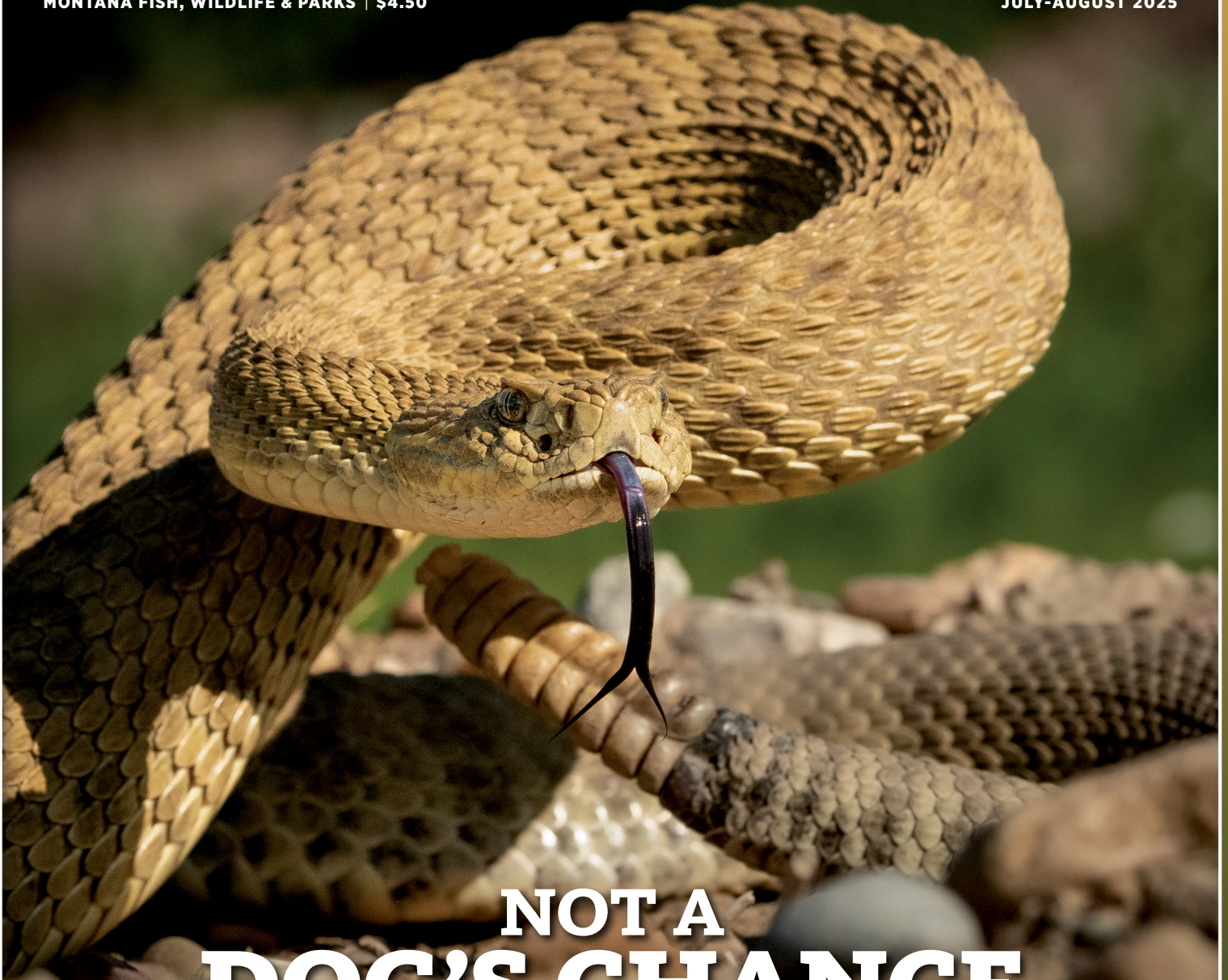


INSIDE: A STREAM'S BEST FRIEND TURNS 50

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NOT A DOG'S CHANCE

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FATAL ATTRACTION A male red-naped sapsucker lies dead outside a house after mistaking itself in a picture window reflection for a rival. PHOTO BY PAUL QUENEAU

COLLISION COURSE

Window strikes, dead birds, and what to do about it.

BY SHANE SATER

THE THUD OF A BIRD HITTING GLASS slammed me out of my morning routine. *Not again*, I thought. Hoping I had imagined it, I scurried outside.

The veery lay crumpled on the sidewalk in a soft brown heap. Its black eyes still glistened with life as I gently picked it up and cradled it in my hands, but the bird was listless, stunned, and perhaps concussed, its toes barely grasping as I set it down gently away from the window.

Twenty minutes later, the veery was gone. Perhaps the window had simply stunned it and the bird had flown off. But I knew from a biologist friend of mine, Hilary Turner, that far more birds die from window strikes than just the ones we see. Indeed, a study published last year analyzed wildlife rehabilitation records from more than 3,000 birds (152 different species)

injured in building collisions. More than half later died.

Window strikes are a serious problem around the world. In fact, they're second only to domestic cats as the leading cause of preventable, human-caused bird deaths. In the United States, the numbers are chilling and hard to comprehend. Studies have found that glass collisions kill more than one billion birds annually and that houses cause nearly half the deaths, with one-

to forest. Its large windows reflected the surrounding woods, creating what Stephen quickly learned was a death trap for local birds, "three to five pine siskins a week," he told me.

Near Bozeman, Lou Ann Harris of Sacajawea Audubon Society estimates the windows of her home killed three to four birds during spring migration each year and a similar number in the fall before she began seeking solutions. "I'd get waxwings, and

had a Swainson's thrush kill itself," she said. "I also had a redpoll in the wintertime."

With more than 539,000 housing units in Montana, based on the 2.1 deaths-per-

house calculation, our structures kill over 1.1 million birds each year—one for every person living in the state. Fortunately, many of these deaths are preventable with the use of reflection-reducing countermeasures. As research sheds light on window collisions as a major problem for birds, concerned individuals and organizations are developing ways to make windows more bird-friendly.

**A 2024 study estimated that building collisions kill more than
1 billion birds annually.**

three-story structures killing 2.1 birds per year on average.

A couple of dead birds each year might go unnoticed, especially since predators and scavengers like cats and raccoons may remove carcasses before people find them.

Birder Stephen Turner (Hilary's father) moved into a new house in 2021 a few miles south of Helena in a mature ponderosa pine

Shane Sater is a writer and field naturalist in Helena who writes the Wild With Nature blog and podcast.



WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE Canadian conservation wildlife photographer and filmmaker **Patricia Homonylo** took this image of 4,000 birds killed by glass and building collisions in and around Toronto, Ontario. During spring and fall migrations when bird strikes are at their peak, rescue patrols head out before sunrise searching city streets for birds that have hit windows. While they save an impressive number of injured birds, many don't survive the impact.



At his home near Helena, Turner installed Acopian BirdSavers—a do-it-yourself solution that involves placing vertical rows of a thin rope known as parachute cord 4 inches apart across the outside of each window. Since installing it, Turner has found evidence of just one window strike in the past two years—a gratifying decrease from his previous estimate of three to five birds per week.

In Bozeman, Harris used a white paint pen to trace vertical stripes 2 inches apart on the outside of her windows, which has also proven effective.

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) has a list of reflection-reducing options on its website, including commercially sold sticker dots that some western national parks such

as Zion have found effective. With all of these methods, the basic goal is to break up the window's reflection from the outside. In general, the ABC recommends using vertical stripes spaced at least 4 inches apart or

horizontal stripes spaced 2 inches apart. Note that decals of hawks or other predatory birds are not effective. There are also a variety of commercial products designed specifically to prevent birds from crashing into windows. Feather Friendly and Solyx Bird Safety Film both use a system of prepared lines or dots, similar to the do-it-yourself options but applied as a tape or a film. CollidEscape, a window coating that appears opaque from the outside, lets light in and provides a relatively clear view out from the inside.

“You can do something about it, and it doesn’t cost much money. It just takes caring about these wild birds.”



BREAKING THE MIRROR Visual markers that disrupt the solid reflection on the outside of windows can work wonders to limit bird strikes. Placed on the exterior of a window, patterns should cover the whole surface and be high contrast under varying daylight conditions. Decals, tempura paint, insect screens, and beaded curtains are all cost-effective options. For commercial settings, window film can do double-duty as advertising while also protecting birds.

What about the aesthetics? Don't the lines or dots make windows ugly? Opinions vary, of course, but people I've spoken with who have installed these solutions say they still enjoy the view from their windows.

Ruth Swenson installed Acopian BirdSavers on her Helena home, repurposing beaded bamboo curtains for the job.

"Actually, I don't even notice them—they sort of blend in," she reports. "I've had several friends who, when they see them, have commented on how much they like them."

If you need further motivation for making a change for your home, consider the stories behind those window strike victims. The veery that struck the window of my home that late spring morning had just completed a 5,800-mile migration after wintering in the forests of Brazil. As I held that bird's life in my hands that day, the choice seemed clear. It was time to solve the window problem.

Harris sums it up: "You can do something about it, and it doesn't cost much money. It just takes caring about these wild birds." 🐦



SPOT CHECK National Park Service scientists are researching ways to reduce bird collisions with park windows. At Zion National Park in Utah, workers installed clear, ultraviolet dot-stickers 2 inches apart that are barely visible to people but that most songbirds can see. Time will tell how well the stickers deter birds, but if successful, they could help pave the way for less-distracting solutions that preserve scenic views.



What to do with an injured bird

- ▶ Don't attempt to catch or trap it.
- ▶ Don't touch it with your bare hands. If the bird is in immediate danger, use a paper towel, hand towel, work gloves, t-shirt, or small blanket to carefully pick it up and move it to a safer natural space such as under some brush or a tree. Clean items used for transport.
- ▶ If there are no visible injuries, see if the bird can recover on its own. If it's unable to fly away after 24 hours, contact a wildlife rehabilitator for advice on next steps. In the Helena area, call Montana WILD at (406) 444-9942.

For injured raptors, call:

Wild Skies Raptor Center
Potomac
(406) 210-3468

Montana Wild Wings
Kalispell
(406) 250-1070

Montana Raptor Conservation Center
Bozeman
(406) 585-1211