

Global Warming

and Montana's Birds

Montana's climate is changing. Left unabated, global warming poses the greatest threat to birds and other wildlife in recorded history. What's at stake for our birds and their habitats?

Unless we slow the pace of climate change, our wildlife faces increasing threats, including rising temperatures, food scarcity, and habitat degradation, with populations of many species projected to decline to dangerously low levels. Birds and other wildlife will face habitat loss from causes such as more droughts, invasive species, and loss of snow. The timing of birds' migration, reproduction, breeding, nesting, and hatching are all highly adapted to match change. Climate change will affect different species differently, bird behavior may no longer be in sync with their food sources and other habitat needs.

In Montana

Projections suggest many of our common species, like Thrasher, Wilson's Warbler, or Bobolink, may no longer call Montana home (see www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/birdguide.html).

Breeding and migrant birds that rely on wetlands are particularly vulnerable to a warmer and dryer climate. These wetlands will have a harder time persisting, as climate change is likely to bring more year-to-year variability in rains. More frequent and severe droughts in eastern Montana are likely to cause prairie pothole wetlands to dry up, jeopardizing millions of waterfowl during breeding season.

Birds (and other critters) that live at high elevations are threatened. As temperatures warm, habitats creep up the mountain.

But where do you go if you already live near the top,—say in high elevation meadows like the **White-tailed Ptarmigan**?



The **Greater-Sage Grouse** is closely tied to our healthy sagebrush-shrubsteppe areas, and these landscapes are expected to be severely lost or degraded as temperature warms. Few options remain for a sage grouse without sage.

Gray Jays rely on the cold fall weather in the mountains to preserve their food caches—caches that are needed to feed their early spring nestlings. Years with warmer temperatures have already been linked to rotting food caches, failed nests, and even the loss of local populations.



Clark's Nutcrackers preferred white-bark pine food source is threatened by pine beetles. Recent warming trends in the mountains have allowed the beetles to

live higher in the mountains. White-bark pines, already diminishing from a non-native fungus, may not provide the seeds upon which these birds rely.

Did You Know?

- The window to avoid catastrophic climate change is fast closing.
- The new Obama administration is offering real solutions.
- Montana Senators remain key to passing sound federal legislation.
- The 2009 State Legislature is considering some great energy proposals.
- You can easily help in bird conservation by taking action! (see back of page)

