

BIRD DISTRIBUTION IN MONTANA: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

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Montana's diverse landscapes provide habitat to a wide assortment of birds. Climate, ecology, and human activity can influence landscape changes and patterns of bird distributions across the state. Every year, birdwatchers, biologists, and landowners document the occurrence of common and rare bird species throughout Montana. The Montana Bird Distribution program promotes stewardship of birds and their habitats by using information gathered by Montana's citizens to track the distribution and seasonal occurrence of the 409 bird species documented in the state. Over 30 new species have been documented in the state of Montana since 1980 through this program. As of 2003, 29 species appeared to be increasing their distribution across the state, e.g., tundra swans, several flycatcher species, and 27 species appeared to be decreasing their distribution, e.g., stilt sandpipers, 2 species of rosy-finch. The Montana Bird Distribution partnership consists of Montana Audubon, Montana Bird Records Committee, Montana Natural Heritage Program, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The Partnership collects observations by professional and nonprofessionals, maintains a high-quality database of observations, and disseminates information via a website and *P.D. Skaar's Montana Bird Distribution* book series. Publication of the next book edition is planned for 2010 and observations are due by 31 December 2009 for inclusion in this edition. Here we present examples from the previous edition and a tutorial on *Tracker*, the web-based system for contributing data points.