

# Audubon festival deemed a 'soaring success'

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Over 300 people participated in this year's Audubon Festival hosted June 7 - 9 at the Yogo Inn. After days of non-stop rain and flooding, the skies turned blue and the sun made everything look fresh and clean. Lewistown was awash in at least a dozen different shades of green with splashes of brightly colored flowers everywhere, and the birds began to sing.

"The feedback we have gotten from festival attendees has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic!" said Norane Freistadt, Montana Audubon development director. Norane also complimented the variety and quantity of the 34 field trips offered as well as the knowledge of the field trip leaders. Field trip leaders came from the Lewistown Birding Bunch and the City of Lewistown staff as well as area government agencies such as the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, Lewistown and Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Bureau of Land Management and the Lewistown office of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Norane added, "People loved coming to the central part of the state - Lewistown and the surrounding areas -- and the weather's cooperation certainly helped make the weekend a huge success."

Not only did this year's festival draw people from throughout the state of Montana but it also had participants coming California, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Texas, Wisconsin, Vermont, Virginia and even Canada.

The kickoff event Friday evening was an ice cream social at Frank Day Park, complete with ice cream and amazing goodies from Brooks Market and coffee brewed to perfection by Rising Trout. Fiddle music was provided by local musician Kathryn Holman, who also did a repeat performance at the Saturday evening barbeque at the Yogo Inn. Student artists whose bird banner art work was used for the Audubon festival brochure, t-shirts, website and tote bags were introduced and honored.

Throughout the weekend the Yogo Inn staff kept the group fed and happy. Saturday and Sunday mornings were full of field trips to area birding hot spots. Saturday afternoon included talks about birds and plants and of course a little politics concerning birds and plants.

Not everyone attending the festival spent the entire time with the festival activities. Downtown Lewistown and the Saturday Art Stomp were also quite a draw for festival participants. Several festival participants came a day early and stayed an extra day after the festival just to explore Lewistown and surrounding communities. Many comments were overheard about how friendly and welcoming the community, and especially the Yogo Inn staff, had been to this large group of "birding nerds."

One of the final comments overheard at the festival was, "I think we should have the Audubon Festival in Lewistown every year."



Birders visiting Central Montana for the statewide Audubon conference last weekend enjoy a trip on the Upper Missouri River courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management.

Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management