Black Swifts in Montana



The Black Swift is a poorly known species that is receiving increasing attention from the conservation community. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently listed it as a Species of Conservation Concern, the National Audubon Society places it on their "WatchList," and it is Level II Priority Species in the Montana Bird Conservation Plan. In 2004, Montana Audubon and the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) initiated the first organized survey of nesting Black Swifts in the state.

Black Swifts are almost completely dependent on waterfalls for nesting. In Montana, they had only been documented in the western part of the state. During 2004, 32 potential sites were visited, including 12 sites in Glacier National Park, 3 on or adjacent to the Flathead National Forest, 2 in the Mission Mountains within the Flathead Reservation, 4 in the Bitterroot National Forest, and 11 in the Gallatin National Forest.

The main objective of our visits was to verify the presence or absence of Black Swifts at each site, estimate colony size at occupied sites, and score the suitability of each site using protocols developed in other states. Observers stationed themselves at the nearest safely accessible point that afforded a clear view of the waterfall and then simply watched for incoming swifts. We strived to be present for the last two hours before dusk at each site because Black Swifts typically concentrate their visits to nests at this time.

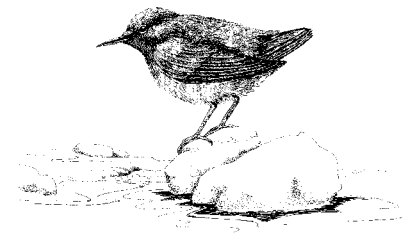
Prior to our work, Black Swifts had been documented nesting at only two sites in Montana. We confirmed that one of these historic sites was still active (South Fork Mission Creek); the other site (Mount Vaught/McPartland Mountain, Glacier National Park) most likely was not. We also found a new site in Glacier National Park (Haystack Creek), and learned of a possible new site in the Bitterroot

Mountains (Gash Creek). Owing to a number of logistical challenges (grizzly bears, nest sites in rugged country, etc.), the surveys were difficult to conduct. Nonetheless, we are encouraged by our results and hope to undertake additional surveys in the coming years.

We learned several things about Black Swifts during our work. First, although certain waterfalls do not appear to have suitable nesting habitat for Black Swifts, these falls may have short areas that are ideal. As an example, the South Fork Mission Creek is a complex of plunges, horsetails, fans, and cascades, and the falls is segmented and tiered. However, swifts were seen at this site. This fact underscores the need to revisit some of the large falls in Glacier Park (e.g., Avalanche Lake complex) that might appear unsuitable from a distance, yet contain small portions of suitable habitat used by swifts. Another important lesson learned is that swifts may arrive very quickly and quietly (or their vocalizations cannot be heard above the noise of the falls), and they will fly directly to their nests without circling the falls. These factors make it a challenge for observers to see these elusive birds.

We thank **Dan Casey, Russell Barabe, Dick Cannings, Hannah Casey, Susannah Casey, Steve Gniadek, John Hughes, Kathy Hughes, Angie Kociolek, Dan Krza, Kate Ciari Regan, and Patrick Toomey** for helping with the surveys.

Our full report is available upon request from Jeff Marks, Montana Audubon, <jeff.marks@umontana.edu> or Dan Casey, American Bird Conservancy, <dcasey@abcbirds.org>.



A Call for Award Nominations

Each year Montana Audubon proudly recognizes select individuals whose efforts to conserve and protect birds and other wildlife go beyond the ordinary. These are people we admire, for they truly do make a difference. This year we are seeking nominations in the following categories:

Lifetime Achievement Award. For an Audubon volunteer who has dedicated extraordinary effort, time and energy to shape the activities and successes of a local Audubon Chapter and/or Montana Audubon.

Educator of the Year. For a person who has shown outstanding achievement in educating others in wildlife conservation.

Conservationist of the Year. For a person who has provided significant wildlife conservation achievement in Montana for the previous year.

Special Achievement Award. For a person who has shown an extraordinary commitment to birds, other wildlife, and the conservation of habitat on a special project or through special activities.

Last year's winners were:

- **Elsie Tuss**, Conservationist of the Year (Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon)
- **Arla Eckert**, Environmental Educator of the Year (Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon)
- **Mary Geis**, Special Achievement Award (Bozeman)
- **Don Stoecker**, Lifetime Achievement Award (Pintler Audubon)

Contact the Montana Audubon for a nomination form. Nominations are due at the office by May 15, 2006. Award winners will be announced at our Bird Festival banquet in Glasgow on June 3.

Conservation Briefs

Eminent Domain / Takings Initiative – Please Don't Sign!

Between April and June a citizen's initiative may circulate that would require local governments and state agencies to pay owners of private property before enforcing government regulations. In order to qualify for the ballot, petition circulators will need to gather 22,308 signatures from registered voters. **PLEASE Don't Sign this Initiative!**

If passed, this initiative would dramatically affect local government subdivision and zoning regulations, floodplain regulations, and conservation district "310" erosion regulations. On the state level, it will impact streamside management rules, rules on clean water and air, mining and reclamation rules, and fish and wildlife regulations affecting game farms, private fish ponds, and game damage. In our work to protect wildlife habitat, Montana Audubon often depends upon government rules and regulations. The real purpose of this initiative is to stop most government regulations. Importantly, the value of private property often increases because of rules and regulations. **Again, please don't sign this initiative!**

Where the Wind Blows

Montana Audubon supports the development of renewable energy sources. However, we have concerns about wind energy projects on a site-specific basis because of the potential impact of wind turbines on birds. The problem with wind farms is straightforward: if farms are located in areas heavily used by birds, such as in a migration flyway or in a nesting area for a species of conservation concern, there is the potential for significant numbers of birds and/or rare birds to be unnecessarily killed each year. Consequently, the Montana Audubon Board adopted a Wind Energy Policy at its January 2006 meeting. That document will guide us as we work on issues affecting the siting of wind farms. We



are currently concerned about a large wind project north of Glasgow that will fragment more than 20,000 acres of grassland habitat. If you are interested in a copy of Montana Audubon's wind policy, please contact the Helena office.

Protecting Streams from New Buildings

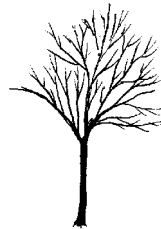
Montana Audubon is working with local governments to establish building setbacks from wetlands and streams. These areas are rare—less than 4% of the state—yet provide the richest bird habitat in Montana, including nesting areas for at least 52% of Montana's breeding bird species. When new homes are built, wildlife habitat deteriorates. Our work is based on the publication *A Planning Guide for Protecting Montana's Wetlands and Riparian Area*. Janet Ellis of Montana Audubon is the primary author of this guide. In the past six months, Janet has presented setback talks in Kalispell, Polson, Hamilton, and Missoula. Currently talks are scheduled at the following locations:

- April 18, Cascade County Planning Board, Cascade County Courthouse, 2 pm.
- April 21, Bitterroot River Inn, Hamilton, 3 pm.
- May 8, Plan Helena Board meeting, Lewis & Clark Library, Helena, 7 pm.
- May 18, American Fisheries Society meeting, Montana State University, Bozeman, 10:25 am.

Join us for one of these presentations!

Russian Olive & Birds

Riparian areas are a small piece of the state, yet they provide Montana's richest wildlife habitat. Specifically, cottonwood forests in Montana provide habitat for at least 150 of Montana's bird species all or part of the year. One of the very real threats to this habitat is invasion by exotic plants, with

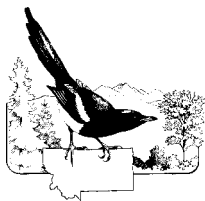


Russian olive near the top of the list. Russian olive, a plant native to southern Europe and western Asia, has been planted in Montana as an ornamental, for windbreaks, erosion control, and wildlife enhancement purposes. This tree is invasive and it is taking over riparian ecosystems, displacing native cottonwoods and willow, on such rivers as the Marias, Missouri, Yellowstone, and Big Horn. If we lose cottonwood habitat along our rivers and streams, an important part of Montana's wildlife habitat will be lost. In order to combat this problem, Montana Audubon is working with others to 1) stop the Montana Department of Resource Conservation (DNRC) from selling Russian olive to landowners through the state nursery; and 2) develop a list of alternative plants that can be used instead of Russian olive. If you are interested in helping in this work, please contact our Helena office.

Mercury in Our Air

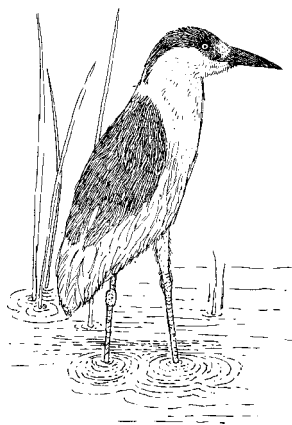
In Montana, coal-fired power plants are responsible for up to 92% of the mercury air emissions released, emitting 982 pounds of mercury into Montana's air in 2001. Currently, 6 new coal-fired plants are proposed for our state. Montana Audubon is supporting efforts to create a state rule that requires coal-fired power plants to control mercury emissions. In addition to being a human health issue, mercury contamination is a wildlife issue: Montana has almost 420,000 acres of lakes and 1,300 miles of streams that are impaired due to mercury contamination; we also have statewide fish advisories for northern pike, lake trout, and walleye for mercury contamination. Mercury also affects birds. In fact, since December, 4 Bald Eagles have been picked up along the Missouri River with mercury poisoning. Although most of our mercury problem today are a result of past mining activity, increased mercury air pollution can exacerbate our current problem.





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Montana Audubon's International Birding Tours

We currently have two international birding tours scheduled in the next year. These trips will allow you to explore new places in the world with experienced Montana guides. Additionally, a portion of your trip fee is tax deductible and supports Montana Audubon's programs. Complete itineraries can be received by calling the Montana Audubon office; they also appear on our website:

<http://www.mtaudubon.org/html/birdwatching_field_trips_and_programs.htm>.

A Special Thanks!

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Liz Claiborne/Art Ortenberg
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LEAW Family Foundation
National Forest Foundation
Charles M. Bair Family Trust
The Charles Engelhard
Foundation
Annie Maclay Leffingwell
Foundation

The Gambia Birding Tour November 3 - 17

Join us for our very popular tour to The Gambia on November 3 – 17, 2006. This will be the fourth trip to The Gambia sponsored by Montana Audubon and led by staff ornithologist, Jeff Marks. Travelers will spend two weeks birding in the tiny West African country's savannas, mangrove swamps, and lush forests along the River Gambia. This trip is to a seldom-visited part of the world, typically yielding more than 300 bird species. At present, we have six slots open.



Egyptian Plover, The Gambia
Photo by Wietze Janse

Panama Birding Tour January 2 - 13, 2007

Join Montana Audubon board member, professor Jack Kirkley, for this 12-day tour of Panama. Serious birders in our group may tally 300-400 bird species, with help from our excellent in-country guide, Guido Berguido of Advantage Panama Tours. We will explore a wide variety of habitats, from coastal marshes to high elevation cloud forests, as well as world famous birding sites such as Barro Colorado Island, the Pipeline Road, and Baru Volcano National Park. Interesting side trips will visit Chagres National Park, Old Panama City, and the Panama Canal at the Miraflores Locks. Tour information can be obtained from Montana Audubon, or by contacting Dr. Jack Kirkley by phone (406-683-7321), mail (c/o UM-Western, 710 South Atlantic, Dillon, MT 59725), or email (j_kirkley@umwestern.edu). A deposit fee of \$1,000 by October 1, 2006 is required to secure your spot on this tour.