

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    February 2018*

---

## **Birds and Wetland Mitigation in Montana**

**Tuesday, February 13, 2018**  
**Montana WILD, 2668**  
**Broadwater Ave.**

**Cookies and Conversation**  
**6:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.**

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

Birds often seen at wetland mitigation sites in Montana will be the focus of this presentation by Larry Urban, Wetland Mitigation Specialist. A variety of shorebirds, waterfowl, cranes and neotropical migrants – as well as amphibians, reptiles, and other wildlife – can be seen in these restored habitats. Larry will describe the comprehensive Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) wetland mitigation program, which has restored or created over 2,000 acres of wetlands since 1996. He will share bird and wildlife photos from his annual site visits to monitor the development and health of statewide aquatic resource projects.

Larry Urban has over 30 years of experience in wetland delineation, assessment, monitoring and



*Sandhill Cranes near Ennis by Larry Urban*

mitigation site development for both the New Jersey and Montana DOT. He developed MDT's annual mitigation and monitoring programs for managing aquatic resource mitigation sites on private, state, federal and tribal lands. He participates in continuing education and collegiate courses as an instructor in wetland regulations, endangered plant species, mitigation monitoring, and aquatic resource restoration. Larry is a member of the Association of State Wetland Managers. He is also the recipient of the 2017 Montana Wetland Stewardship Award for his untiring efforts to protect, preserve and restore wetland ecosystems. He is an avid birder and fly-fisherman. He likes to tie flies and works with veterans from the Fort Harrison VA hospital.



2018 – Year of the Bird.

Here at LCAS we are all about “BIRDS”. We offer field trips, we conduct surveys, and we have presentations featuring birds, far and near. We LOVE BIRDS!

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, protecting migratory birds, their nests, and eggs, is – as the National Geographic Society describes it – “the most powerful and important bird-protection law ever passed.” This treaty was subsequently signed by many other countries, including Great Britain, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Russia.

National Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Geographic and Bird Life International are joining forces with organizations around the globe to honor this 100-year milestone with “**2018, The Year of the Bird**” (<http://www.audubon.org/yearofthebird>) and so are we at LCAS. We encourage you to make a pledge to take simple steps each month to protect birds in your area.

The first opportunity might be **The Great Backyard Bird Count** coming up February 16-19, 2018. This one you do on your own – we don’t gather as a group. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online. For more information, go to: [gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org).

What birds are you seeing in your backyard? Which birds are missing from your winter feeders? Who is new or unusual? These observations are important to gain a snapshot of how birds are faring. Consider tracking birds in your backyard for science – and for the birds.

Janice Miller  
President, LCAS



*White-winged Crossbill by Bob Martinka*

## **2018 LCAS Scholarship for High School Seniors**

If you know of a high school senior who might be interested in applying for a 2018 LCAS scholarship, the submission deadline is April 15. Interested seniors can contact Christina Murgel at Helena High or Rebecca Troianos at Capital High for the application information, or visit our website:

<http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/learning/scholarship/>. LCAS offers up to two \$1000 scholarships each year. Students must have an interest in pursuing college/university studies related to ornithology, habitat protection or restoration, land conservation, and/or protection and restoration of wildlife. Areas of study interest could include the sciences, environmental studies, public policy, journalism/communications, and geography.

-- *Sumner Sharpe*

# **Wildfire in Montana: Its History, Science, and Impact on Habitat**

## **Last Chance Audubon's March Natural History Lecture Series**

Please mark these Mondays on your calendar! All of the talks start at 7:00 p.m. at Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave. Please note that the venue and day of the week is different from last year. The March 19 and March 26 talks are still tentative, so stay tuned for confirmation in our March newsletter.

### **March 5 – Options for Dealing with Climate Change and Wildfire** *by Steve Running*

Steve Running received his PhD in Forest Ecology from Colorado State and has been Professor of Global Ecology at the University of Montana since 1979. He is a Land Team Leader for the NASA Earth Observing System, author of over 300 scientific articles, and shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.



*Western Tanager by Bob Martinka*

### **March 12 – Ecology & Restoration of Montana's Fire-Dependent Forests** *by Stephen Arno and Carl Fiedler*

Stephen Arno earned a PhD in forestry & plant science from University of Montana in 1970. He retired from the Fire Sciences Lab in Missoula in 1999 as research forester. He has practiced restoration forestry on his family Ponderosa Pine forest for forty years.

Carl Fiedler retired from the University of Montana Forestry School in 2007 after attending grad school, serving in the U.S. Army, and working at the USFS Intermountain Research Station. Fiedler and Arno have co-authored three books on forest and fire management.

### **March 19 – Birds and Fire** *by Kristina Smucker*

Kristina Smucker is a wildlife biologist for Montana FWP in Great Falls and has extensively studied the impact of wildfires on bird habitat. She will take us through forests ravaged by wildfire to examine how different bird communities respond.

### **March 26 – Elk and Wildfire in the Bitterroot** *by Kelly Proffitt*

Kelly Proffitt, a wildlife biologist from the Bozeman FWP office, has spent several years documenting the effect of wildfire on elk populations in the Bitterroot.

## **Bylaws Update**

The LCAS chapter bylaws are due for revision. In general the bylaws date back to 1988, though there was a bit of review and revision in 2000. If bylaws are your thing and you'd like to work on a revision committee, please contact Sue Jackson (443-4486). Could be fun!

## **Calling All Short-eared Owl Enthusiasts**

The Owl Research Institute is embarking on a 3-year collaborative study to monitor Short-eared Owl populations in the western U.S. The study will rely on volunteers to make it a success.

Project WAfLS (Western Asio flammeus Landscape Study)



*Short-eared Owl by Shane Sater*

involves 15 other agencies and organizations across 8 states and is designed to assess the population status, trends, and threats against the Short-eared Owl – an enigmatic, open-country species.

This project, funded by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is a rare example of cooperation and collaboration on a large scale and is an opportunity to influence and focus conservation and restoration activities for this species. This species-specific monitoring program will provide the most robust population data for Short-eared Owls to date.

The effort aims to complete a number of coordinated surveys across California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. The survey design is well-suited to volunteer participation and will rely primarily on volunteer citizen-scientists to collect data.

Volunteers will be asked to select one of 50 grids in the state and will be responsible for two 1.5 hour visits, each occurring in a separate 3 week window (March/April and April/May). The timing for a given route is dependent upon elevation. It is a road based survey (8 - 11 points along a secondary road, separated by 1/2 mile) that starts 100 minutes before darkness, and finishes 10 minutes after darkness. The survey timing is set to coincide with the Short-eared Owls' elaborate courtship displays. Check out this video from partner Neil Paprocki (Hawkwatch International) in Utah:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-YKEmTvEQE>.

More information, maps, and sign-up will be coming shortly. In the meantime, if you're interested in learning more about this ambitious project or want to know how to participate, please contact Matt Larson at the Owl Research Institute: [owlinstitute@outlook.com](mailto:owlinstitute@outlook.com) or (701) 866-5771.

## **GEMS Fundraising**

During November and December, LCAS dedicated its fundraising efforts to helping the Golden Eagle Migration Survey (GEMS) project. This included any money raised at both of our monthly meetings – much of it as part of the "Not A Silent Auction" event – as well as all other donations made to LCAS during this time period. As a result of your generosity, it was a success! The \$3,270 raised in November and December helped us exceed our goal of \$2,000 overall and receive an anonymous \$2,000 matching grant! Thanks to everyone who contributed.

-- Sue Jackson

## **Save the Date - Wings Across the Big Sky**

**June 8 – 10, 2018**

**Red Lion Hotel, Kalispell**

Montana Audubon's 19th annual Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival is coming to Kalispell in June 2018! This longstanding community event draws birders and wildlife enthusiasts from around the state and beyond, to celebrate Montana's birds and the landscapes they inhabit. The festival is co-sponsored by the *Flathead Audubon Society*.

Visit Montana Audubon's website for festival updates: [mtaudubon.org](http://mtaudubon.org).

- *Field trips to Glacier and other breathtaking areas in the Flathead region*
- *Silent Auction: bid on a private tour to an amazing Montana destination!*
- *Birding & Conservation Presentations*
- *Evening Banquet, Dessert Auction and More!*

**wings**   
**across the big sky**



*Ferruginous Hawk  
by Bob Martinka*

## Clancy Elementary School

On December 11, LCAS members met with Shelley Stewart, a third grade teacher at Clancy School, and her pupils in the school library. They presented the school with three pairs of binoculars and four books, including: Young Birders Guide (for kids up to 10 years old), The National Geographic Kids Bird Guide (for tweens), Wild about Rocky Mountain Birds, and a book about hummingbirds, donated by Birds and Beasleys. The binoculars and books will be kept in the library and be available for use by all Clancy teachers and grades. Thanks to Bill Rainey, long-time birding volunteer at the school, who worked with Shelley to initiate the request; to Stephen Turner for checking and cleaning the binoculars (which had been purchased previously for another purpose); and to Sandy Shull for donation of the hummingbird book.

-- Sumner Sharpe



*Bill Rainey and Sumner Sharpe with Clancy School students. Photo by Bill Rainey.*

## Helena CBC Results

Thanks to the record number of participants who helped make the 2017 Helena CBC a success! Together, our 58 observers tallied 64 species of birds, which is fairly typical for this count. Some of the particularly notable sightings were Cackling Geese, a White-winged Scoter, and 4 Blue Jays. We set new record high counts for several species, including Rough-legged Hawks and Rusty Blackbirds. Follow the [2018 CBC Results](#) link for details!

## The View from Sevenmile Creek: December, January

I stopped abruptly at the edge of the snow-covered, shrubby flat along the creek, where the Willow Flycatchers sang in the summer. There was a massive lump perched in plain sight in the row of Chokecherries near the hill, where no lump had been the week before. The Great Horned Owl eyed me unconcernedly, 20 meters away, its huge yellow eyes half-closed. How incredible to see this ferocious hunter so close! So different from the other time I saw a Great Horned at Sevenmile Creek, on October 4, when the bird flushed from dense cover, then flushed again, and I had to skirt far around it to leave it in peace.



*Sevenmile Creek in January by Shane Sater*

Why was this owl so visible, and why was it unharassed by magpies or chickadees? I watched the owl's body language carefully as I took photos, ready to move away if it showed any sign of concern, but it remained calm. Once I finished taking photos I backed off slowly and continued upstream – only to find a SECOND Great Horned Owl in an alder less than 350 meters away, this one better-hidden.

One owl in October could well be a wandering fledgling or a “floating” nonterritorial adult. Two owls in December got me to wondering. Might they be a breeding pair? Great Horned Owl pairs stay on territory year-round. According to Birds of North America, these fierce, generalist predators choose more variable nest sites than any other North American bird – old raptor nests, power poles, buildings – even on the ground. Might these two be nesting in trees around a nearby dwelling? In shrubs, upstream or downstream along the creek? Under a bridge? In spite of the very infrequent sightings here during our surveys, might they be using the area much more than I had suspected?

Overall, winter bird activity has continued to be slow here, with small numbers of 10 species or less on each survey. Rough-legged Hawks, Black-billed Magpies, and Common Ravens are standbys; a Townsend's Solitaire is still hanging out in the area, and a shrike has been here and gone a few times. I have heard redpolls on most surveys but only rarely get a good look. A Ring-necked Pheasant feeding under a Russian-olive recently was a stunning, blue and red surprise. Though slow, the winter surveys continue to be so interesting that I don't have room to mention half of it here.



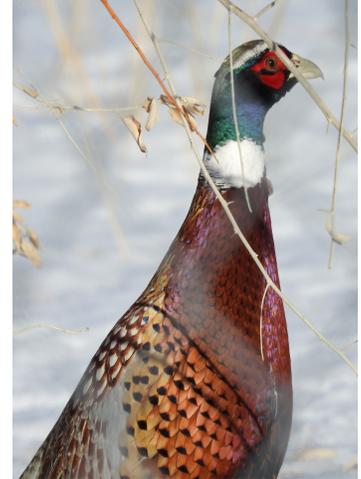
*Great Horned Owl by Shane Sater*

If you hear a Great Horned Owl hooting in the vicinity of Sevenmile Creek – a sign of a territorial pair – please contact me.

-- *Shane Sater*

## **LCAS Board Highlights - January 2018 Meeting**

**Overview:** this meeting was primarily focused on getting acquainted with Larry Berrin, the new Montana Audubon (MA) Executive Director. He was accompanied by Amy Seaman, MA's Conservation Program Manager. After a brief business meeting, the Board members described the activities in which they are involved for LCAS.



*Ring-necked Pheasant by  
Shane Sater*

**Here are some items of interest and new information that were discussed at the meeting.**

### **Conservation/Citizen Science**

- A wide-ranging discussion of ideas, including renewed efforts in the Lake Helena IBA (MA), potential placement of kestrel boxes, possible invasive species removal at K-mart Ponds, continuing effort with species of concern, such as curlews (MA), potential placement of monofilament tubes (MA), and other bird monitoring opportunities, such as the ongoing efforts at Sevenmile Creek, working with Prickly Pear Land Trust, and recording CBC results on eBird. Have conservation project ideas? Contact Brian Shovers.
- A sub-committee was formed to work with Amy Seaman on drafting a plan going forward with the Lake Helena IBA: Shane Sater, Coburn Currier, and Stephen Turner.
- The 2018 Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 15. Coburn Currier will continue as Coordinator.
- Stephen Turner reported on LCAS volunteer efforts to organize and manage the 2017 GEMS project, and we discussed considerations for the long-term future of GEMS. If you have any comments or suggestions, contact Janice Miller.
- If you see a FWP toilet without a screen on the vent, please notify Janice or FWP. Screen placements save owls and other cavity-nesting birds from a terrible predicament.

### **Education**

- LCAS Scholarships – Available to graduating high school seniors planning to pursue a course of study consistent with the LCAS mission. Check our website for more information.
- 2018 Field Trips are being organized by Don Skaar. We discussed a variety of locations and routes, as well as the importance of getting the word out. Contact Don with trip ideas.
- Stephen Turner will offer Birding 101, a class for beginners, in early June at MT WILD. If you know anyone who might be interested, have them watch for more information.

- If you know of any teachers or schools (pre-school through high school) with an interest in birds and birding and are looking for advice and support, contact Sumner.

### **Communications**

- Larry reported on the strategic planning effort by the Montana Audubon Board and staff, and presented the DRAFT of goals set by the Board.
- We discussed the possibility of a mid-summer newsletter or email to update members on field trip options in late summer and early fall.

### **Other**

- Monthly membership meetings will be held at MT WILD this spring.
- A subcommittee was formed to update the LCAS bylaws. If you'd like to lend your talents, contact Sue Jackson or Sharon Dewart-Hansen.

## **Membership Report**

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society** new members: Brad Robinson, Emily Wong, Nancy Matheson, Curtis Larsen, Mike Butzlaff, Larry Berrin, David Slaughter, Ron Waterman, Pam Campbell and Jean Mehrens.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members**: Steven & Catherine Askam, Jan Donaldson & Mary Anne Guggenheim, Don & Donna Eisenmenger, Laurie Ekanger, Dan Ellison & Elizabeth Fournier, Constance Enzweiler, John & Debrah Fosket, Carolyn Fox, Constance Herzig, William Hubber, Chris & Carol Hunter, Leonard John, Marie McAlear, Earl McCurley, Sharon & Slim Miller, Shane Sater, Berma Saxon, Pete Strazdas, Stephen & Patty Turner, Len & Sandy Wheeler, Lowell Anderson, B. Alan Davis, Fran Penner-Ray, Rich Wirak, Joanne Thun, Kathy Van Hook, Mary Alice Chester, Carol & Rodney Bischoff, Neal & Mary Ruedisili, Suzy Holt, Bill Rainey and Greg & Wendy Wheeler.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members**: Marilyn Hayes and Donald Troutfetter.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members**: Kristin Bakula, Ann Bauchman, Stan & Glenda Bradshaw, Constance & David Cole, Eric Feaver, Louie Gloege, Margaret Hubber, William Hubber, Shirley Hudson, Carolyn Mazurek, Deborah Stafford and Beatrice Vogel.

**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 [www.lastchanceaudubon.org](http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org). Please send completed registration form and your \$15 check to: LCAS, PO Box 924, Helena, MT 59624.

**PRINTED and ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS:** We want all 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

Last Chance Audubon Society  
PO Box 924  
Helena, MT 59624

First-Class  
Postage  
Required  
Helena MT 59601



<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

**PRESIDENT:** Janice Miller,  
439-5762, [jan2854@gmail.com](mailto:jan2854@gmail.com)

**SECRETARY:** Brian Shovers, 443-  
6640, [sholace0848@gmail.com](mailto:sholace0848@gmail.com)

**TREASURER:** Sue Jackson, 443-  
4486, [suejacksonmt@gmail.com](mailto:suejacksonmt@gmail.com)

**WEBSITE/BOARD:** Stephen  
Turner, 521-0000,  
[turnstonest@gmail.com](mailto:turnstonest@gmail.com)

**EDUCATION/BOARD:** Sumner  
Sharpe, [mtnutmeg@gmail.com](mailto:mtnutmeg@gmail.com)

**NEWSLETTER/BOARD:** Shane  
Sater, 208-597-0488,  
[shsater@gmail.com](mailto:shsater@gmail.com)

**MEMBERSHIP/BOARD:** Sharon  
Dewart-Hansen, 422-4546,  
[smdewarthansen@charter.net](mailto:smdewarthansen@charter.net)

**BOARD AT LARGE:** Coburn  
Currier,  
[clcurrier@hotmail.com](mailto:clcurrier@hotmail.com)

**BOARD AT LARGE:** Bob  
Martinka, 449-3313,  
[rmartink@aol.com](mailto:rmartink@aol.com)

**BOARD AT LARGE:** Jo Lace, 443-  
6640

**BOARD AT LARGE:** Don Skaar,  
442-3254, [tedradon@gmail.com](mailto:tedradon@gmail.com)

### LCAS COMMITTEE CHAIRS/CONTACTS

**Birdathon:** Jo Lace 443-6640,  
[sholace0848@gmail.com](mailto:sholace0848@gmail.com)

**Birdseed Sale:** Sue Jackson & Sandy  
Shull, 443-4486 or 449-0904

**Christmas Bird Count:** Coburn  
Currier, [clcurrier@hotmail.com](mailto:clcurrier@hotmail.com)

**Conservation:** Brian Shovers, 443-  
6640, [sholace0848@gmail.com](mailto:sholace0848@gmail.com)

**Monthly Program:** Sandy Shull & Liz  
Hiltunen, 449-0904 or 227-5492

**Publicity:** Liz Hiltunen, 227-5492,  
[lhiltunen@q.com](mailto:lhiltunen@q.com)

**Silent Auction:** Sandy Shull & Jo  
Lace, 449-0904 or 443-6640

**Meeting Set-up:** Doug Hansen,  
[mthusker@charter.net](mailto:mthusker@charter.net)

**Field Trips:** Don Skaar, 442-3254,  
[tedradon@gmail.com](mailto:tedradon@gmail.com)

**Habitat:** open

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