

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    April 2019*

## **Birding Adventures in Argentina**

**Tuesday, April 9, 2019**

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

**Cookies and Conversation 6:30 – 7:00**

**Montana WILD  
2668 Broadwater Ave.**

**FREE - All Are Welcome**

Eager to share their birding adventures in Argentina, Leslie and Jim Smith will describe their bird and wildlife watching experiences during four trips to the area. In 2009 they visited Argentina for the first time: a fly-fishing adventure in Patagonia which included a five-day float on the Chubut River. It turned out to be a spectacular bird watching experience and they took hundreds of photos. On their subsequent trips they visited Patagonia, Alerces National Park and the Atlantic coast. Their presentation will include a variety of bird and wildlife photos from the various regions, including the Magellanic Penguin, Burrowing Parrot, Black-necked Swan, Buff Necked Ibis, and Southern Lapwing.



*Chucao by Jim Smith.*

Leslie and Jim Smith describe themselves as avid amateur birders, but not life-list types. They have always had an interest in birds. Both are from California. Leslie grew up in the San Francisco Bay area where she went hiking/bird watching every weekend with her parents in the Coast Range and along the Pacific coast. In the summers they were in the Sierras. Jim grew up in the northern Sacramento valley, a flyway for migration. Both are retired from the mortgage business. Leslie has been teaching fitness classes for 20 years. Jim is enjoying retirement and both love to spend their spare time continuing to discover Montana.

### **Upcoming Election**

Nominations are open for LCAS board members. The election will be held at the May meeting. If you'd like to make a nomination, contact Sue Jackson (443-4486).



# President's Perch

**Surveying Birds**

**March 21, 2019**

The birds are returning! YAY! No, wait. There's snow on the ground. A LOT of snow on the ground. There aren't many bugs for the Mountain Bluebirds, nor open water for waterfowl. And yet, they are returning. Will they die of starvation?

What about the flooding in Nebraska? How will that affect the Sandhill Cranes migrating through there?

Certainly, these are trying conditions, and no doubt some birds will die. However, birds have always lived in nature. Nature includes natural disasters, yet we still have birds.

Birds are resourceful – they find the smallest amount of open water along the warm edge of the lake where the lake ice has melted, which provides open water for a few at a time. Or they may find the warmer side of a mountain to look for seeds and berries among the more open vegetation.

When we do the same bird survey, year after year, it gives us data. We can see whether the number of birds has dwindled due to various conditions. Conditions like natural disasters – snow and flood – and human impact – from skyscrapers to wind turbines to pesticides. We can also note that some species of birds are migrating earlier/later, moving farther uphill, or moving farther north to find appropriate habitat.

All of this helps us keep our fingers on the pulse of bird population trends. At LCAS our Christmas Bird Count gives us 64 years of data to compare with our most recent count, and we can see that our local numbers of birds were, in fact, down this winter.



*Prairie Falcon on the Warm Springs CBC.  
Photo by Janice Miller.*

Next up, we have the Long-billed Curlew survey to check their numbers against previous counts. We can see for ourselves: with the natural disasters of this winter, are curlew numbers down?

Reading the numbers may inspire us to do as our Mission Statement suggests, and promote “...education, habitat protection, and environmental advocacy.”

What will we do?

Janice Miller  
President, LCAS

## Field Trip Season

*In spite of the lingering snow, field trip season is almost upon us! Stay tuned for more birding excursions soon: check the LCAS website and next month's newsletter.*

### May 18: Blackfoot Valley and Brown's Lake

Leader: Bob Martinka (Details TBD)

### May 19: Warm Springs Pond

Leaders: Brian Shovers and Jo Lace (Details TBD)

### June 1: Mullan Road

Leader: Sharon Dewart-Hansen Meet: 6:30 a.m.

A trip to Mullan Road/Austin Road on the west side of McDonald Pass. As many as 46 species can be seen.

Possible birds in this area are: **Veery, Northern Waterthrush, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Lazuli Bunting.** Contact Sharon Dewart-Hansen at [smdewarthansen@charter.net](mailto:smdewarthansen@charter.net) by May 30 to reserve a spot. Meet at the west end of the Lundy Center (on Euclid) at 6:30 a.m. and expect to return by roughly 12:00 p.m.



Veery along Austin Road by Dan Ellison.

## Wings Across the Big Sky

Montana Audubon will host its 20th annual Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival at the Cottonwood Inn in Glasgow on June 7-9, 2019. This longstanding community event celebrates Montana's native bird species and typically draws hundreds of wildlife enthusiasts from across the state and beyond. For 2019 the festival lead sponsor is American Prairie Reserve.

Online registration is now open. Register here: [mtaudubon.org/birding/montana-bird-festival/](http://mtaudubon.org/birding/montana-bird-festival/). Field trips are filling up fast!



Lupines on the prairie by John Lambing.

## Conservation Award Nominations: Deadline May 20

Montana Audubon' is accepting nominations for their 2019 conservation awards. Find nomination forms on the MT Audubon website: [mtaudubon.org/about/awards/](http://mtaudubon.org/about/awards/). Please submit via email to [info@mtaudubon.org](mailto:info@mtaudubon.org) (preferred) or by mail to Montana Audubon, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624. Award winners will be announced at the Bird Festival banquet in Glasgow on June 8. Categories are below:

- **Conservationist of the Year.** For an individual who has provided significant wildlife conservation achievement in Montana.
- **Environmental Educator of the Year.** For a person who has shown outstanding achievement in educating others about birds, other wildlife, and conservation of habitat.
- **Citizen Scientist of the Year.** For a person contributing significantly to our knowledge and understanding of birds and their habitats through monitoring and observations.
- **Lifetime Achievement Award.** For an Audubon volunteer who has dedicated extraordinary effort, time and energy to shape the activities and successes of a local Audubon Chapter and/or Montana Audubon.

## The View from Sevenmile Creek: March

*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).*

March 17. Jeff Van Tine and I traversed the snowy landscape on cross-country skis, wondering if we'd see any signs of spring.

Horned Larks were the first hint. Sweet "se-put" calls announced their movements over the glaringly sunny fields, one or two at a time. The trickle of larks continued all morning, the first in months.

Next was the call of a Mountain Bluebird. It remained hidden, somewhere beyond the tangled willow branches. The male American Kestrel did not – he perched on a shrubby vantage point, bobbing his head and tail. Minutes later he flew, conducting a ripple of alarm calls through the Black-capped Chickadee flock farther upstream.

Occasionally, small squadrons of starlings zoomed overhead. A passerine alighting on a distant fencepost turned out to be a Western Meadowlark. He perched and sang for a few minutes, then flew onward over the snowy whiteness.

Sevenmile Creek's first spring robin flew past us into an alder thicket. Farther upstream we counted almost 15 more. They foraged on snowbanks at the stream edge, bouncing up into the shrubs and then back down to the snow.

American Tree Sparrows were our frequent companions along the riparian zone. We even heard one sing for a few minutes: a rhythmic whistle, thin but jubilant. An essence of another landscape, the song carried my imagination north. In a month, most of our tree sparrows will be gone. Imagine their journey: over mountain ranges and rivers, boreal forest and peat. Three thousand kilometers north of us is the coastal plain of the Arctic Ocean. There is riparian habitat there as well: willow-lined streams flowing north.

Craig Creek is one of these. I know of it through the observations of biologist Cameron Eckert. In June 2003, he found five tree sparrow nestlings tucked into a hummock of dwarf willow just a few meters from Craig Creek's shrubby border. The view is expansive for an adult tree sparrow – a moist, hummocky tundra stretching east and west.

I hold this picture in my mind. It broadens the horizons of my imagination, and reminds me that Sevenmile Creek is a window out on an incredibly connected world. Now is the time of interfingered seasons: spring sun and deep snow, earth's tilted orbit and polar air. Tree sparrows sing as they get ready to wing northward to places like Craig Creek. Robins and bluebirds find food on the melting snow. And a meadowlark sings his first overture, welcoming the symphonies to come.

-- Shane Sater



*American Robin foraging habitat along Sevenmile Creek. Photo by Shane Sater.*



*Hummocky tundra near Craig Creek: American Tree Sparrow nest at lower right. Photo by Cameron Eckert.*

## Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Sharlene & Kenneth Kolb, Nancy & Alan Nicholson, Larry Peterman, Elizabeth Poletti and Susan & Brett Brunner.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Evelyn Norton, Helen Fee, Steve & Judith Bayless, Mike & Corliss Butzlaff, Len & Conchetta Eckel, Diann & James Fradette, Roberta Guderian, Londa Huso, Ken Kailing, Jim Rose, Jeff Savage & Tracy Cook, Berma Saxton, Estelle Shuttleworth, Kathy Van Hook, Coral White, Ron Wiens, Candace West, Mary Beaudette, Lowell Anderson, Carlene & Joseph Armstrong, Marlyn Atkins, Sandy & Gary Barker, Ann Bauchman, Kathy Bramer, Nan & Ray Breuninger, David Cooper, Laurie Ekanger, Eric Feaver, Jim & Pamela Harris, John Hoffland, Suzy Holt, Bill Hubber, Howard Johnson, Peter & Gloria Lambertz, Curtis Larsen, Steven & Renee Liston, Nancy Matheson, Denise Pengeruth, Ruth Swenson, Linda Sharkey, Sue & Bruce Newell, Mary Yeshe, Mike & Jane Bishop, Ann Lauer, and Teresa & John Vore.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Creede Caldwell, Marshall Gingery, Marilyn Bass, Cynthia Williams, Mary Arnold, Diana Hammer, Kristin Olsen, Marc Kelly, Mary Kessinger, Roberta Guderian, Joan Jacques, Kadie Gullickson, and Diane Stanchuk.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Margie Opitz, Pam Poole, Terry O'Connor, Glenn Phillips, Susan Anderson, Patricia Peterson, Kathryn Bramer, Dallas Miller, Andrea Rankin, Gene Huntington, Pete Strazdas, David Ewer, David Gans, Gretchen Bingman, Judy Scheier, Bruce Desonia, Gene Semmens, Eva Clark, Mikal Kellner, Denise Pennington, Mark Murphy, Loretta Carter, William Gallea, Chris Alke, Helen Lefferdink, Van Bass and Claudia Dirkes.

**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.

**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)



*American Tree Sparrow nest near Craig Creek, Ivavik NP, Yukon Territory. Eggs on June 19; nestlings 7 days later. Photos by Cameron Eckert.*

Last Chance Audubon Society  
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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.

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**Field Trips:** open

**Habitat:** open

**MT Audubon State Office:** 443-  
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