

Montana  Bird Advocacy
Fifth Annual Report 2022



Gray Flycatcher nesting habitat at Badger Gulch (Jeff Marks photo)

A Few Thoughts from the Executive Director

Thankfully, 2022 marked the end of the pandemic so far as our activities were concerned. Jeff led birding tours to Ghana in February and Peru in July, and he visited Costa Rica in April to scout a potential new tour. Field work in 2022 involved continued efforts to document breeding by Solitary Sandpipers (*Tringa solitaria*) in Glacier National Park (GNP) and to clarify the status of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (*Poliioptila caerulea*) in Beaverhead County. We also conducted some thoroughly enjoyable searches for Gray Flycatcher (*Empidonax wrightii*) nests in Beaverhead County. That work was so successful we decided to launch a multiyear study of Gray Flycatcher breeding biology in which we will color band adults and obtain complete information on nesting attempts for 15–20 pairs of flycatchers each year.

The Montana Bird Advocacy (MBA) continues to play a major role in increasing knowledge of Montana's birds. Our [Web site](#) provides essential information for Montana bird enthusiasts, including the Web pages for the [Montana Bird Records Committee](#), the [Official State List](#) of Montana's birds (with current English and scientific names listed in proper taxonomic sequence), a list of [record early and late dates](#) for all Montana migrants (derived from an exhaustive review of various sources of information), and a tally of accepted records for all [vagrant birds](#) documented in the state.

This material is available nowhere else!

We are eagerly anticipating the start of the 2023 field season. Please visit our Web site, contact us with any bird-related questions you'd like answered or comments about our activities, and consider making a tax-deductible donation to help support our important work.

Jeff Marks, Executive Director



Jeff (far right) birding in Senegal in January 2023

(Whitney Mortimer photo)

Solitary Sandpipers Nesting in Glacier National Park

For the third straight year, we did not document any breeding attempts by Solitary Sandpipers, and we encountered only a single bird on two occasions. Jim Rogers was the lead searcher and made eight trips to GNP. Each visit is summarized briefly below.



Solitary Sandpiper brood-rearing habitat in Glacier NP (Jeff Marks photo)

19 May—Jim and Sarah Gaulke conducted an unsuccessful search of Unnamed Wetland Nos. 1 and 2 from 15:30 to 17:30 pm during rainy and windy weather.

27 May—Accompanied by Craig Barfoot, Jim again searched Unnamed Wetland Nos. 1 and 2 and found no sandpipers.

3 June—Jim again checked the two unnamed wetlands without success.

20 June— Jim again checked the two unnamed wetlands. As he was backtracking through Unnamed Wetland No. 1, a Solitary Sandpiper immediately responded to his broadcasted call. It flew in

from the northern end of the wetland, passed overhead, and landed about 10 m up in a snag near the southern end of the wetland.

23 June—Jim again searched the two wetlands. He found no sandpipers at Unnamed Wetland No. 2 and one bird at Unnamed Wetland No 1. As on 20 June, he walked the length of the wetland from south to north without observing a sandpiper. But while retracing his route from north to south and playing a recording of the species' call, a Solitary Sandpiper responded near the middle of the wetland. The bird departed the wetland to the east.

6 July—Jim and Steve Gniadek searched both unnamed wetlands but detected no sandpipers.

11 July—Jim searched both unnamed wetlands. No sandpipers were detected.

22 July—Jim and Craig Barfoot searched the two unnamed wetlands for the final time in 2022 and found no sandpipers.



Solitary Sandpiper at Unnamed Wetland No. 2

(Jeff Marks photo)

Blue-gray Gnatcatchers nesting in Beaverhead County

For the second year in a row, we searched for gnatcatchers at the three locations where we had first found them in 2020. Again, we found no birds. Conditions for seeing and hearing gnatcatchers were perfect during our visits from 20-22 June. As was the case in 2021, despite many attempts, no one found gnatcatchers in Cottonwood Canyon in Jefferson County in 2022. On 15 May 2022, Jeff and Nate Kohler visited Bear Canyon to see how gnatcatchers were doing there. In 5 hours of walking the canyon, they encountered at least eight singing males, proving that the apparent disappearance of gnatcatchers in Beaverhead and Jefferson counties did not extend to the core of the species' Montana range in Carbon County. On the basis of two consecutive years of failed attempts to find gnatcatchers in Beaverhead County, we decided to abandon future surveys for the species, at least for now.



Gnatcatcher nesting habitat in Beaverhead Co.

(Jeff Marks photo)



Gnatcatcher nest in Beaverhead Co., July 2020

(Paul Hendricks photo)

Breeding Biology of Gray Flycatchers in Beaverhead County

Having abandoned the search for gnatcatchers, on the afternoon of 22 June Jeff and Paul decided to visit Badger Gulch to look for Gray Flycatcher nests. This is the same location where Jeff had found the first Gray Flycatcher nests known for Montana some 14 years previously. It was a fortuitous decision. In two hours they found three nests, two with a full clutch of 4 eggs and one with 3 small young, before they had to return to Missoula. Less than a week after Jeff returned home from leading a birding tour in Peru in mid-July, he and Paul were back at Badger Gulch. Between 19 and 21 July, they found nine more Gray Flycatcher nests, three in Badger Gulch and six in Sheep Corral Gulch, which runs roughly parallel to Badger Gulch about 1.2 km to the east. Paul located two nests at Badger

Gulch between 6 and 12 August, and Jeff and Paul found one more nest there on 20 August. Thus, we found 15 Gray Flycatcher nests in 2022, nine at Badger Gulch and six at Sheep Corral Gulch.



Gray Flycatcher nest at Badger Gulch, June 2022 (Jeff Marks photo)

The latest nest was especially interesting. It was empty when Paul found it on 20 July and contained a full clutch of 2 eggs on 5 August (clutch size seems to decline as the nesting season progresses). The young probably hatched on 6 or 7 August, and we know for certain they fledged sometime between 0930 and 1630 on 22 August, making this the latest successful Gray Flycatcher nest ever reported according to the scant literature on the species' breeding biology. A search of the literature also revealed that no published study of Gray Flycatchers has involved

banded individuals. Paul and Jeff made the decision to study Gray Flycatchers nesting in Badger Gulch and Sheep Corral Gulch beginning in May 2023. We hope to continue the study for at least five years. Our goal will be to capture and place color bands on both parents at 15-20 territories per year and gather complete information on timing of nesting, nest-site characteristics, productivity, nesting success, site and mate fidelity, and annual survivorship of adults. The study will be significant because the information will be gathered from banded adults. Moreover, the habitat in which Gray Flycatchers nest in Beaverhead County—old-growth sagebrush stands along dry washes—is unique in so far as

published studies go, all of which were of birds nesting in habitats dominated by pinyon-juniper (*Pinus edulis-Juniperus* spp.), pure juniper (*Juniperus* spp.), or ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). Stay tuned for exciting results beginning in 2023!



Adult Gray Flycatcher

(Bob Martinka photo)



Female Gray Flycatcher on nest at Badger Gulch, August 2022

(Paul Hendricks photo)

Montana Bird Records Committee

As Secretary of the Montana Bird Records Committee (MBRC), Jeff is responsible for obtaining rare bird reports from observers. He also coordinates voting on reports and manages the MBRC's [Web site](#), in addition to writing the minutes each year. Jeff also updates Montana's official list of birds, thus providing the most current list, with accepted English and scientific names.

Highlights from 2022 included the first and second fully documented records of Cassin's Sparrow (*Peucaea cassinii*), which were singing males found by Josh Covill at Bowdoin NWR on 7 June and by Eric Rasmussen at the MPG Ranch on 15 June. Also of interest was Montana's fourth record of a Garganey (*Spatula querquedula*), a gorgeous male found by Jan Thom at Billings on 6 May.



Montana's first fully documented Cassin's Sparrow, Bowdoin NWR (Robin Wolcott photo)



The MBRC met in Great Falls on 8 October 2022

(Harriet Marble photo)



Montana's fourth Garganey, Billings

(Jan Thom photo)

Record Early and Late Dates for Montana Migrants

Interest remains high among birders to track record dates for Montana's migrant birds. Accordingly, Jeff has continued to update the list of record early and late dates on the MBA [Web site](#).

Publications

Three of Paul's publications appeared in 2022: one in *Northwestern Naturalist* ([Black-billed Magpies](#) attacking songbirds) and two in *Western Birds* (first nest record of [Lesser Goldfinch](#) in Montana, and [Rock Wren](#) predation on a Sagebrush Lizard). Three of Jeff's publications were accepted in 2022 and will appear in 2023 in *Cotinga* (status of **Stygian Owls** in Peru), *Ornitología Neotropical* (secondary nectar robbing by a **Volcano Hummingbird**), and *Bulletin of the African Bird Club* (weaver predation on frogs). Jeff also published a chapter on **Northern Saw-whet Owls** in *As the Condor Soars: Conserving and Restoring Oregon's Birds*, published by Oregon State University Press. A complete list of Jeff's and Paul's publications can be found on our [Web site](#).



Volcano Hummingbird stealing nectar in Costa Rica

(Josh Covill photo)



Fledgling Stygian Owl at Morro de Calzada, Peru

(Ramiro Yabar photo)

Birding Tours

The MBA leads birding tours to international destinations to help raise funds for our work in Montana and to promote interest in the world's birds. In 2022, Jeff led tours to Ghana in February and to Peru in July. Trip reports are available on our [Web site](#). In 2023, Jeff will lead tours to Senegal in January and to the Amazon in Peru in July.

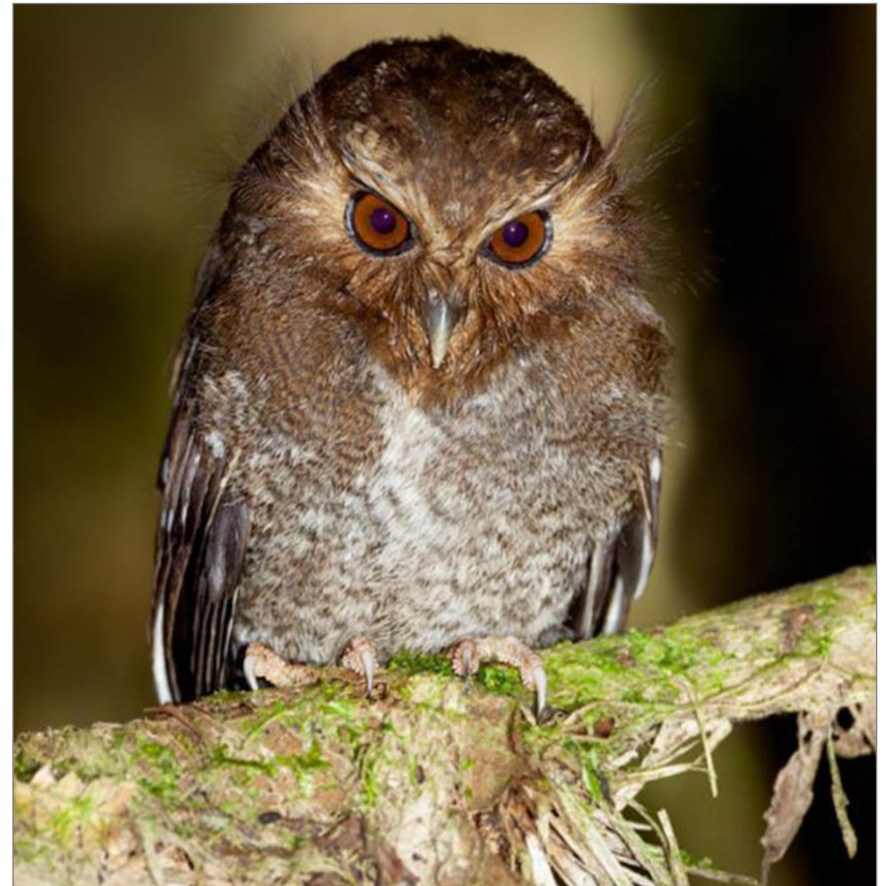
Other Outreach Activities

Jeff and Paul continue to participate in various outreach and professional activities, including eBird review and manuscript review for professional journals. In 2022, Jeff reviewed manuscripts for *Bird Conservation International*, *Ornitología Neotropical*, *Ornithology Research*, and *Western Birds* and also reviewed the revised species account for Northern Pygmy-Owl for *Birds of the World*. Paul reviewed manuscripts for *Ornithological Science*, *Northwestern Naturalist*, and *Western Birds*.

Thank You!

We could not function without our supporters and field volunteers. First, we thank **Cynthia Hudson & Robert Zirl**, **Barbara Marks**, **Susie Maclin**, **Ginny Fay**, **Harriet Marble**, and **Jon Swenson** for their unrestricted donations and **Rose Leach**, **Ron Martin**, **Caryn Throop**, **Peggy Harger-Allen**, **Jenn Megyesi**, and **Cay Ogden** for joining one or more birding tours. We are grateful to **Nate Kohler** and **Steve Sherman** for helping us search for Gray Flycatchers and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers in Beaverhead County; and **Jim Rogers**, **Craig Barfoot**, **Sarah Gaulke**, and **Steve Gniadek** for help searching for nesting

Solitary Sandpipers in Glacier National Park. We also thank **Tara Carolin**, **Lisa Bate**, and **Dan Seifert** for making possible our work in Glacier National Park, and **Whitney Mortimer**, **Susannah Casey**, **Bob Martinka**, **Harriet Marble**, **Robin Wolcott**, **Jan Thom**, **Josh Covill**, **Ramiro Yabar**, **Dubi Shapiro**, **Jenn Megyesi**, and **Baldo Gevara** for contributing photographs. Finally, we thank **Matthew Nordhagen** for his continued stellar work on our Web site and annual reports.



Long-whiskered Owlet in Peru

(Dubi Shapiro photo)



Birding at Owllet Lodge, Peru

(Jeff Marks photo)



Rose Leach at Mole NP, Ghana

(Jeff Marks photo)



Group shot in NW Peru

(Baldo Gevara photo)



Ron Martin at Mole NP, Ghana

(Jeff Marks photo)



MBA board meeting at Somers

(Susannah Casey photo)



Bush Elephant at Mole National Park, Ghana

(Jeff Marks photo)



Great Blue Turaco in Ghana

(Dubi Shapiro photo)



Wire-crested Thorntail in Peru

(Jenn Megyesi photo)