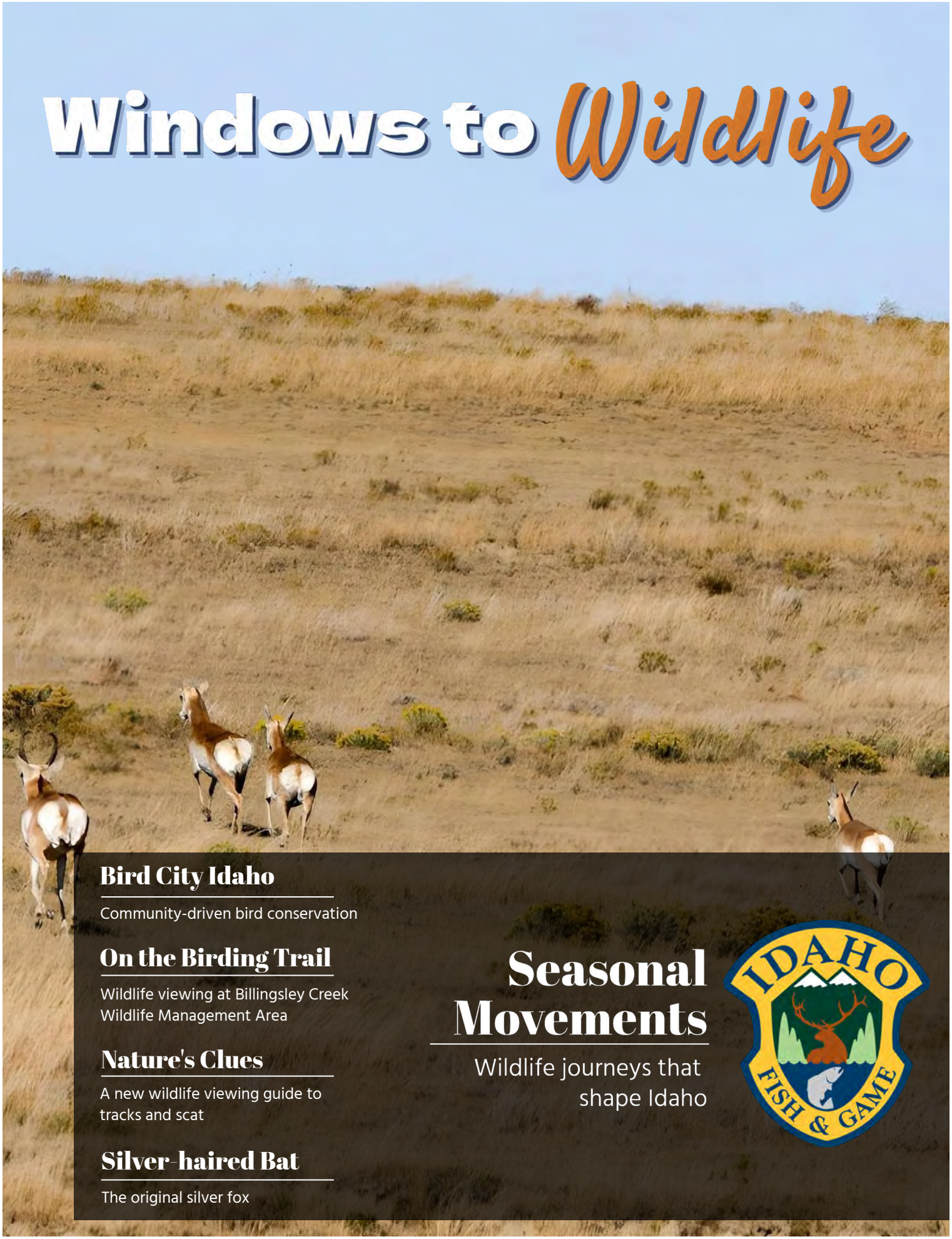
Windows to Wildlife



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The original silver fox

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(Cover): Pronghorn on the move. PHOTO: new regime image/Shutterstock.com
(Right): Great Blue Heron tracks. PHOTO: CC-BY Amanda Janusz/iNaturalist.com



Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Nature's Seasonal Movements

Wildlife Journeys that Shape Idaho

Swainson's Hawk. PHOTO: Eden Ravecca

The Three Journeys Worth Knowing



Every year, millions of animals leave one place and travel to another. They don't use maps or GPS. Yet many follow the same route, on almost the same schedule, year after year. Some travel hundreds of miles. Some travel thousands. They cross mountain ranges, dams, highways, and water along the way. Idaho sits at a crossroads of mountains, deserts, and rivers. Because of that, it's home some of the most impressive animal migrations in North America.

Migration is a kind of bet. An animal spends energy and takes on risk by traveling, betting that life will be better somewhere else once conditions change. Animals migrate for a few main reasons:

- **Food:** As seasons change, food appears, disappears, or gets buried under snow. Moving to follow food, like new plant growth in spring or ripening seeds in fall, can matter more than staying in one place and waiting out a hard season.
- **Snow and cold:** Many Idaho animals aren't really migrating to escape the cold itself. They're escaping deep snow that buries the food they need to survive winter.
- **Reproduction:** Some animals travel to reach the exact place where they were born, because that spot gives their own offspring the best chance to survive.
- **Predators:** Moving to a new area can also mean escaping predators or escaping open terrain where predators have an easier time finding prey.

In the last twenty years, GPS collars, satellite tags, and radio trackers have changed how much we know about migration. Scientists can now follow individual animals step by step, in a way that wasn't possible before. Idaho has been part of that research. Three examples show just how different migration can look: one happens on land, one happens up a river, and one happens across an entire hemisphere.

Pronghorn does and fawns. PHOTO: Julia Clup/Shutterstock.com

On land: the Pronghorn of the Pioneer Mountains
Pronghorn are North America's fastest land animals, but in Idaho their real talent is endurance. In 2008, researchers put GPS collars on ten female pronghorn that spend their summers in the Pioneer Mountains, then tracked them for a year. To everyone's surprise, most of them traveled to the Little Lost River and Birch Creek area of eastern Idaho, a migration route no one had known about.

The trip runs about 80 miles each way between summer and winter range, a 160-mile round trip that makes it one of the longer land migrations in the Lower 48. It's often dangerous. The route crosses lava fields, rolling foothills, and highways, and in one stretch it narrows to a bottleneck about 200 yards wide, boxed in by mountains, fences, a highway, and jagged lava. Deep snow is the reason for the trip. Moving lets Pronghorn find good summer forage and avoid the worst of winter. Once they arrive, herds from across the region gather on the winter range, forming Idaho's largest Pronghorn herd at around 1,000 animals.

Up a river: the Sockeye of Redfish Lake
Snake River Sockeye Salmon undertake one of Idaho's most remarkable migrations. Young fish travel about 900 miles from the Sawtooth Valley to the Pacific Ocean, then return as adults, climbing more than 6,200 feet in elevation to reach Redfish Lake. Their transformation from silvery blue to bright red is one of the species' signature traits, and no other Sockeye population migrates as far or to such high elevations.

Changes in the migration corridor over recent decades have contributed to challenges for the species, leading to its endangered listing in 1991. A collaborative conservation effort, including a long-running captive breeding program, helped prevent extinction and continues to support recovery. Adult returns since 2009 have varied widely, from fewer than 100 fish in difficult years to more than 1,500 in strong ones, reflecting both ongoing challenges and the progress made through sustained conservation partnerships.

Across a hemisphere: the Swainson's Hawk
Idaho's summers are short for a bird that spends most of its life somewhere else. Swainson's Hawks nest across the Snake River Plain and much of the West, then leave in late summer for Argentina. The migration is roughly 12,000-14,000 miles roundtrip, one of the longest migrations of any North American raptor.

Satellite tags revealed this route in detail. In the 1990s, Idaho researchers tagged 46 adult hawks across seven US states and two Canadian provinces. The birds took different routes south before funneling together along Mexico's east coast into a single corridor to central Argentina, averaging about 116 miles a day over roughly 57 days. The journey's end brings its own dangers. In 1994, a researcher tracked a tagged hawk to Argentina and found flocks of up to 4,000 hawks, with more than 700 dead from pesticides. An Idaho bird's safety can depend on farms thousands of miles away.

Connected Journeys
Each of these animals follows a migration route shaped by Idaho's diverse landscapes. From Pronghorn moving through narrow corridors across lava flows and highways, to Sockeye navigating a long river system, and to Swainson's Hawks crossing an entire continent, their journeys depend on connected habitats that remain passable and healthy from end to end.





(top) Sockeye Salmon. PHOTO: USFWS; (bottom) Swainson's Hawk. PHOTO: Eden Raveccaa



Purple Martin sculpture outside a Bird City Maryland community. PHOTO: Town of La Plata

Bird City Idaho: A New Way for Communities to Support Wildlife



Idaho has launched **Bird City Idaho**, a new program designed to help communities make simple, meaningful changes that benefit birds, pollinators, and the natural spaces we all enjoy. The idea behind the program is straightforward: when communities take small steps to improve habitat, reduce threats, and engage people in nature, birds and people both thrive.

Many Idaho communities are already doing great work in these areas, and Bird City Idaho provides a way to recognize those accomplishments and build on them. The program is flexible, community-driven, and designed to meet people where they are. No town is too small to participate. Rural communities, cities, neighborhoods, and local groups are all encouraged to get involved.

Bird City Idaho is partner-driven. Communities often bring together local governments, conservation organizations, schools, clubs, and volunteers to submit an application and carry out Bird City projects. This collaborative approach not only strengthens the work, but it also builds long-term relationships that help communities sustain their successes.

Bird City Idaho also joins a growing national movement of successful statewide bird-friendly initiatives. Bird City Colorado supports towns and cities in restoring native landscapes, installing bird-safe building features, and developing popular community birding events. Bird City Oregon helps communities create pollinator-friendly gardens, adopt bird-safe building guidelines, and host local bird festivals and nature programs. Together, these programs demonstrate the power of coordinated, locally driven conservation efforts and demonstrate that even small communities can have a big impact.

Applications are now being accepted from any community interested in joining Bird City Idaho. Communities select from a list of actions across four categories: **habitat**, **threats to birds**, **education and engagement**, **and sustainability**. Certification is earned by completing at least ten actions.

And now, Idaho is looking for its very first Bird City. Which community will lead the way? Will it be a small town with a big passion for native plants, a rural community already championing wildlife habitat, or a college campus wanting to reduce bird hazards and bring people together?

For more information, visit: **birdcity.org/idaho**

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EXPLORE YOUR NEXT TRAIL

Dark-eyed Junco;
PHOTO: Wirestock Creators/Shutterstock.com

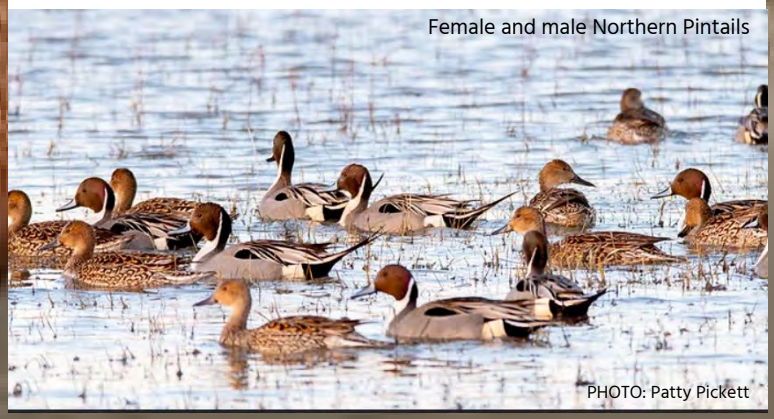
Idaho Birding Trail

Billingsley Creek Wildlife Management Area

Just northeast of Hagerman in south-central Idaho lies Billingsley Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), one of southern Idaho's top fall birding locations. This spring-fed wetland complex along the Snake River Canyon blends marsh, riparian habitat, and open ponds, attracting impressive numbers of migrating waterfowl from October through December. Mallards, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, as well as **species of greatest conservation need** like Northern Pintail, often number in the hundreds. Bald Eagles start appearing as the season advances.

Upland edges support Ring-necked Pheasant and California Quail, so keep listening even when you're away from the water. Because geothermal springs prevent the ponds from freezing, birds concentrate here well into winter, making the WMA a dependable stop when other wetlands ice over. Be aware that hunting activity increases in late fall, so check season dates if you prefer quiet viewing.

To Get There: Billingsley Creek WMA sits just northeast of Hagerman off Highway 30 (Thousand Springs Scenic Byway). Several pullouts along the highway offer easy, roadside access to the wetlands and ponds.



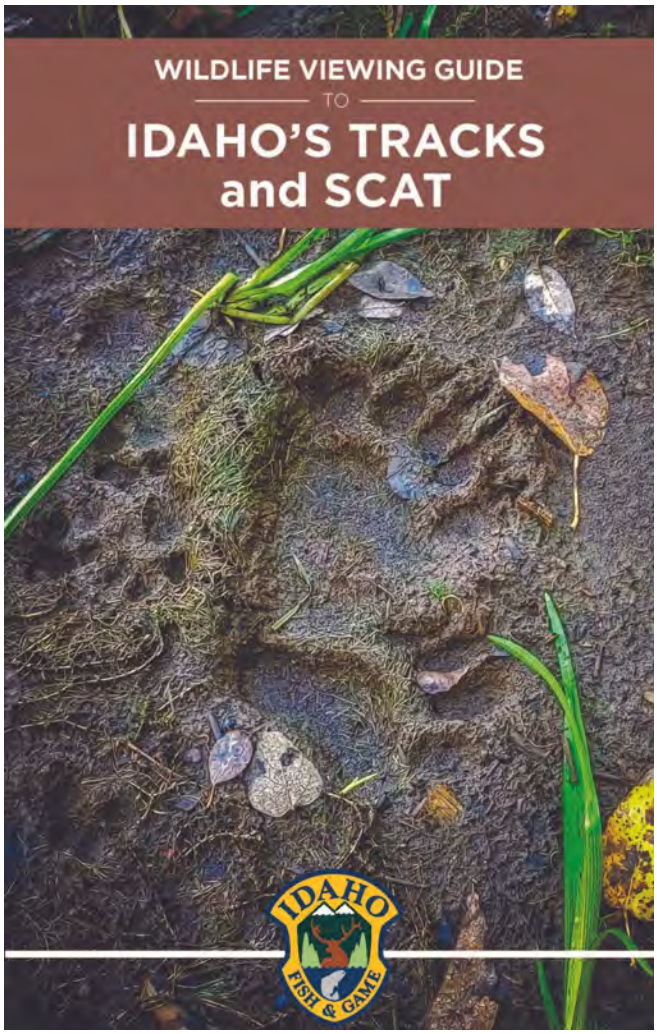
Female and male Northern Pintails

PHOTO: Patty Pickett



Bobcat tracks in mud. PHOTO: CC-BY-NC by Lex/iNaturalist.com

Exploring Tracks and Scat



Idaho's wildlife viewing series just got more exciting: a brand-new guide to the tracks and scat of the state's mammals and birds. Building on the success of earlier guides on raptors, ungulates, owls, and bats, this pocket-sized resource explores the footprints, droppings, and other signs left behind by the animals that call Idaho home.

Inside, you'll find everything you need to spot and identify wildlife signs in the field, whether you're walking a muddy creek bank, hiking a snowy trail, scanning a sandy shoreline, or simply checking the edge of your own backyard. For each species, you'll find photos of footprints and droppings along with straightforward tips on identification, behavior, and where to look. You'll gain the confidence to recognize which animals have been nearby.

Tracks and scat aren't just clues, they're a window into the lives of Idaho's wildlife. They reveal what animals eat, where they travel, and how many share a landscape, often when the animals themselves are never seen. This guide highlights what makes each sign distinctive, from the Moose's large, splayed hoofprints to the Great Blue Heron's long, slender toes. It will also help you distinguish between signs that are easily confused, like coyote and domestic dog tracks, so you can confidently identify what you're observing.

Pick up your **FREE** copy at any Idaho Department of Fish and Game office!

Silver-haired Bat

The original silver fox

Species of Greatest Conservation Need



PHOTO: Jose G. Martinez-Fonseca

Wingspan: 11–13 inches, **Nose to tail length**: 3.1–4.5 inches
Weight: 0.3–0.4 ounces, **Lifespan**: up to 12 years

Predators: Crows and magpies, skunks, owls, and domestic cats.

Identification: Medium-sized bat with short, rounded, black ears and dark brown to black fur with silvery-white tips giving them a frosted or silvery appearance.

Range: Found throughout most of North America, ranging as far north as southeastern Alaska and southern Canada south to northern Mexico. In Idaho, they occur throughout the state in a variety of habitats.

Habitat: Although commonly regarded as a solitary tree-roosting bat, they can be found in a variety of habitats including forests, woodland ponds and streams, and shrub-steppe.

Diet: Variety of small swarming insects such as moths, mosquitoes, and small flies.

Behavior: Usually solitary except when found in small maternity colonies and during courtship/mating in the fall. Roosts under tree bark or in cavities. They may also be found in buildings, using open air structures like garages and barns. Feeds mid-flight but will occasionally go to the ground to get their food. Pregnant females gather in small summer maternity colonies. Just before giving birth, females will roost with their heads facing upwards and hold their tail membranes forward to form a cup-shaped basket to catch their pups as they are born.

Breeding: Breeding occurs primarily in the fall. Females give birth to two pups in June or early July.

Migration/Hibernation: Some populations migrate long distances, while others are short-distance migrants, and some hibernate.

Conservation Concerns: Population size in Idaho is unknown. Wind energy is the biggest problem for these bats as they are one of the most common bat species killed by turbines at wind energy facilities. Forest management practices can impact both the number of available roosts and alter the habitat surrounding roosts.

Bat Beats
Scan to listen

Bat Bit: Did you know that Silver-haired Bats are one of only two bat species in North America known to sing? Their songs are too high-pitched for us to hear, but when slowed down, they reveal a pattern of calls and chirps. Scientists think they may be love songs, since most are sung during mating season!

Thank You

Thank you to those who made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or contributed to the Idaho Nongame Wildlife Fund when completing their taxes.

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

Windows to Wildlife
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Great Horned Owls are powerful nocturnal hunters, feeding on a variety of prey from rodents to birds. As fall arrives, listen for their distinctive deep hoots echoing through the lengthening nights. Their ear-like tufts make them one of North America's most recognizable owls. PHOTO: Patrick Myers/NPS