

**FEBRUARY
MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

Last Chance Audubon Society will meet on Tuesday, February 19, at 7:00 pm in the large meeting room of the Lewis and Clark Library.

The February program:

Birds of the Aleutians

Presented by Bob Martinka

The Aleutians are an arc of islands that extend westward approximately 1100 miles from southwest Alaska toward Russia.

In 2006 the avian bird flu was spreading through Asia. There was mounting concern as to when and where the virus would first enter North America. Numerous monitoring plans were implemented including extensive sampling of birds in the outer Aleutian Islands. Bob was fortunate to be selected as a volunteer to assist in the monitoring of birds as they migrated from Asia through this region of Alaska. For three weeks in September 2006 he was stationed on Shemya Island, very near Attu Island, which is the farthest west island in the Aleutian Chain. This has become a hallowed place for avid birders due to the Asian rarities that temporarily immigrate to the U.S. there.

Bob's presentation will cover his experiences with monitoring, some of the history of the area, and birding in this remote portion of the world.

Bob retired from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks after 30 years as a wildlife biologist and administrator. In 2007 he celebrated his 40th year as a permanent resident of Montana. Among the many interests and activities he currently pursues, birding and photography have come to dominate his time. He is a board member of Last Chance Audubon and keeps track of bird comings and goings in the Helena area.

WEBSITE HELP WANTED: LCAS is seeking a volunteer to help update the chapter website. If you would like to assist with this project, please contact Brian Shovers, 443-6640. Training will be provided.

**THE LAST CHANCE AUDUBON
NATURAL HISTORY LECTURE SERIES
ON MONTANA PRAIRIES BEGINS ON
MARCH 4. PLEASE SEE THE
ENCLOSED FLYER FOR DETAILS.**



ALSO INSIDE:

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LET'S GO BIRDING!

As we experience a wonderful, snowy, more typical Montana winter, it is time to look forward to spring and our annual assortment of field trips. Our usual cadre of leaders will likely be ready and willing to lead our members, old and new, out into the field, but we can always use new ideas and new leaders. Please give serious thought to leading a small group to an area that you've enjoyed, or would like to explore with others. Remember—you do not have to be an "ace" birder to lead a trip. Your responsibility is only to choose a location, receive a few phone calls, and get the participants into the field via car pooling. It's a fun, rewarding endeavor.

I will be scheduling the trips in February, so if you have an idea for a trip, please give me a call. Jim Greene, Field Trip Chair, 495-9270, or you can e-mail me at greenevogt@imt.net

LCAS MEMBERSHIP REMINDER: Membership renewals were due in January. (If you joined the chapter this fall, you need not renew until Jan. 2009.) LCAS membership is good from January through December and should be renewed each January; it does not preclude membership in National Audubon. There is a membership form on the back page. Please mail it and a check to the address provided.

PROPOSED MacDONALD PASS BIATHLON FACILITY

The Department of Defense and Montana Army National Guard have asked the U.S. Forest Service to allow construction of a \$1.5 million biathlon training facility on MacDonald Pass. This project was initiated four years ago, and the Final Environmental Assessment (Final EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) were recently released. The 330-page Final EA and the 4-page FONSI are available at <http://dma.mt.gov/Armyguard>.

A 30-day comment period has just begun, and will close February 22, 2008. Even if you have already commented during one of the previous two comment periods, your remarks at this time could have great impact on the process. The project does not yet have the approval of the Forest Service and cannot go forward unless Forest Supervisor Kevin Riordan approves it.

Summary of Critical Points:

● **Threat to Simple, Quiet Skiing.** The MacDonald Pass ski trails have provided quiet, safe skiing for over 30 years. Local skiers can access the area with minimum driving. The EA cites acoustic studies predicting that gunfire from the target range will be heard along all of the existing trails. The expansion of use, and the displacement of current skiers to other areas predicted in the EA, will damage the very qualities for which the area is currently valued.

● **Poor Reliability of Snowfall.** There are no studies of snowfall for MacDonald Pass. The EA optimistically references data from other snow gauges, all located at higher elevations than the proposed site, though even this data presents a gloomy picture of future snowfall in Montana. The short-term benefit derived by a few biathletes at the proposed site does not warrant the expenditure of \$1.5 million of public funds, nor the deterioration of this valuable public resource.

● **Damage to Habitat Connectivity.** The MacDonald Pass area provides critical wildlife linkage within the already fractured Continental Divide ecosystem. The proposed facility, sitting astride the Continental Divide as it does, would do irreparable harm to this most vulnerable of corridors.

● **Poor NEPA Process.** Any federal project of this sort is subject to evaluation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Among other NEPA requirements, any valid concerns raised by citizens within the prescribed process should be addressed in the final EA. A review of the public comments received in response to the Draft EA

(May 2006) shows innumerable concerns that have not been addressed in the Final EA.

● **An EIS is Likely Required.** Under NEPA, decision-makers can choose to perform an Environmental Assessment, as was performed here, or a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Most professionals who were consulted agree that a project of this magnitude should be further evaluated with an EIS.

● **Cumulative Impacts.** NEPA requires an evaluation of the cumulative effects of proposed projects, both at present and into the foreseeable future. Though the research cited in the EA iterates several ways in which these impacts would jeopardize the integrity of the Continental Divide ecosystem, the FONSI appears to ignore the underlying conclusions. Under NEPA guidelines, the impacts of the proposed biathlon facility, if evaluated in conjunction with other human impacts in the area, would likely cause irreversible cumulative damage to wildlife, soils, and other natural resources.

What you can do: Contact the below listed decision-makers by Feb. 22. ●Becky Myers, Dept. of Military Affairs, is the official designated contact who will compile comments – PO Box 4789, Fort Harrison, MT 59636-4789, rebekah.myers@us.army.mil. ●Kevin Riordan of the Forest Service will make the final decision on the project – Helena Natl. Forest, 2880 Skyway Dr., Helena, MT 59602, kriordan@fs.fed.us, 406-449-5201. Our senators will ultimately appropriate the money for this development, and will be sensitive to a poor use of public funds. ●Sen. Jon Tester, Capital One Center, 208 N. Montana, Ste 202A, Helena 59601, rjt@tester.senate.gov, 406-449-5401. ●Sen. Max Baucus, Empire Block, 30 W. 14th St., Ste. 206, Helena 59601, max@baucus.senate.gov, 1-800-332-6106.

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♪ **BIRDNOTE: *BIRDS OF MONTANA*
BOOK PROJECT**

By Steve Hoffman,

Executive Director, Montana Audubon

Montana Audubon is pleased to announce the *Birds of Montana* book project. This book will summarize information on the status, distribution, biology, conservation, and historical aspects of the 421 bird species known to occur in the state. Because Montana is one of the few states without a general reference on its birds, the need for this book is great. Consequently, Montana Audubon has contracted with ornithologist and former Director of Bird Conservation Jeff Marks to lead this exciting project. Jeff and co-authors John Carlson and Paul Hendricks began work on the book in September 2007. The book is scheduled for completion by fall 2011.

Montana Audubon is seeking funds to help support research and writing time, pay for illustrations and travel to museums and libraries, and defray printing costs to reduce the retail price of the book. All royalties from book sales will go to Montana Audubon. In addition to requesting funds from foundations, businesses, and government agencies, we seek support from individuals who have an interest in birds and conservation in Montana.

One way individuals can participate is through sponsorship of species accounts. Individuals can sponsor one or more accounts, with the sponsor's name appearing at the end of each account and in the acknowledgments. The donation to sponsor an account ranges from \$100-\$300, depending on the conservation status of the specie. The rate for agencies and corporations is \$1,000 per species account independent of conservation priority. Donations are fully tax-deductible.

We hope you share our excitement about *Birds of Montana* and that you view the project as we do: a gift to Montanans and others who wish to learn more about the state's birds, and a means of encouraging the public to treasure and protect the abundance and variety of birds in Montana and the habitats that sustain them. Such a book is long overdue, and you can help make its completion possible. Check the Montana Audubon website for a complete list of bird species available for sponsorship (www.mtaudubon.org).

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT (GBBC):

Millions of novice and accomplished bird watchers can make their fascination with nature add up for science and for the future during the 11th annual Great Back Yard Bird Count, led by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. **During Presidents' Day weekend, Feb. 15-18, 2008, anyone can count birds from wherever they are and enter their tallies online at www.birdcount.org.** Additional information on the GBBC is available at this website.

KELSEY CHAPTER OF THE MONTANA

NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY: Tuesday, March 11, at 7:00 p.m., Jack Taylor, MSU professor emeritus, will give a presentation on the history of range management in Montana. The program will be in the large meeting room at the Lewis and Clark Library, and is free and open to the public.

MONTANA BIRD FESTIVAL: Montana Audubon and the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Chapter will host the 2008 Montana Bird Festival at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, June 6-8. A festival brochure with full details will be sent to all Montana Audubon members in early April.

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MARCH NEWSLETTER DEADLINE: Please submit March newsletter items by Monday, March 3. Thanks!

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

Membership from Sara Toubman. Welcome and thanks to the following new and renewing members. NAS New: Jan Williams, Debbie Armstrong,, Mac Gregor, Beverly Pickett, John Wirth, Steve McEvoy, Nicolette Baril, Brad/Shari Harlow. NAS Renewals: Joan Bishop, Robert Whitesitt, Tim Speyer, Pat/Becky Foster, Perry Fisher, Bob Bird, Alicia Reber, Mark/Dee Dee Cress, Kristin Bakula, Barbara Twiggs, Dorothea Houseworth, Dorothy Johnson, Bob Anderson, Mary VanGilder, Richard Hopkins, David Percival, Martha Haddock, Beverley Gregor, Cary Lund, Ron Bulkley, Marjorie Levine, Jo An Jancques. LCAS New/Renewals: Sue Jackson, John Christenson, Fran Penner-Ray, Charlann Forbes, Jan Donaldson, Kizzie Brown, Loren Bahls, Joyce Beckes/Sam Sperry, Larry/Carol McEvoy, Wendy Wheeler, Mike Murray, Stephanie Kellogg, Kirsten Bowers, Jane Phillips, George Holton, CD Avery, Joan Bishop, Ray/Nan Breuninger, Gary Grzebielski, Arch/Gail Hewitt, Drake Barton/Kathy Lloyd, Janice Miller.

**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

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	Committee Chairs/Contacts:	Publicity	Jim Greene 495-9270
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LCAS Website: www.lastchanceaudubon.org . Contacts: Birdseed – Birds & Beasleys, 449-0904; Shade Grown Coffee – Joyce Beckes, 458-8170; Montana Audubon – 443-3949 / www.mtaudubon.org . Newsletter available to non-members for \$5.50 per year. Send check to LCAS, PO Box 924, Helena 59624.			

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*Emperor Geese
Photograph by Bob Martinka*

2008 Last Chance Audubon Society Natural History Lecture Series on Montana Prairies

All talks begin at 7 pm and will be held at the FWP Commission Room at FWP Headquarters, 1420 E. 6th Ave., in Helena. People should access the building through the door on the west side of the building. Since this is a fund raiser to help protect Montana's Important Birding Areas, there will be an Admission Fee. Cost is \$5 per talk or \$25 for all six talks. Admission is paid at the door.

March 4. Richard Manning – “The Montana Prairie: Its History, Biology, and Promise” As author of *Grasslands: The History, Biology, Politics, and Promise of the American Prairie* (1995), Richard will lead off the series with an overview focusing on the biological importance of grasslands, their historic destruction, and plans for grassland conservation in Montana.

March 11. David Ausband—“Swift Fox on the Northern Plains: A Success Story” Dave is a Research Associate at the Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Montana currently working with wolves in Idaho. He will talk about his studies of Swift foxes on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation.

March 18. Jack Taylor – “Plants of the Montana Prairies” As range science researcher and teacher at Montana State University, Jack Taylor spent over thirty years studying grassland ecosystems. Taylor will discuss what he learned and its significance to birdwatchers.

March 25. Bob Bramblett—“There's Fish in Them Thar Cricks: Prairie Stream Research at Montana State University” Bob is an Assistant Research Professor at Montana State University and has worked for 21 years on prairie fishes in eastern Montana and Colorado, as well as some misspent time in Alaska and the Grand Canyon. He will talk about fish, herptiles and even bird life in and along Montana's prairie riparian corridors.

April 1. Coburn Currier – “Grassland Birds of Northeastern Montana” As Project Biologist for the Montana Natural Heritage Program, Coburn has been studying the grassland birds of north-central and eastern Montana for the Program since 2003. He will provide an overview of grassland birds and their habits and habitat needs. Photos and sounds of these birds will be included in his talk.

April 8. Mike Madel –“The Prairie Grizzly Bear” Mike has been involved with research and management of grizzly bears since 1978. He has been in Choteau since 1983 as Grizzly Bear Management Specialist with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. He will talk about grizzly use of the prairies and riparian areas along the Rocky Mountain Front.