

***Brother Can You Sparrow Dime? Birdathon Trip Report***  
**May 29-30, 2015**

This year our Birdathon began when Don and Andrea Stierle and Brian went out to scout the route up Grizzly Gulch/Lump Gulch for the upcoming Montana Bird Festival fieldtrip. They counted 34 species, and among the “early birds” were Red crossbills, Western tanagers, and MacGillivray’s warblers. Our foray into the Helena Valley was rewarded with another 35 species. We added Merlin, Belted Kingfisher, and a Wood duck hen with chicks at Spring Meadow State Park. As we were leaving the Helena Regulating Reservoir we stopped to watch a family of six Red foxes enjoying the late evening sun.

We managed to leave Helena by 5:15 am. on Sunday so we could get to Benton Lake NWR for the morning rush. All along the road heading to the refuge we saw Willets, Upland sandpipers, Marbled godwits, Long-billed curlews, and a pair of Chestnut-collared longspurs. Another wonderful sight at Benton Lake was an adult Great-horned owl bringing in a fresh kill for its three big owlets in a tree outside a residence for the refuge managers. We enjoyed watching 40 or more American avocets wading in a small portion of a pond. We also saw the avocet hen with three fuzzy chicks. Later we viewed a couple of male Sage grouse practicing their moves for next year’s breeding season. Our only Black-crowned night heron was sitting in a patch of open ground at Freezeout Lake Refuge. We also counted a flock of Franklin’s gulls flying in as we headed south through Augusta to explore Little Prickly Pear Canyon. Beautiful clouds came and went overhead as the temperature rose into the high 70s as we scoped the beautiful green foothills and fields along the Rocky Mountain Front. In the canyon we counted Lincoln’s sparrow, a Red-naped sapsucker, and a beautiful Lazuli bunting and an American redstart. We concluded our Birdathon along Duffy Lane at the north end of the Helena Valley where Jo spotted a pair of elusive Bobolinks, which face enormous threats in their winter habitat in Mexico and South America. With the last minute Bobolinks we counted 120 species, a repeat of last year’s effort and a respectable number for a bunch of old coots.

Our primary goal each year is to help Audubon raise money to protect critical bird habitat in the Helena area, and there are thousands of birders across the country doing the very same thing to assist both resident and migrant birds. Of course by working to save and enhance bird habitat, we are making our own communities better places to live. So thank you for your tax deductible contribution. Please make your check to Last Chance Audubon and send it to Jo Lace, 210 S. California, Helena, MT. 59601. Thank you very much!

