

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    November 2018*

## **Birding Central Brazil: The Pantanal and Cerrado**

**Tues, November 6, 2018**

**\*\*Please Note – Program is the  
First Tuesday!**

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

**Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave.**

**FREE – All Are Welcome**

If you are a birder and enjoy travel, then Brazil's Pantanal region should be on your bucket list, according to Bob Martinka. Join him as he describes his recent birding trip to this region, one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world. The birds, wildlife, and vegetation are a reflection of this diversity. The Pantanal is a vast, seasonally flooded wetland, perhaps the largest in the world, and the birding there is world-renowned. The adjacent Cerrado to the north is a woodland/grassland region that is equally diverse, but threatened by agricultural development. Don't miss Bob's exceptional photography of the colorful tropical birds of these areas, including the Blue-and-yellow Macaw, Hyacinth Macaw and the Agami Heron.

Bob Martinka worked for nearly 30 years with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In his



*Blue-and-yellow Macaw by Bob Martinka.*

career with FWP, he began as a field biologist and then held a number of positions, eventually becoming Deputy Director. Since retirement, Bob has become an avid photographer, traveling around the globe to pursue his interest in most wild things, including birds, dragonflies, mammals, and flowers. His passion for photography has allowed him to share his outdoor experiences and exceptional images with many others. Bob has served for 12 years on the Montana Audubon Board and is an active member of the Last Chance Audubon Board.



## Happy 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to Birds & Beasleys!

We CELEBRATE Sandy Shull and the staff at Birds & Beasleys for the many ways they undergird Last Chance Audubon Society:

- Financial – Donating funds from annual Birdseed Sale each fall
- Programs – Identifying potential speakers and programs
- Field Trips – Saturday mornings all summer long
- Bulletin Board – Posting the LCAS newsletter and posters advertising upcoming events



Birds and Beasleys brings birds and birding into focus for locals, as well as visitors, all year long. Sandy and the staff are a rich source of information about birds, habitat, and diet for anyone inquiring. They offer conservation education seven days a week in ways that our local Audubon chapter simply cannot provide. They are invaluable, and much appreciated!

A BIG LCAS “THANK YOU” to SANDY SHULL and BIRDS & BEASLEYS!

Janice Miller  
President, LCAS



*Agami Heron by Bob Martinka. Come to the November program and learn about these secretive waders!*

## LCAS Fall Fundraiser

As November and December approach, LCAS looks to its members for support of our Fall Fundraiser. Contributions for the fundraiser are 100% tax deductible and money raised stays in the Helena area to support education, habitat protection and environmental advocacy. In the past, LCAS has supported important projects such as the Charles Van Hook Wetlands, Golden Eagle Migration Survey (GEMS), and the ongoing bird surveys at Sevenmile Creek.

The LCAS board is reviewing several possibilities for use of donations this year. Some of these include a contribution to help build a birding blind at the Helena Regulating Reservoir, placement of a park style bench (similar to the LCAS bench at Spring Meadow) also at the Regulating Reservoir, and continued support for Sevenmile Creek and GEMS.

Please consider LCAS in your year-end giving. Any amount is helpful as LCAS continues its support of conservation in the Helena valley. In advance, thank you!

## New Bird Checklist Available

The new Field Checklist of Montana Birds, published August 2018, is now available. Hardcopies are available at FWP Headquarters, Montana Audubon, and at LCAS monthly meetings. Find a PDF copy [here](#).

## Birdseed

If you placed an order during the annual LCAS birdseed sale, please pick up your seed at Birds & Beasleys by November 15 if possible. If you didn't order seed, but need some for this winter, just visit Birds & Beasleys before November 15 and ask them to include your purchase in our chapter's fundraiser. A big thanks to Sandy Shull and her staff for helping every year with the birdseed sale!

## November Board Meeting

The next LCAS Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 13, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The meeting is open to everyone. If you're interested in attending, call Sue Jackson (443-4486) for the location.



*Belted Kingfisher by Dan Ellison, along Priest Pass Road near a Barn Swallow colony.*



*Canyon Wren by Bob Martinka.*

## Montana Audubon Mid-October GEMS Update

The first two weeks of October brought low-lying clouds and snow to the Golden Eagle Migration Survey site atop Duck Creek Pass. For nearly a dozen days the clouds obscured visibility, and just five surveys were conducted. One of those days, observers counted zero birds.

During the 21 days of counting so far this season, the project has recorded 1235 individuals representing 17 raptor species. The first Rough-legged Hawks showed up on October 3, and their numbers are likely to increase during the month. For many in Montana, this bird is a true harbinger of winter. Birds continue to pass through the count site very well fed.

The distinctive bulge of a raptor's full crop can be readily visible when birds fly close or are backlit by the sun, but it is still unknown where their favored hunting grounds are. By now, some eagles may be finding the gut piles left behind by bow hunters that have been successful in the area, but surely many others are benefitting from rodents in the valleys below.



*Wintry GEMS site by Shane Sater.*

### GEMS Raptor Counts (total as of mid-October)

- 658 Golden Eagles
- 162 Sharp-shinned Hawks
- 84 Cooper's Hawks
- 84 Red-tailed Hawks
- 45 Bald Eagles
- 40 American Kestrels
- 29 Northern Goshawks
- 26 Northern Harriers
- 20 Rough-legged Hawks
- 18 Peregrine Falcons
- 12 Broad-winged Hawks
- 8 Prairie Falcons
- 7 Merlins
- 6 Turkey Vultures
- 6 Ospreys
- 4 Swainson's Hawks
- 1 Ferruginous Hawk

Find more information here: <http://dunkadoo.org/explore/golden-eagle-migration-survey/radio-tower-west-slope-raptor-count-2018>.

-- Amy Seaman

## Sevenmile Creek Survey Stipend

Most LCAS members know about the work Shane Sater has been doing collecting data at Sevenmile Creek, a property owned by the Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT). Shane presented a program for us last May describing his efforts surveying birds and other wildlife at Sevenmile and he continues to provide updates in our monthly newsletters. Shane, who started the surveys in April 2017, volunteers his time to visit the area weekly in spring, summer, and fall and as often as possible in winter to record how the Sevenmile Creek area is being used. Last year, LCAS awarded a \$500 stipend to Shane to support the important work he's doing and, at its September meeting, the Board voted to renew that \$500 stipend for the coming year. Shane's survey work is a collaboration between LCAS and PPLT.



*Black-necked Stilts at the Helena Regulating Reservoir by Liz Hiltunen.*

## **LCAS Board Meeting Highlights: October 2018**

- Fall fundraising goal: projects such as a viewing blind and/or bench at the Regulating Reservoir; follow-up effort planned to get help with design and approval for placement.
- Birdathon final results: \$4200 raised, half of which goes to support Montana Audubon.
- Membership report: 5 new LCAS members in the past month.
- Education report: two new contacts – Four Georgians teacher and Cottonwood student – follow-up underway; high school scholarship notices to be sent out in November; Carroll College student research grant discussed – should be for student-initiated summer projects, tied to the LCAS mission statement, and located in the Helena region.
- Conservation: letters prepared to support I-185, as well as the established stakeholder approach to Sage Grouse protection.
- Eagle Scout Candidate, Sean Felter, presented a life-size, wooden raptor silhouette prototype of a Sharp-shinned Hawk; described reduced budget request; and has Montana WILD “okay” about placement of exhibits of seven area raptor species.
- K-Mart Ponds discussion: LCAS to encourage City and Montana Conservation Corps to focus on removal of Russian Olive trees, identified as invasive and spreading.
- LCAS Board opening – if interested, contact Janice for more information.
- Reminder: Christmas Bird Count Date set for December 15, 2018.

## The View from Sevenmile Creek: October

Note: The surveys on Sevenmile Creek are a collaboration between LCAS and Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT). PPLT acquired the Sevenmile property in 2016 for open space and habitat purposes. Stream restoration activities in the area are ongoing, and public access is not permitted at this time. PPLT provides access to LCAS volunteers specifically to conduct these bird surveys. Questions? Contact Nate Kopp, [nate@pricklypearlt.org](mailto:nate@pricklypearlt.org).

It is that bittersweet time of year when the bird numbers are dwindling at Sevenmile Creek, the landscape is gorgeous, and winter is on its way. The leaves have dropped from the alders as I write this. The willows are flaming orange. A surprising number of juicy black fruits still hang from bare chokecherry twigs, but the robins are dwindling. I have yet to see a single Townsend's Solitaire, though they were common here last fall.

Last week I had an unbelievable survey. I had thought migration was petering out, but the birds astounded me: a Palm Warbler bobbing its tail and foraging low along the creek; six species of sparrows, including three Harris's Sparrows and a White-throated Sparrow; a Hermit Thrush scratching under a thicket.

Today, on the other hand, was the bittersweet side of fall, when the quiet makes me think of all the birds that have left and won't be back for many months – if they survive their journeys. The Bank Swallow colony has been empty for months already. The warblers have gone now, and the Lincoln's Sparrows, and apparently even the meadowlarks.

So, as Janice Miller and I were walking back along the creek, I was astounded when a *wren* flushed up from an alder sapling, flew across the creek, and blended in with a woody tangle. Over the next 20 minutes, we glimpsed it three times, perhaps five seconds in total. Broad gray-white eyebrow, pale underside, short barred brown tail... and sneaky. Finally Janice had to head back and I stayed a bit longer, waiting for movement. The low-foraging wren remained hidden; the brush appeared deserted. I had given up and started walking when it flushed again from the streambank. Another quick glimpse, but this one sufficient: black and white streaks on the back confirmed a Marsh Wren.

Here, away from the dense marshes of cattail and bulrush, this is a rare bird. It brings me back to the only other time I met one here, a cold April day at the opposite end of the season, the chokecherries just leafing out. A brief, surprising glimpse in a willow, identified finally by the song.

What is the story of Marsh Wrens here? Are they rare but regular migrants, sneaking through the shrubs each spring and fall? Each survey adds sightings, and each sighting tells a story. As the stories grow, the habitat is growing too. Will the new ponds host nesting Marsh Wrens one day? Time will tell.

-- Shane Sater



*Last chokecherry leaves by Shane Sater.*



*White-throated Sparrow by Shane Sater.*

## Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Kurt Olofson, Norma Tirrell & Sande Wilson.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Alan Davis, Christian Frazza, Patricia Helvey, Sue Jackson, Fran Penner-Ray & Robert Ray, Jeff Savage & Tracy Cook, Cliff & Catherine Sheets & Christie Strock.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Sandra McIntyre, Mary Gardinier, Keith Crosbie, Randi Hood, Derik Reed & William Hall.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Jim Erickson & S. Eriksen.

**LCAS MEMBERSHIP:** A new membership or renewal is \$15 per household and is current for one year, January 1 through December 31. 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.



*American Kestrel by Janice Miller.*



*Tundra Swans watching a coyote just after sunrise on Benton Lake NWR by Dan Ellison.*

**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 [customerservice@audubon.org](mailto:customerservice@audubon.org) or contact them directly by phone at 1-844-428-3826. We are unable to forward memberships to National Audubon.

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

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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 \_\_\_\_\_

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