

APRIL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Last Chance Audubon Society will meet Tuesday, April 21, at 7:00 pm in the large meeting room of the Lewis & Clark Library. The April program:

Preserving Montana's Wetlands

Presented by Tom Hintz

What do Trumpeter Swan restoration, preserving the Rocky Mountain Front, and protecting the Ward Ranch on the Missouri near Helena have in common?

Namely, these projects use or encompass wetlands - which the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership has played a role in conserving. The Legacy works to protect Montana's wetlands and riparian areas and the uplands associated with them.

Tom Hintz is Coordinator of the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership which is a voluntary, incentive-based public/private partnership working to protect wetlands, riparian areas, and watershed lands throughout Montana. During the period 2000-2005, partners in the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership invested more than \$67 million to protect over 800,000 acres including at least 27,000 acres of wetlands and riparian areas, and more than 500,000 acres of associated uplands.

During the Legacy's first five years, more than 1,000 stream miles were affected by the concerted efforts to restore, enhance, and protect riparian and wetland habitat in Montana.

Tom is a graduate of Montana State University and has worked in the field of migratory bird and wetland conservation since 1974. In May 2005 he was awarded the Montana Wetland Stewardship Award by Montana's Governor Brian Schweitzer.

Last Chance Audubon promotes understanding, respect and enjoyment of birds and the natural world through, education, habitat protection and environmental advocacy

IT'S IN THE AIR

Spring is in the air along with increasing numbers of birds (and a little snow). Last Saturday we drove to Freezout Lake to look at around 100,000 snow geese along with a good number of tundra swans and an array of ducks. It is always a wonderful phenomenon. Equally exciting is the arrival of the single Swainson's thrush that forages under our blue spruce for a day or two every spring. We would like to share these experiences with others **and so are offering a short class for beginning birders.**

This is a two evening, two field trip class— Thursday evenings, April 30 and May 7, from 7-8:30 pm, and Saturday mornings, May 2 and May 9, for field trips—meet at 8 am. We will discuss the basics of bird identification, birding equipment, and some habitat, behavior and birdsong information as well.

Anyone who would like to enhance or develop birding skills is welcome to attend. We will limit the class size to 20 members and ask for a \$15.00 registration to cover our expenses.

If you would like more information or wish to register, please call Jo Lace at 443-6640. If you plan to attend, please bring your binoculars and a field guide (if you have them) to the first meeting. Thank you.

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♪ HELENA BIRDNOTE: STUDYING RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS

by Dave Slaughter

A few years ago a friend of mine made the comment that you see a lot more robins than eagles. Later that day we floated the Missouri and saw 5 bald eagles. I think we are fortunate to live in an area where magnificent and spectacular birds are not so uncommon. But if rare birds are the icing on the cake, the common birds are the cake itself. Here I would like to discuss one of the commonest species, the red-winged blackbird.

Granted, these fellows are very common, not particularly pretty, and you could be blind and still recognize them. However, they are very easy to observe, very susceptible to being lured into traps and banded, and therefore very easy for biologists to study. And they are well worthy of study.

As you know, redwings are marsh living polygynous birds, and as such, the job of every male is to attempt to carve out a territory and get as many females as possible to nest on that territory. The plot thickened in 1975 when O.E. Bray, et al., reported a study in the *Wilson Bulletin* wherein they vasectomized male redwings, but the females nesting on their territories still produced offspring. Later, DNA testing allowed scientists to determine who the father of any particular nestling was. In studies done on the Columbia National Wildlife refuge in Washington, Elizabeth Gray of the University of Washington determined that 35% of all nestlings were sired through an extra-pair fertilization, and about one-half of all broods in each year had at least one nestling in which the father was not the female's mate. In the vast majority of these cases (95%) the sire was a male on an adjoining territory. Further study revealed that most red-winged females on this particular study area eventually sought out males other than the one whose territory they nested on—actually 88% by the third year of age.

Scientific findings always lead to more questions, and the obvious question is, why does this behavior occur? Is there a reproductive advantage to this behavior? Gray looked at this, and determined that female redwings that consorted with multiple males hatched a greater proportion of their eggs and fledged significantly more young than “faithful” females. There was a trend to lower rates of starvation in these broods and significantly less loss to predators. Theoretically, having more male partners could lead to genetic diversity with the possibility of fitter offspring, and act as insurance against one's mate being sterile, but it would not explain the difference in loss to predators.

Dr. Gray then looked at this in experiments that should be praised just for the sheer amount of work entailed. Birds were trapped and banded, territories of individuals were mapped out, extensive DNA testing of nestlings and males was done, and hundreds of hours of observation and then looking at data ensued. The report was published in *Animal Behavior* 1997 53:625-639. What she found was, at least to my mind, staggering. First, there was a cost to the female to be “unfaithful.” Females that engaged in extra-pair copulations were prevented from feeding on their social mate's territory significantly more often than were “faithful” females. However, they WERE allowed to forage unharrassed on the territory of the males they had copulated with, giving them access to additional food resources. Since males in this study did not render any care to the nestlings, this may explain the slight survival difference from lack of starvation. Gray then assessed the birds' response to predators using a mounted black-billed magpie. She discovered that male redwings were much more aggressive towards a predator (the magpie) at a nest on a neighboring territory if they had copulated with the breeding female than if they had not. This may explain the improvement in survival from decreased predation.

An interesting sidelight was that there was a lot of variability in the behavior of individual males. One highly aggressive male was excluded from the study because he attacked every male he saw on his territory, regardless of sex or status, and another male did not interact at all with any intruding bird, male or female.

Another interesting sidelight comes from a study performed on the same marsh and reported by Beletsky and Orians in their book, *Red-winged Blackbirds – Decision Making and Reproductive Success* (University of Chicago press, 1996). They found that the chance of a female nesting at the same site on a successive year does not correlate with whether the male claiming the territory is the same, but DOES correlate with whether the neighboring males were present previously. The presumption was that a female can depend on any male whose territory she is nesting on to defend the nest, but she is more likely to get protection from neighboring males if they know her, especially if they know her in the biblical sense. How much of all this is conscious behavior is of course open to question.

I don't know about you, but I find this stuff fascinating. There's so much that goes on behind the scenes in the natural world, and we are so lucky to be living at a time when some of the mystery in being unraveled. It makes me want to get out and watch some redwings.

☀ **LAST CHANCE AUDUBON SOCIETY SPRING 2009**
FIELD TRIPS and WORKSHOPS 🌸

- ▶ **Saturday Morning Birdwalks - Birds & Beasleys** will lead a birdwalk every Saturday from April 25th to Oct 3rd. Meet Bill Rainey or Coburn Currier at 7:30 am at Birds & Beasleys, 70 S. Park Ave. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather. Walks will be about 2 hours in length and destinations will be to local birding areas, i.e., Helena Reservoir, Spring Meadow, Lake Helena, etc. Location of the week's walk will be known by Thursday, so call 449-0940 to learn the location, or just show up Saturday morning ready to have fun.
- ▶ **April 18, Saturday - Seven Mile Hills Along Seven Mile Creek** - Join Cedron Jones for this local birding adventure. It will be a leisurely hike of about 4 miles round trip, through a variety of habitats, from riparian grasslands to mixed Doug fir forests. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Center Stage Video Store in the Lundy Shopping Center, return by noon. Pre-register by calling Cedron at 442-1271.
- ▶ **April 29, Wednesday - Evening Last Chance Gulch Bird Walk** - Meet Cary Lund at the Lewis and Clark Library at 5:30 p.m. for an easy stroll around the neighborhood near the library, looking for a variety of local species. Call Cary at 449-3180 to sign up.
- ▶ **April 30, Thursday evening - LCAS Beginning Birding Workshop - Call Jo Lace at 443-6640 to sign up.**
 - May 2, Saturday - LCAS Beginning Birding Workshop Field Trip; • May 7, Thursday evening – Beginning Birding Workshop; • May 9, Saturday - Beginning Birding Workshop Field Trip.
- ▶ **May 13, Wednesday - Evening Last Chance Gulch Bird Walk** - Meet Cary Lund at the Lewis and Clark Library at 5:30 p.m. for an easy stroll around the neighborhood close to the library, looking for a variety of local species. Call Cary at 449-3180 to sign up.
- ▶ **May 23, Saturday - Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge** - Jo Lace and Brian Shovers will lead a group to Benton Lake near Great Falls. This is an excellent opportunity to see waterfowl and burrowing owls. Meet at the DOT parking lot at 7:15 a.m., return about 4 p.m. Bring a lunch, water, binoculars, spotting scope and dress for any weather. Call to reserve a spot, 12 people maximum, 443-6640.
- ▶ **May 27, Wednesday - "Blue Light Special"** - You won't believe all the birds Bob Martinka has seen over the past few years at this unknown, unexpected urban birding hotspot! Likely sightings are migratory and nesting waterfowl, as well as migratory passerine species. Meet at the west side of the K-Mart parking lot at 6:30 p.m. for a two hour outing. Call Bob to reserve a spot at 449-3313.
- ▶ **May 30, Saturday - Stanfield Pond - Helena Valley** - Stanfield Pond is an area adjacent to Prickly Pear Creek in the Helena Valley. The pond was created to produce ice in the days before refrigeration. This wetland area, on private property, has long been known by Helena birders for its diversity of birds. Birds expected in the marsh include teal, mallards, sora, marsh wren, common yellowthroat, red-winged and yellow-headed blackbird; in the cottonwood riparian area: wood duck, sapsuckers, orioles, vireos, black-headed grosbeak, western flycatcher are likely; savannah sparrow, bobolink and meadowlark may be found in the hayfields and pasture areas. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the parking lot of the Good Samaritan Thrift Store at 3607 N Montana. Expect to walk 1.5 miles on mostly level terrain. Return by 12:00 p.m. Call Dan Sullivan to make reservations at 443-4229 or dsullivan01@bresnan.net
- ▶ **June 5-7, Friday through Sunday - Montana Audubon Bird Festival** - This weekend is the state Audubon Birding Festival. There will be no Helena area trips scheduled, so sign up to hear David Allen Sibley, Vince Yannon and go birding in the Great Falls area. www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival or call the Montana Audubon office at 406-443-3949.
- ▶ **June 13, Saturday - Silver City-Canyon Creek** - Explore grassland-sagebrush habitats and wetland riparian areas. Long billed curlew, sage thrasher, vesper and Brewer's sparrow and red-tailed hawk can be expected in the grassland/sagebrush areas. Little Prickly Pear Creek and Canyon Creek riparian and wetland habitats will include sightings of sandhill crane, bobolink, western and eastern flycatcher, common snipe, common yellowthroat, yellow warbler, house wren, warbling vireo, song sparrow and swallows. Dan Sullivan is the leader---reserve a spot with him at 443-4229 or dsullivan01@bresnan.net.
- ▶ **June 20, Saturday - McClellan Creek** - This trip will be a loop from Montana City to East Helena, exploring a variety of habitats in the McClellan Creek area. Expect to see birds inhabiting both mountain riparian habitats,
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mountain grassland habitats and the areas in between. Meet at the north Montana Department of Transportation parking lot at 6:30. Call Don Skaar to make a reservation: 442-3254.

► **June 20, Saturday - Nevada Valley Trumpeter Swan Release (tentative)** - Del Straub is working with the Blackfoot Challenge in Ovando to firm up details of how many Helena area folks can attend the release this year. Look for details in the May newsletter.

APPRECIATION!

Thank you field trip leaders and workshop facilitators for the most extensive, diverse and stimulating series of spring birding events LCAS has had in several years. The Helena area birding “economy” does not seem to be faltering at all; rather, it appears to be thriving! Kudos and thanks to each of you for your generous sharing of time and organizational services.

--Jim Greene



Great Horned Owl by James Coe

THE TEACHERS by Mary Oliver

Owl in the morning,
mockingbird in the burning
slants of the sunny afternoon
declare so simply

to the world
everything I have tried but still
haven't been able
to put into words,

so I do not go
far from that school
with its star-bright
or blue ceiling,

and I listen to those teachers,
and others too—
the wind in the trees
and the water waves—

for they are what lead me
from the dryness of self
where I labor
with the mind-steps of language—

lonely, as we all are
in the singular,
I listen hard
to the exuberances

of the mockingbird and the owl,
the waves and the wind.
And then, like peace after perfect speech,
such stillness.

--from *Red Bird*

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COMING EVENTS & REMINDERS

☼ **Wednesday, April 8, 7:00 p.m.** - “**Wildflower Warm-up**” - botanist and photographer Drake Barton. Drake will show some of his photographs of local spring wildflowers, focusing on the common natives found on Mt. Helena. Come and see what you remember from last year and get a head start on the blooming season! Free at the Lewis and Clark Library. Jointly sponsored by the Kelsey Chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society and the Montana Discovery Foundation.

☼ **April 22 is Earth Day.**

~ Celebrate Birds in Culture ~ **2009 International Migratory Bird Day**

Saturday, May 2, 2009

Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir

Birds have always played important roles in Native American cultures, especially in storytelling, art, music and dance, spirituality, food and conservation.

The 2009 International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) theme—**Celebrate Birds in Culture**—explores the roles birds maintain in Native American culture, aims to educate people on the cultural and ecological importance of birds and ignite a passion among participants for birds and their habitats.

Come help us celebrate birds in culture on Saturday, May 2, at the Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir! Guided early bird hikes will begin at 6:30 a.m., while the main IMBD event will begin at 10 a.m.

The IMBD Celebrate Birds in Culture event will include many different educational and interactive activities and games for the whole family to enjoy; along with some musical entertainment from local musicians.

Many stations at the event are geared toward young audiences with cookie-decorating, making bird houses, plaster tracks, face painting and tattoos; however there are several stations that adults are sure to enjoy including photography, bird walks, backyard nature-scaping, bird art and much more! Some special visitors from the Montana Raptor Conservation Center will spend the day at our IMBD event, as well.

Join the fun of celebrating birds—the IMBD event is free and open to everyone! For more information about the IMBD event, contact us at 495-3711. For more community events, visit the Montana Discovery Foundation website at www.montanadiscoveryfoundation.org.

Volunteers Needed: In order to make this day a wonderful success, we need help! We need volunteers to assist with early morning bird hikes (6:30 to 9:00 AM), as well as hands-on stations until 2 PM. There will be a volunteer training on Weds., April 22, at FWP Headquarters at 1420 E. 6th Ave. in Helena. This training runs from 6 to 9 PM. For the bird hike leaders, there will be a pre-event walk on Sat., April 25 at 7 AM to scope out what is out and about. Please call Sam at 495-3718 if you are interested in helping with this fun day.

Did You Know?

Hawks, falcons and eagles perhaps hold the greatest importance to Native People, because they represent speed and agility to hunters; healing powers to a tribe's healer; and a connection to the Great Spirit that can carry messages and bring blessings and gifts.

For more information, visit the International Migratory Bird Day website at www.birdday.org.

MONTANA AUDUBON OFFERS AWARDS

Montana Audubon will be giving at least 4 awards away at its annual meeting this year. The awards acknowledge individuals who exemplify a commitment to birds, other wildlife and habitat conservation. This year awards will be given for Conservationist of the Year, Environmental Educator of the Year, Special Achievement, and Lifetime Achievement Award.

To nominate your candidate, please call the Montana Audubon office to request an award nomination form or download the form from our website at <http://mtaudubon.org/about/awards.html>. **To be considered for this year's award, nominations and all supporting material must be postmarked no later than May 8, 2009.** All nominations and supporting material should be sent to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624, or by fax: 406-443-7144. **The award ceremony will take place on June 6 at MT Audubon's Bird Festival in Great Falls.**

--Janet Ellis

MEMBERSHIP from Sara Toubman

Welcome and thanks to the following new and renewing members. NAS-New: Shirley Palmer, James Utterback, Chelsey Frank, Stan Percival, Chris Alke, and Maribeth Goodrich. NAS Renewals: Rich Petaja, Shirley Moudree, Kenneth High, Roy Hockett, Janet Grinde, C. Berg, Renae Gardner, and Katie Smith.

MAY NEWSLETTER DEADLINE: Please submit May newsletter items by Friday, May 1. Thanks!



**Last Chance Audubon Society
Membership Form**

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Please send your \$15 check and form to Last Chance Audubon Society, PO Box 924, Helena, MT 59624.
All contributions are tax deductible.

LAST CHANCE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Officers:	Christmas Count	Sue Newell-442-8142/Cedron Jones	442-1271
Secretary	Brian Shovers	443-6640	
Treasurer	Dan Sullivan	443-4229	
Board of Directors:	Circulation	Sam Sperry/Joyce Beckes	458-8170
Bob Martinka	449-3313		
Don Skaar	442-3254		
Coburn Currier	ccurrier@mt.gov		
Lorna Milne	443-7162		
Martha Vogt	495-9270		
Committee Chairs/Contacts:	Conservation	Brian Shovers	443-6640
Birdathon	Jo Lace	443-6640	
Birdseed Sale	Sue Jackson-443-4486/Sandy Shull-449-0904		
LCAS Website: www.lastchanceaudubon.org . Contacts: Birdseed – Birds & Beasleys, 449-0904. Montana Audubon – 443-3949 / www.mtaudubon.org . Newsletter - 458-8170, 8982 Jackpine Dr, Helena 59602, samsper@mt.net . Non-members may receive the newsletter for \$5.50 per year. Send check to LCAS, PO Box 924, Helena 59624.			
	Education	vacant	
	Field Trip	Jim Greene	495-9270 - greenevogt@imt.net
	Habitat Protection	vacant	
	Membership	Sara Toubman	442-1271
	Nat. Hist. Series	Don Skaar	442-3254
	Newsletter	Joyce Beckes	458-8170 - samsper@mt.net
	Program	Sara Toubman	442-1271
	Publicity	Jim Greene	495-9270 - greenevogt@imt.net
	Silent Auction	Sandy Shull-449-0904/Jo Lace-443-6640	
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