

Last  
Chance  
Audubon  
Society



# Last Chance Chat

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

*Published September to May*

*Helena MT*

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## What's Up with Juncos?

**September 12, 2017**

**Program begins 7:00 p.m.**

Cookies and Conversation 6:30 – 7:00  
Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave.  
FREE - All are Welcome

When is a junco a junco? Did you know there are distinct junco populations - in a variety of geographic locations, with variable color patterns - all considered to be juncos? Gerry Shields will discuss recent research on the morphology, distribution, song and DNA that tells us how types of juncos are differentiating. Shields says the entire group has been evolving over the last one million years. This talk aims to bring birders up-to-date on who is who in the world of the junco.

Gerald Shields studied the genus *Junco* for his Ph.D. research at the University of Toronto after studying the same genus at Central Washington State University. He was a professor of Biological Sciences at the Institute of Arctic Biology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (1975-2000). He is currently the James J. Manion Endowed Chairman of Biology at Carroll College where he teaches Evolution, Ornithology, Thesis Writing and Biology Senior Seminar. Shields also teaches a



*Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon) by Bob Martinka*

Field Ornithology course during the summer session to introduce all students (college and senior citizens) to the diversity, morphology and behavior of birds of west-central Montana.

-- Liz Hiltunen



*Dark-eyed Junco map by Boria Mila, from Snowbird (2016) by Ellen Ketterson*



What a SUMMER!

Our Education Committee was busy - with two occasions for information booths, three presentations, and two classes. We've found a new membership chair, Sharon Dewart-Hansen, and an editor for the *CHAT*, Shane Sater! We had a work day at the K-mart Ponds pulling Burdock and other noxious plants; we are conducting a bird survey in conjunction with Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT); and we are busy preparing for the Golden Eagle Migration Survey (GEMS) with the Forest Service, Fish Wildlife & Parks, and MT Audubon.

Sharon Dewart-Hansen started birding in high school, and her first birding memory is of climbing through fences in pursuit of a Scarlet Tanager. Since then, she has gradually become an "obsessive" birder. She has been involved with LCAS since she moved to Helena six years ago. Since retiring from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana in June, she graciously accepted the vacant membership chair. A BIG LCAS "THANK YOU" to SHARON!

Shane Sater first appeared on our radar at our 2016 Christmas Bird Count. He stepped up this spring when PPLT asked LCAS to conduct a bird survey for their Sevenmile Creek project, and he has taken the lion's share of responsibility for that survey. He periodically leads the Saturday morning bird walks for Birds & Beasley's, and has now volunteered to be the editor for our newsletter. A BIG LCAS "WELCOME" to SHANE SATER! If you haven't met him yet, look for him at our next membership meeting. Check out Sevenmile Creek on eBird to see data from the surveys.

Looking ahead to September: World Shorebirds Day is/was September 2<sup>nd</sup>, at the south end of Canyon Ferry Reservoir. At our Membership meeting on Sept. 12<sup>th</sup> Gerry Shields will articulate Juncos, and there's an opportunity to learn more about identifying raptors during HMANA'S International Hawk Migration Week, September 17-25<sup>th</sup>. The GEMS migrating raptor count near Duck Creek Pass begins Friday, Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> and goes until the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, weather permitting. Learn more: <http://lastchanceaudubon.org/>.



Montana Audubon is happy to announce their NEW Executive Director, Larry Berrin, who begins his post September first. A BIG LCAS "WELCOME" to Larry! We look forward to working together on conservation issues, locally and state-wide. You can learn more by visiting: <http://mtaudubon.org/>. Our Programs and Publicity Committee, Liz Hiltunen and Sandy Shull, have an intriguing lineup of programs for our monthly membership meetings. It promises to be a great year ahead! Join us!

*Janice Miller*  
President LCAS

# World Shorebirds Day Field Trip



*Killdeer by Shane Sater*

**Saturday, September 2**

**Leader: Coburn Currier**

Last Chance Audubon is again hosting a field trip to the south end of **CANYON FERRY LAKE WMA** in support of World Shorebirds Day (WSD). **This year our count will take place on Saturday, Sept 2nd.** An alternate date for inclement weather will be **Sunday, Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>**. We will meet in Helena to carpool to the southeast end of the reservoir and will walk into the area. Shore birding is best done by spotting scope, although many birds can be identified using binoculars. Participants are asked to bring a scope if they have one. Data from the census will be submitted through eBird. Information about World

Shorebirds Day is available at <https://worldshorebirdsday.wordpress.com/>. Group size will be limited. The group will meet at 7:00 a.m. in the Albertson's parking lot on Fee Street, and carpool from there. To participate, please email Coburn Currier: [clcurrier@hotmail.com](mailto:clcurrier@hotmail.com). Contact Coburn at 449-2574 in case of inclement weather-related date change.

## **Raptor ID Class and Field Trip Immersive, two-day raptor identification experience**

**September 22 & 23**

As part of International Hawk Migration Week, Steve Hoffman, raptor expert and former Executive Director of MT Audubon, will teach a raptor ID class for all skill levels on Friday, September 22. He will lead a Field Trip to the Golden Eagle Migration Survey (GEMS) study site near Duck Creek Pass in



*Golden Eagle by Ronan Dugan*

the Big Belt Mountains near Townsend on Saturday, September 23. Participants will practice identifying raptors with GEMS observers for several hours on Saturday. Raptors likely to be encountered: Golden Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel. Seventeen species have been observed at this site. Field trip participants can choose either a hike of 1.4 miles with 900-ft. elevation gain to our primary observation site or an easy stroll of 150 yards to our lower observation site.

Friday evening's class meets at Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave. from 6:30 – 8:30 pm. Saturday morning we meet in Helena at 8:00 am. Carpooling and high clearance and/or 4WD vehicles are

strongly recommended. Home by 5 pm. Dress for hiking and the often cool, breezy high-mountain weather conditions (8,000ft elevation). Bring lunch, water, snacks, daypack, binoculars, camera, and a walking stick if required.

GEMS is a cooperative effort between the USFS, MT FWP, MT Audubon, and Last Chance Audubon. All funds raised directly benefit the GEMS project. The workshop will be limited to 30 persons and pre-registration is required - early reservations are advised. To reserve a spot in the workshop register online at [GEMS Raptor ID Workshop Registration](#) or send your non-refundable \$50 check, payable to "Montana Audubon" to: Montana Audubon, Attn: GEMS Workshop, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624. Please put "GEMS Raptor ID" on the memo line of your check. Please include the name, email and contact information for the participant with your check. For more information contact Janice Miller at [jan2854@gmail.com](mailto:jan2854@gmail.com).

## **The View from Sevenmile Creek: August 2017**

The land is a gently contoured tract of grassland, heavily grazed in the past, with an eroding stream running through it. The occasion: a project by PPLT to restore the stream and develop a public trail. Since spring, Last Chance Audubon has been conducting bird monitoring on the site. We've focused on the alder patches, chokecherry thickets, and eroded banks along Sevenmile Creek, and every week there have been surprises - from rarities like an American Tree Sparrow at the beginning of May to changes in Yellow Warbler behavior from week to week. I get excited about unusual birds, but I am finding it very interesting to learn more about the lives of common ones, too. The story unfolds a bit more each week, and the cast of characters



*Sevenmile Creek by Shane Sater*

keeps growing. So far, we've found 92 species of birds, each with a story that touches this fabric of alder, water, and dry grass and connects it with people and ecology across the hemisphere.

I saw the first Cliff Swallow over Sevenmile Creek on May 3rd - one individual, flying alone. For months, it had presumably been on a journey I can not begin to comprehend, having spent our northern winter in Argentina or southern Brazil, over 5500 miles away. Through early July, I saw these striking swallows sporadically, flying over the creek and the grassland. I suspected they were adults on forays from a nesting colony under the Birdseye Road bridge, half a mile upstream. Everything changed in the middle of July. Birdsong was sparse, but Cliff Swallows were thick. I counted 34, including juveniles: flying, perching in a row of Chokecherries, and making harsh, starling-like calls. Had the colony fledged? In the next few weeks, activity dwindled, only to spike again on August 7th. Why the variability? Reading about migration, I learned that - while some colonies may stay much later than others - Cliff Swallows can start moving south as soon as early July. Perhaps I was seeing several different groups, already migrating through!

Stay tuned next month for more about the Sevenmile Creek birds. Have questions, or want to help with a survey? Contact me: [shsater@gmail.com](mailto:shsater@gmail.com).

*--by Shane Sater*

## Reserve Your Seed NOW!

Last Chance Audubon Society, in partnership with Birds & Beasleys, is now taking orders for the chapter's annual birdseed sale. Here's a chance to stock up on seed for your feathered winter guests and at the same time help our chapter raise money for educational and conservation projects. All profits from this sale go to LCAS. We'll have a sign-up sheet at the September meeting so you can place your order. Alternatively, you can call Birds & Beasleys (449-0904) or Sue Jackson (443-4486) to order seed - or if you're at the store buying birdseed, just let them know it's part of the LCAS fundraiser. The prices are the same as last year:

- 20# black oil sunflower seed, unshelled – \$28.00
- 20# medium sunflower chips, shelled – \$38.00
- 10# nyjer thistle – \$20.00
- 20# nyjer thistle – \$38.00
- 20# millet – \$22.00



*MacGillivray's Warbler by Shane Sater*

Please pick up your birdseed at Birds & Beasleys, 2 S. Last Chance Gulch, by Halloween. Thanks to Sandy Shull and her crew for helping with this event every year.

### WEB ALERT:

Last Chance Audubon is putting the finishing touches on a new and improved website. The website will go live this fall. Navigate to <http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/> and STAY TUNED!

## Birdathon 2017

This year's fundraiser featured four teams whose members solicited pledges from friends and family and then spent a 24-hour period recording as many bird species as possible. Below are some highlights from each Birdathon team:

1. **The Fledglings** (Janice Miller, Shane Sater, Larry Urban) - From the team report: "We reached our goal of 121 species at 8:15 p.m. and were ready to be content with that number. However, by sundown at 9:00 p.m. we had 124 species, and garnered three more, in the dark, including a Great Horned Owl crossing in front of our headlights. We ended our Count at 9:40 p.m. with 127 different species of birds, including an Eastern Phoebe, which has only been documented in Montana seven times previously."

2. **Brother, Can You Sparrow Dime?** (Don & Andrea Stierle, Brian Shovers, Jo Lace) - From their report: "We counted 120 species and raised \$1,095. Our highlights included a Ruddy Turnstone and Black-bellied Plover at Freezeout Lake, and a Bobolink, and a Black Crowned Night Heron."

3. **Bigfoot and Baldy** (Cedron Jones, Sara Toubman). Highlights from Sara: "We saw 96 species. The most unusual bird was a Lark Bunting. Birding Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge was pure joy. The wind kept the mosquitoes at bay! One of the highlights was literally hundreds of Black-necked Stilts on



*Birders at Work by Bob Martinka*

a vegetation mat in shallow water. Another highlight – we were the only people on the whole refuge.”

4. **Team Turnstone** (Hilary Turner, Stephen Turner) 120 Species. “First Big Day where we both got a lifer: Long-eared Owl on a nest guarding two nestlings (lifer for Stephen) and a Clark's Grebe (lifer for Hilary). Other firsts for a Team Turnstone Big Day: Wild Turkey and Peregrine Falcon.”

LCAS presents 50% of BIRDATHON revenue to Montana Audubon. After the check was presented, we heard from Norane Freistadt at the state office: *“From all of us at Montana Audubon, thank you for your very generous gift! We are pleased that your Birdathon was such a success and extremely grateful for the chapter's generosity. Your chapter's work, commitment, and generosity continue to make a positive impact as we strive to conserve Montana's remarkable diversity of birds, other wildlife and the habitat upon which they depend. Thank you, again, for your generous gift!”*

*Thanks to the Birdathon team members and all the folks who made pledges.*

*-- Report by Sue Jackson*

## **LCAS Board Meeting: August 2017**

### **Conservation**

- **GEMS Project** - Workshop on Sept-22-23 with **Steve Hoffman**; **Not a Silent Auction** funds in Nov and Dec committed to GEMS project; 2017 Observers are **Jeff Grayum** and **Hilary Turner**. *Dunkadoo* computer program (donated) to electronically record sightings.
- **Sevenmile Creek Survey for Prickly Pear Land Trust** – To date, 86 species and 12 confirmed breeding species. Contact **Shane Sater**, [shsater@gmail.com](mailto:shsater@gmail.com), if interested in participating in a weekly survey.
- **World Shorebirds Day** at Canyon Ferry scheduled for Sept. 2; if interested contact **Coburn Currier**, [clcurrier@hotmail.com](mailto:clcurrier@hotmail.com).
- **Burdock** removal at Kmart ponds on Aug 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **Education Committee**

- **Monthly Membership Meeting Programs** (Sept-May) are scheduled for the coming year.
- **Summer activities** - Distributed information at Earth Day and the Wetlands Festival; gave presentations at two preschool programs; and taught two Birding 101 classes.
- **Exploration Works**, working with **Montana Audubon**, is now exhibiting “*Birds and Beyond*” featuring bird and habitat photos.

### **Communications**

- **LCAS website platform change** underway – goal is new software in place by September.
- Effort beginning to **update LCAS brochure**; if interested in helping with graphic design, contact Sumner Sharpe, [mtnutmeg@gmail.com](mailto:mtnutmeg@gmail.com).

### **Other**

- Income from **Birdathon** - \$3828, with half going to MT Audubon.
- New LCAS leadership -
  - **LCAS CHAT** Editor: **Shane Sater**
  - **Set-up Coordinator** for membership meetings: **Doug Hansen**, [mthusker@charter.net](mailto:mthusker@charter.net)

*--Report by Sumner Sharpe*

## LCAS Treasurer's Summer Report: Fiscal Highlights

### Expenses

- Purchased **canvas tent** for the GEMS (Golden Eagle Migration Survey) raptor counters working in the Big Belt Mountains = \$2008
- **Scholarship** for Kristopher Bosch who is attending Montana Tech = \$1,000
- **Liability insurance** (annual policy) for our chapter activities = \$558

### Revenue

- **Membership & donations** = \$85
- **2017 Birdathon** = \$3,878

-- Report by Sue Jackson

## Membership Report

Please welcome **new National Audubon Society members**: Carolyn Clemens, Neil Tyree, Rex Short, Van Bass, Jennifer Bottomly, Leslie Smith, Janet Coughlin, Lee Watson and Angela Haddick.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members**: Gretchen Bingman, Suzy Holt, Tom Ryan, Betty Gutman, Jeffry Goldes, Mary Van Gilder, William Dunbar, Tedra Skaar, Michael Opar, Leona Tolstedt, Alice Kim, John Nix, Sam Samson, James Shaver, G. Wozniak, Jim Richard, James Driggers, Bill Cook, Heidi Youmans, Leona Tolstedt, Judy Sears, Randolph Bradley and Pete Strazdas.

**LCAS MEMBERSHIP:** A new membership or renewal is \$15 per household and is current for one year, January 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>. Please be sure we receive all your correct contact information by filling out a registration form located either in this newsletter or printed from <http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/html/membership.html>. Please send completed registration form and your \$15 check to: LCAS, PO Box 924, Helena, MT 59624.

**PRINTED and ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS:** We want all of our members to stay informed about chapter news and happenings. If you do not have access to email, staying current with your chapter membership to Last Chance Audubon Society guarantees that you will continue to receive a printed version of our newsletter. If you do have email access, please help us keep printing costs to a minimum and opt to receive our newsletter electronically. Those dollars we save will be spent for important bird habitat, education and outreach. Thank you.

**NAS MEMBERSHIP:** If you would like National Audubon Society membership information or to renew with them, please direct an email to [www.customerservice@audubon.org](mailto:www.customerservice@audubon.org) or contact them directly by phone at 1-844-428-3828. We are unable to forward memberships to National Audubon.

-- Sharon Dewart-Hansen, Membership Chair; [smdewarthansen@charter.net](mailto:smdewarthansen@charter.net) or 422-4546



*Bullock's Oriole by Shane Sater*

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<https://www.facebook.com/lastchanceaudubon>

Website: <http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/>

**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Clip and mail to:  
PO Box 924, Helena MT  
59624 with check for  
\$15.

All contributions are tax  
deductible.

Name

Address

City/State

Zip

Phone

Email

**LCAS BOARD**

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**Field Trips:** open

**MT Audubon State Office:** 443-3949