Idaho Watchable Wildlife

FALL 2022

Windows to Wildlife

Your support at work in Idaho's landscapes

Western grebe chicks are brooded on the backs of their parents for a period of two to four weeks after hatching.

Oh Good Grebe!

by Betsy Wagner*, Senior Wildlife Technician
McCall Subregion, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

I was walking through a muddy lake shore edge with grass taller than me, barely able to see three feet in ahead when I heard an intermittent loud sucking noise like someone smacking their lips, but more distorted. I stopped and listened closer for a moment and didn't hear it so continued. In another minute, I heard it again and stopped, this time listening intently to figure out what it was...a frog, a duck, or something larger that could come crashing through the grass at any moment? After a couple more periods of stopping and listening, it suddenly got louder, more frequent, and closer by the second. I braced for impact. It stopped about 10 feet from me and as I peered through a part in the grass, I saw a big eye staring back at me. "Oh, good grief!" (or maybe good grebe in this case). I sighed in relief once I realized what it was. Luckily it wasn't a lion, a moose, or a bear (the usual suspects while conducting wildlife research in the field), just a cow. A whole herd of cows had found a weak spot in the fence and were traipsing around in one of the areas on Lake Cascade that hosts the largest Western and Clark's grebe nesting colonies in the state of Idaho.

Each year the Idaho Department of Fish and Game conducts two visual surveys by boat on Lake Cascade to count the number of Western and Clark's grebes, two species of grebes that are nearly identical in appearance, and both of which are on Idaho's list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Our first survey is in June after the migrating birds have arrived and started their elaborate courtship displays, but before a large portion of them disappear into the "weeds" to start nesting as a colony. The second survey is conducted later in the summer after chicks have hatched, but before they get too big to easily distinguish from the adults.

Grebes nest in emergent vegetation in protected areas near the edge of open water, anchoring mounds of vegetation and mud to create a small nest platform where

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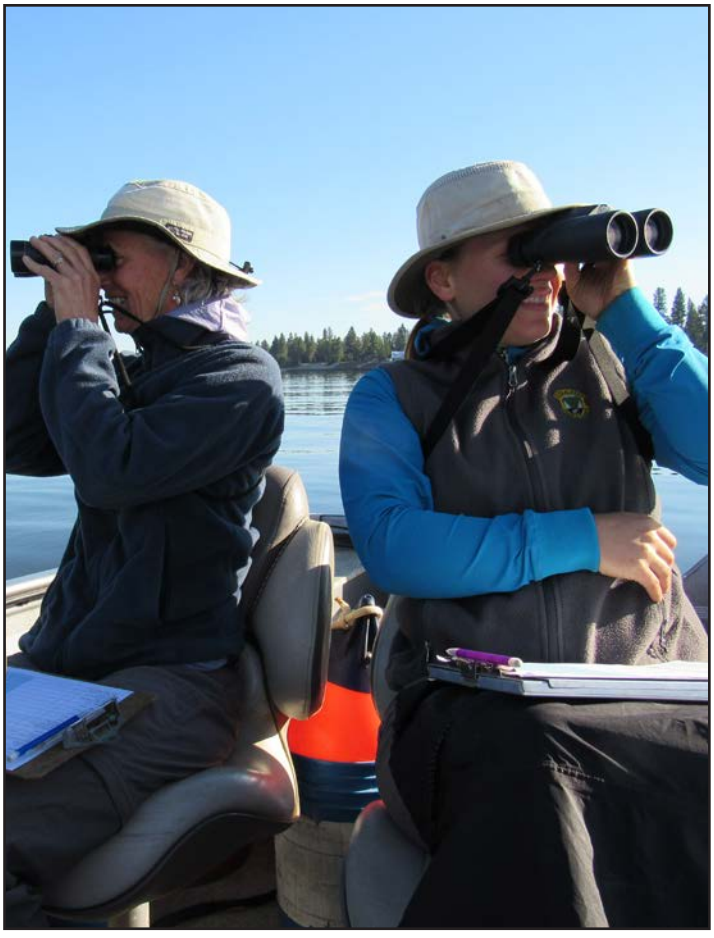
Top: An abandoned grebe nest. **Bottom:** Visual surveys of grebes are conducted twice during the summer at Lake Cascade. **Photos:** IDFG



they lay 2-4 eggs. After about 24 days of incubation, young chicks hatch and quickly leave the nest on the back of their parent to be raised in the open water. Pretty quickly, those little chicks grow big enough to starting swimming and diving on their own.

Unfortunately, the grebes at Lake Cascade have not had much nesting success in recent years, likely due to factors like unstable water levels during incubation, major wind events with large waves that flood nests, and nest abandonment from getting flushed by predators. In the last 5 years, we have counted 3000-5000 adult grebes with only 0-100 chicks each year, with most years having less than 30 chicks. Graduate students at the University of Idaho have had good success using drones to monitor grebe nesting colonies at Lake Cascade the last 5 years and they have been able to share their results with us. It has been helpful to know a little more about the location and timing of nest initiation, hatching dates, and overall nest fate. Those studies wrapped up in 2021, so this summer I was left without my eye in the sky and with a lot of questions about what happened to all the grebe chicks!

So why was I squishing around in the mud getting stalked by cows? After not finding any chicks during our visual surveys this summer, I decided to make sure the grebes at least tried to nest and maybe determine if they had success with a second later nest attempt. To do this, I strategically walked through one of the main nesting areas after water levels had receded and marked nests with a GPS, keeping count of the number of empty nests versus nests with one or more eggs left behind unhatched. This year I documented approximately 500 nests, and I was stunned by the number of nests with not just one, but two or three eggs left behind, signifying a major nest abandonment by most of the grebes. In addition, I found about 30 nests that looked like the grebes attempted to nest a second time in a patch of semi-submerged vegetation and brush that would still have been surrounded by water as it slowly receded. That little bit of water around a nest is very important as grebes need to swim to their nest. Grebe legs are positioned further back on their body, making them agile in the water as they dive for food, but very awkward and susceptible on land. Unfortunately, those 30 nests had a lot of unhatched eggs too, and our results from our visual encounter surveys by boat were confirmed. Another year with no chicks.

While these results are disappointing, we are encouraged that the adult population at Lake Cascade is holding steady for now. We will continue to monitor the adult and chick population on Lake Cascade as well as nesting success, either by post season nest counts or using drones to monitor the nesting colony. We are hopeful that the data we collect will inform future decisions regarding management of water levels, water quality, and recreation on Lake Cascade to benefit Western and Clark's grebes.

ATTENTION! Boaters and Anglers

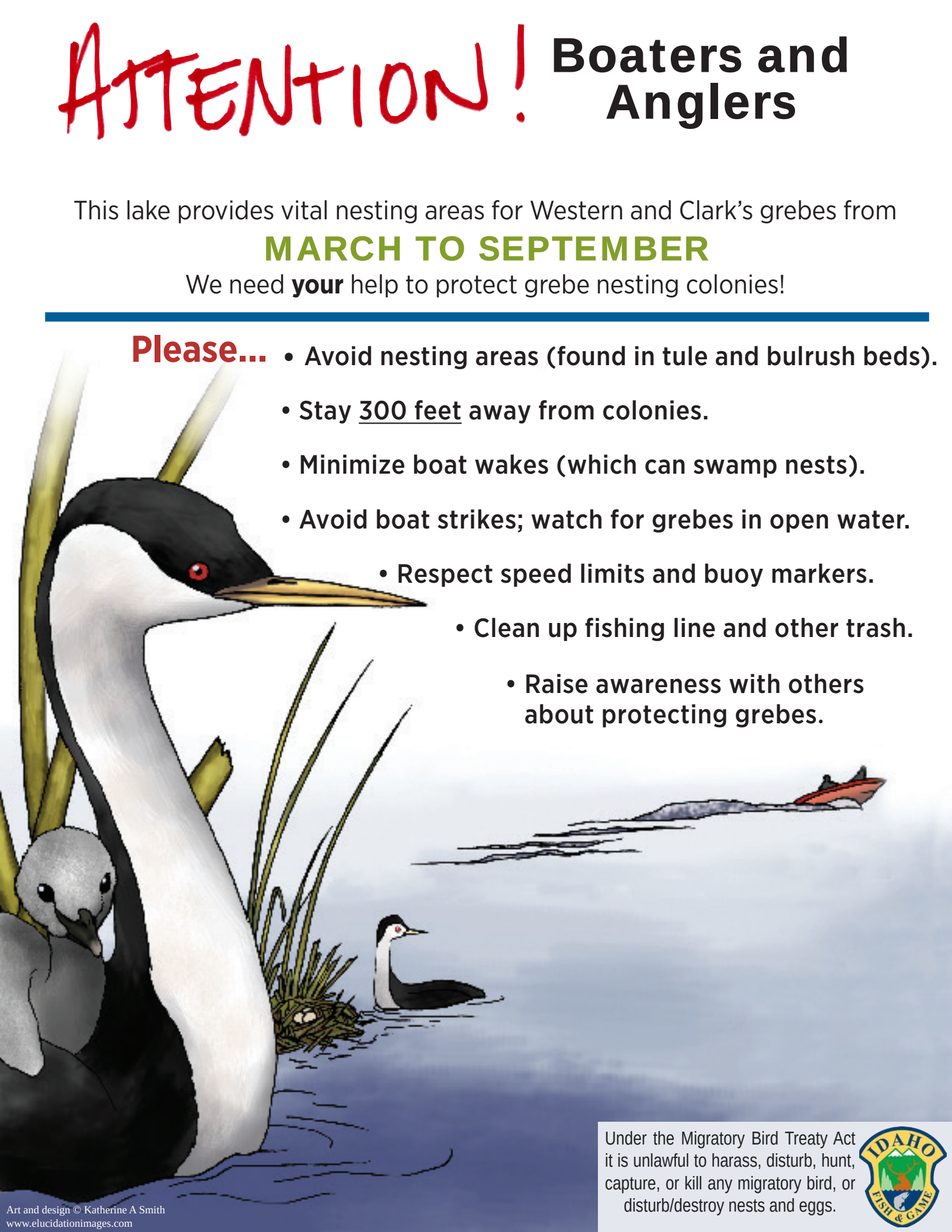
This lake provides vital nesting areas for Western and Clark's grebes from

MARCH TO SEPTEMBER

We need **your** help to protect grebe nesting colonies!

Please...

- Avoid nesting areas (found in tule and bulrush beds).
- Stay 300 feet away from colonies.
- Minimize boat wakes (which can swamp nests).
- Avoid boat strikes; watch for grebes in open water.
- Respect speed limits and buoy markers.
- Clean up fishing line and other trash.
- Raise awareness with others about protecting grebes.



Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act it is unlawful to harass, disturb, hunt, capture, or kill any migratory bird, or disturb/destroy nests and eggs.

IDAHO FISH & GAME

On The Idaho Birding Trail

Boise River Wildlife Management Area

(208) 465-8465
idfg.idaho.gov/wma/boise-river

eBird ebird.org/hotspot/L1131617

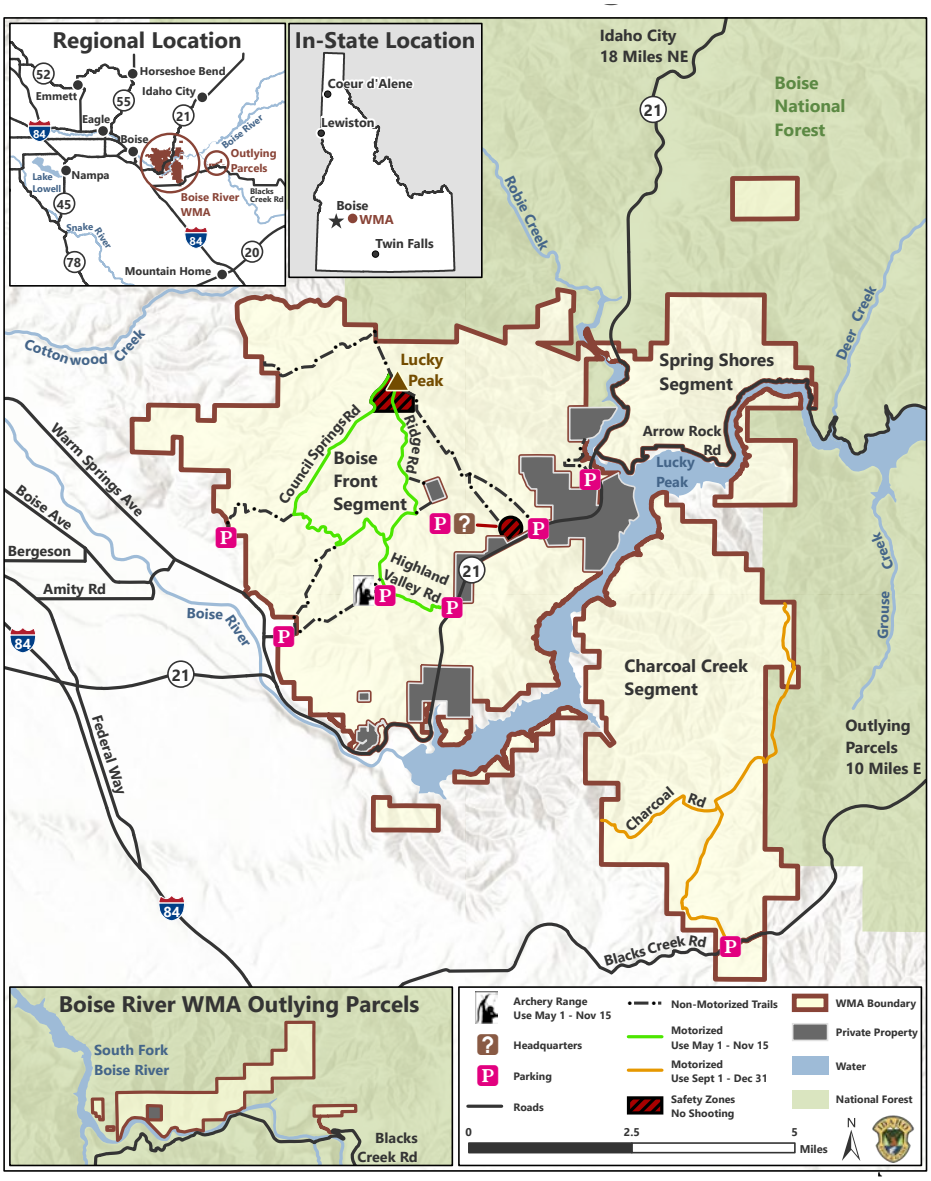
LAT/LONG: 43.5748436,-116.022469

DIRECTIONS: *From the intersection of ID 21/I-84, take ID21 N; go ~4 mi past the top of Lucky Peak Dam, passing The Hilltop Station; ~0.5 mi after the Cafe the WMA parking area will be on the L.*

Boise River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is situated in the foothills of the Boise Mountains and along Lucky Peak and Arrowrock Reservoirs in the Boise River drainage. This 36,000-acre WMA supports over 300 species of wildlife, including at least 215 species of birds. During the winter, the WMA is home to the largest mule deer herd in Idaho.

Look for Golden Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, and Turkey Vultures. Breeding birds at the WMA include Dusky Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Yellow-breasted Chat, Bullock's Oriole, and Lazuli Bunting. During fall migration, keep your eyes to the skies and look for migrating raptors such as Merlin, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, and Peregrine Falcon. Sagebrush favorites like Western Meadowlark and White-crowned Sparrow can be seen.

The WMA also supports populations of upland game birds including Chukar, Gray Partridge, California Quail, Dusky Grouse, Ruffed Grouse, and Mourning Doves.

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Spotlight Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Silver-haired Bat

Silver-haired bats (*Lasionycteris noctivagans*) are one of 14 species of bats found in Idaho. Like humans, bats are mammals. They are warm-blooded, covered in hair, have live young, and nurse their young (called pups). Unlike humans, bats have wings (of skin), which allow them to fly.

Silver-haired bat. **Photo:** Jose G. Martinez-Fonseca

Description
Silver-haired bats are a medium-sized bat with blackish, large rounded ears and very dark fur tipped with silver or white. This coloring gives the bat an icy appearance.

Range and Habitat
Silver-haired bats are one of the most common bats in the United States. Found as far north as Canada and Alaska and as far south as northern Mexico. In Idaho, they occur throughout the state in a variety of habitats.

Diet and Habits
Like most bats, silver-haired bats use echolocation as a form of sonar to hunt and find food as well as detect obstacles. Their diet consists of a variety of insects, such as flies, midges, moths, mosquitos, and beetles. They seem to prefer mostly small, soft-bodied insects, like moths.

Silver-haired bats are most commonly found in forests near bodies of water. While they are known as a tree-roosting species, they can also be found in a variety of other habitats including sagebrush-steppe. Some populations migrate long distances, while others are short-distance migrants, and some hibernate. Silver-haired bats mate primarily in the fall and female bats store the sperm until spring, then gestation will start. After about 50-60 days, the females give live birth to typically two pups.

Conservation and Importance
The silver-haired bat population size is unknown in Idaho. They are classified as a species of greatest conservation need in the Idaho State Wildlife Action Plan. Wind energy is the biggest problem for silver-haired bats as they are one of the most common bat species killed by turbines at wind energy facilities. To more accurately assess their conservation status, IDFG is currently conducting research to better understand their distribution and abundance in the state.

Silver-haired bats, like most other bats, are an important part of our ecosystem.

- Most bats, including those that live in Idaho, eat large amounts of insects, including those annoying mosquitoes. The Pallid bat will even eat scorpions and other larger invertebrates.
- Bats provide free pest control by consuming the insects that damage crops, saving US farmers over three billion dollars annually.

DID YOU KNOW?

Silver-haired bats occasionally fly during the day.
They seek out sunny locations (like a side of a building) to sunbathe!

Viewing Bats
Bats are primarily nocturnal so they are primarily active at night. This gives them a unique niche as nocturnal insect eaters. Riparian areas, wetlands, beaver ponds, and other water sources often have an abundance of insects so these areas are important foraging areas for bats. They also visit these areas to drink water, which is usually done in flight. This also makes good places to potentially view bats as they eat and drink. Harriman State Park in eastern Idaho is a great place to view bats during a summer's evening.

How to Help
Here are some things you can do keep our environment healthy and bat-friendly:

- When cutting down trees, leave large snags (standing dead trees) with loose bark because these provide valuable roosting sites.
- Consider having a bat house so they'll have a safe place to live – and you'll have fewer mosquitoes!
- Keep cats indoors.

Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Tiny Transmitters Tracking Idaho's Monarchs

by David Dressel*, Wildlife Diversity Biologist
Southeast Region, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

It is common practice for biologists to catch all kinds of big game critters and attach radio collars to them. This type of data collection helps biologists learn important information from population estimates, survival, and movement data. However, did you know you can now put radio transmitters on insects? Biologists with Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) have recently launched a pilot project to attach nanopins to monarchs (*Danaus plexippus*) in southeast Idaho.

Sterling Wildlife Management Area, located in southeast Idaho, has one of over 900 towers in 31 countries set up to detect small nanotags and their unique signals worn by birds, bats, and insects previously tagged as they fly through an area. **PHOTO**: IDFG

Every year monarchs are counted on their overwintering sites in California and Mexico. These counts have revealed a drastic decrease in monarchs and have caused the monarch to be warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Monarchs undertake one of the most iconic and difficult migrations of any animal in the wildlife kingdom. Specifically, monarchs that breed during the summer in Idaho must travel to the coast of California, or possibly to Mexico, to spend the winter.

To better understand this incredible migration biologists with IDFG are using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System and very small nanopin transmitters to attempt to track the migration routes of monarchs. A series of Motus towers have been built by multiple agencies, nonprofit groups, and individuals across several western states. When a monarch with an attached nanopin flies by one of these towers, the date and time are recorded. This information is transmitted to a central database. This simple, yet complex system of towers and tags/pins can track the movements of small migratory species like the monarch.

PHOTO: IDFG

How to Attach Transmitters to Monarchs

In southeast Idaho, there are a few locations with abundant milkweed and nectar producing plants that can support the breeding activities of monarchs. Several generations of monarchs are born in the summer months in Idaho, however, biologists wanted to target those individuals that will make the long multi-state journey to their overwintering grounds in California, or possibly Mexico. Timing was everything! The last generation of monarchs born in southeast Idaho typically occur around early September and are larger than previous generations. These are the individuals that will make the migration, which are the individuals we needed to tag. During September 2022, monarchs were caught by using a simple net and some talented stalking capabilities by biologists. And yes, in the wind monarchs can fly fast and put on impressive evasive maneuvers to avoid capture. However, with some persistence, biologists were able to capture 15

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System uses nanotags as light as 0.2 grams to track small birds and insects. The nanotag is a surveillance system that tracks the movement of the monarch, weighs about as little as a penny, and can transmit a signal to a tower that is about 15 miles away! **PHOTO**: IDFG

monarchs in southeast Idaho and affix nanopins to them. Once captured, biologists work quickly and delicately to glue these miniature nanopins to the abdomen of monarchs. The whole "procedure" takes roughly 3-4 minutes and the monarch is released. Most monarchs can fly immediately, however, some need their rest time on a nearby roost tree before they take off.

With the monarchs now making their migration it is our hope that these nanopins attached to these 15 monarchs will help relay information to biologists about migration routes, timing, and crucial roosting habitat along their journey. Armed with this information we can make important steps in not only understanding the monarch migration but enhancing or protecting those areas that monarchs utilize to reach their overwintering sites.

PHOTO: IDFG

LEAVES ARE NOT LITTER

THEY 'RE FOOD AND SHELTER FOR
BUTTERFLIES, BEETLES, BEES, MOTHS, AND MORE.
TELL FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS TO JUST

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Thank You for Your Support!

Thank you to those who made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or let us know of a tax check-off donation between July 1 — September 30, 2022.

Your contribution provides important funding for wildlife and habitat conservation in Idaho.

Long-eared myotis
PHOTO BY: Randy Babb

Windows to Wildlife

Wildlife Diversity Program
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