

# Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program

## Montana

### Partnership Receives a \$10,120 Conservation Grant.

On May 3, 2004, as authorized under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Act), Steve Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, acting on behalf of Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, approved \$10,120 in funding for the Conservation of Cottonwood Gallery Forest Birds in Southeastern Montana Project. This project is located in Custer, Powder River, and Rosebud Counties. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop initiatives in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean to conserve neotropical migratory birds and their habitats. Certain activities defined by the Act are eligible for funding, and partnerships must match grant requests 3:1. Contributions from U.S. federal partners do not qualify as match.

Cottonwood gallery forests cover roughly 0.5 percent of Montana's land area but are used by approximately 60 percent of the bird species that breed in the State. This naturally scarce habitat also supports many other bird species during migration. Interruption of natural flooding regimes via dams, overgrazing, logging, and agricultural and urban development threaten cottonwood gallery forests.

To date, 26 sites are designated Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Montana, with the majority occurring on publicly owned lands already receiving some level of protection. Although approximately 65 percent of the land in Montana is privately owned, few private lands have been surveyed for their bird species

composition—the first step towards identifying potential sites for IBA nomination. Therefore, project partners at Montana Audubon will train and assist teams of citizen scientists in systematically inventorying bird species on privately owned tracts of riparian cottonwood forest, with landowners' permission.

From late May to late July 2004 and 2005, project crews will record all bird species seen and heard on these tracts, located along the Tongue and Powder Rivers in southeastern Montana. They also will estimate the number of breeding pairs present for a suite of bird species considered by Partners in Flight and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be a conservation priority for Montana and for Bird Conservation Region 17 (Badlands and Prairies).

Project activities will not only provide critical data needed to make IBA nominations, but will also create opportunities in which to educate local participants and landowners about the importance of this unique habitat to migratory birds. Montana Audubon is contributing \$30,400 to advance the goals of this educational research project, located in the Northern Short Grasslands Ecoregion.



*Song Sparrow*

Lee Karney/USFWS

For more information, contact Jeffrey Marks, Montana Audubon, (406) 443-3949, [jeff.marks@umontana.edu](mailto:jeff.marks@umontana.edu), or Doug Ryan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (703) 358-1784, [douglas\\_ryan@fws.gov](mailto:douglas_ryan@fws.gov).

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
**Division of Bird Habitat Conservation**  
<http://birdhabitat.fws.gov>

May 2004

