

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

September 2019

Bluebirding in Montana

Tuesday, September 10, 2019

Program begins 7:00 p.m.

Cookies and Conversation 6:30 – 7:00

**Montana WILD
2668 Broadwater Ave.**

FREE - All Are Welcome

Did you ever drive along a rural road in Montana and wonder about all those bird houses on the posts? The original Mountain Bluebird Trail, located on Sloan Road outside of Ronan, MT, is still maintained and bluebird research continues there. Besides that trail, there are countless more through Montana and southern Idaho. Jane Brockway will relate her adventures of being a trail monitor and discuss the bluebird conservation movement on the state and national level.

Her powerpoint presentation and slide show of Mountain and Western bluebirds includes a short video “Inside the Nest Box”. Come and learn about “bluebirding” in Western Montana!

Jane Brockway started bluebirding around 1998 with a few boxes at the family ranch in



Courtship, Western Bluebird style, by Jane Brockway.

western Montana. Her trail now totals about 80 boxes. Her camera lives on her table and she is able to watch and photograph bluebirds most of the year. Jane trained to band birds in 2004 and currently bands 200-350 bluebirds per year. She holds a Master Banding Permit for Mountain Bluebird Trails (MBT) and has been editor of the Mountain Bluebird Trails newsletter for the past 10 years. She has served on the Board of Directors of MBT for many years and also serves on the Board of Directors for NABS, the North American Bluebird Society.



President's Perch

Last Chance Audubon Will Miss Jane Schull Beasley

Jane Beasley passed away on July 22, 2019. The natural world, LCAS, and Montana Audubon lost a dear friend when Jane left the earth. She was an amazingly talented, generous woman. To quote from Montana Audubon's Special Achievement Award, presented to Jane in 2015, she was recognized as "*an individual who, over the decades, has become a source of information, inspiration, and a community resource to Helena and its bird-loving citizens.*"

Jane's artwork drew strongly on her knowledge of birds and her love of them. She spent her career as an artist sculpting, painting, and drawing birds and animals. Jane painted the American Kestrel featured in Last Chance Audubon's logo. In 1993 her love of birds, nature, and art inspired her to open *Birds & Beasleys*, a unique art gallery and gift shop in downtown Helena. The numerous projects that *Birds & Beasleys* has supported over the years – including the annual LCAS Birdseed Sale – reflect Jane's values and belief in community. Helena's backyard birders routinely turned to her as a knowledgeable resource for over 26 years. She shared her passion for birding by teaching kids and adults, leading field trips, volunteering for Audubon, and helping with International Migratory Bird Day.

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The American Kestrel logo of LCAS, one of Jane Beasley's many lasting contributions to the community.

Jane hosted a weekly *Backyard Birding in Montana* radio show on KMTX for 18 years, talking about birds and their importance in our environment. Her enthusiasm was infectious and inspired many people of all ages to become birders.

LCAS was honored to be selected by the family to receive memorial contributions. The memorials we have already received demonstrate just how loved Jane was in our community.

Janice Miller

President, LCAS

World Shorebird Day 2019

LCAS will once again support the World Shorebird Day effort by surveying shorebirds and other bird species at the Canyon Ferry WMA on **Sunday, September 8**. The field trip will meet at the northeast end of the Costco parking lot at 7:00 a.m. Please plan to arrive a few minutes early. The trip will leave the WMA no later than noon. This field trip is **free to current LCAS members** and has limited space availability. Members are encouraged to register for the field trip as soon as possible. Non-members are also welcome. The cost of the field trip for non-members is \$15, which includes a one-year membership to LCAS. Registration can be made by contacting Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com.

Fall Field Trip Opportunity: Aquatic Insect Foray

Mark your calendars for **Thursday, September 12, 6:00 pm**: a rare, guided opportunity to explore a stream world better known to caddisflies, American Dippers, and trout. Sara Owen, an ecologist for the Montana Natural Heritage Program, will guide us along a stream near Helena to find aquatic insects, before and after sunset, and help us understand their importance – both to the stream itself, and also to birds and bats. Bring a flashlight and/or headlamp, warm clothes, and (optionally) shoes that can get wet. Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the west end of the Lundy Shopping Center. The evening field trip should wrap up by 8:30 p.m. Contact Sara to RSVP or with any questions: SOwen@mt.gov.



American Dipper habitat along Tenmile Creek by Shane Sater.

Get Your Birdseed 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



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.

Montana Audubon Field Trips: Raptor Identification and Raptor Photography

Interested in improving your raptor identification skills? This fall, Montana Audubon's Amy Seaman is offering two raptor identification workshops and field trips to the Big Belts [Golden Eagle Migration Survey](#) site, near Helena. There will be an introductory-level and advanced raptor ID class. The introductory course will be held **Friday, September 13** followed by a field trip on September 14, and the Advanced ID course will be held **Friday, September 27** followed by a field trip on September 28. Both workshops are limited to 20 people; the beginner workshop is \$50 and the advanced workshop is \$75. For details on these events, please email Janet Johnston at info@mtaudubon.org.

In addition, for the first time Montana Audubon is collaborating with professional photographers **Kevin League** and **Chris McGowan** to offer an on-site Golden Eagle Migration Photography Workshop **Saturday, September 21**. Kevin and Chris offer a wealth of experience in photographing raptors. Along with Audubon ornithologist Amy Seaman, the trio will offer participants an intensive, one-on-one learning experience about raptor migration, raptor identification, raptor ecology, and professional instruction on how to photograph these stealthy aerial predators from the Big Belts [Golden Eagle Migration Survey site](#) near Helena. This workshop will be limited to 12 people, so check your calendars right away! Registration is \$250. Open to all levels of photographers. For details on these events, please email Kevin League at kevinleague@gmail.com or Chris McGowan at chrismcgow@gmail.com.



Red-tailed Hawk by Bob Martinka.

Endangered Species Alert!

The Trump Administration just released new regulations that would threaten to undo 47 years of progress accomplished under the Endangered Species Act. In 1972 the Nixon Administration passed the Endangered Species Act with strong bi-partisan support (92-0 Senate and 394-4 House). Since then, it has effectively protected American animals, plants, and insects threatened by extinction, including the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Florida Manatee, American Gray Wolf, and Humpback Whale. A 2018 survey found that 80 percent of Americans support the act.

The new regulations proposed by the Trump Administration would make it more difficult to protect threatened species and to protect species threatened by climate change. The changes would base decisions on economics rather than science, making it easier for companies to build roads, pipelines, and mines in critical habitat areas.



Peregrine Falcon by Bob Martinka: one of the success stories of the Endangered Species Act.

We need to contact our Congressional representatives immediately and ask them to oppose Trump's new regulations. We cannot let the Endangered Species Act be treated in this way. Please contact **Senators Steve Daines (406-443-3189; email steve@stevedaines.com)** and **Greg Gianforte at (406-502-1435; email from his website)**, and ask them to oppose the Trump move to dismember this historic legislation.

-- *Brian Shovers, LCAS Conservation Chair*

Birding at the Landfill

As fall makes its way into the Helena Valley, with it will come nonresident gulls that have been nesting farther north. Many of these gulls pass right through the Helena Valley as they make their way southward. Irregular visitors over the years have included Lesser Black-backed, Glaucous, Sabine's, and Mew Gull (to name a few). Many of these have been found by birders at the local landfill – operated by the City of Helena and Lewis and Clark County.



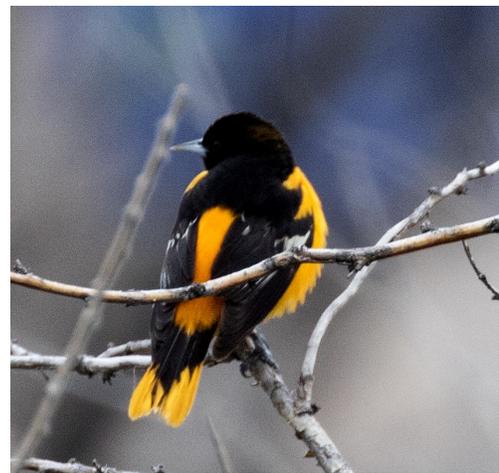
Gulls at the landfill by Bob Martinka.

The folks at the landfill have always been very supportive of birders wanting to search the large *Larus* flocks for that special rarity, and we have always tried to maintain an excellent relationship with them by stopping in at the office to let them know that we are on site. In an effort to continue this relationship and to provide safe opportunities for birders, the landfill has asked that visitors always sign in and out at the office when they are visiting. This allows the employees to keep track of when and where folks might be as they perform their duties around the landfill. It is also an important safety measure to ensure that birders are visiting only those areas that the landfill has designated as safe.

Please plan to visit the landfill for gulls this season – and always follow the guidelines outlined by the landfill employees. Thank you!

Nesting Season at the K-Mart Wetlands

In late April, LCAS placed five bluebird/swallow boxes and two Wood Duck/Hooded Merganser boxes at Helena's K-Mart Wetlands. What followed over the rest of the spring and summer was spectacular. The spring migration season in May and early June was simply stunning. American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush, Clay-colored Sparrow and Loggerhead Shrike were constant visitors to the wetland through migration. On May 20, Jeff Olsson found a first ever (for Lewis and Clark County) Baltimore Oriole, and many local birders were able to see this unusual Helena rarity.



Baltimore Oriole by Bob Martinka.

Just half a week later, rain soaked the wetlands for three days. Over 1.5 inches of precipitation was recorded in the Helena area. Ninety six hundredths – nearly a full inch – was recorded on May 26 alone! The culvert in Pond 1 became blocked with bulrushes and overflowed. It washed out part of the road, exposed the culvert, and deposited yards of silt and rock on the path leading down to Pond 3. High winds snapped off large dead cottonwoods in Ponds 3 and 4, leaving debris and branches scattered throughout the wetlands. The water quickly receded revealing a soggy but intact Sandhill Crane nest (with colt), and Spotted Sandpipers everywhere trying to figure out what just happened. One large nesting box in Pond 1 was inundated with water and was a total failure.

Meanwhile, in other nesting locations around the wetland, Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers were quietly attending their dry (?) nest boxes. The day following the storm, Sharon Dewart-Hansen photographed a fresh brood of Hoodies, and on May 30 Bob Martinka located a small brood of Wood Ducks with a young Hooded Merganser in tow! A Red-necked Grebe pair finally found each other after much spring vocalizing, and Ruddy Ducks disappeared into the cattails attending to their own young families.

Tree Swallows enjoyed the new boxes along the fence line that borders the western side of the property. The swallows were very approachable and almost seemed to be showing off the nest boxes. Several family groups were documented as the nesting season progressed. Young Soras, American Coots, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds all made vigorous use of the breeding season at the wetland.

Mid-August brought another round of torrential rains as the breeding season wound down. In less than 24 hours an additional 1.5 inches of rain, along with severe electrical storms, battered the wetland a second time. The repaired culvert and dike held at Pond 1, allowing the water levels to rise and once again flood the duck nesting box (note to self: move that box!), and then subside without further incident. Whew!

By now, many of the local breeders are in the process of moving on, but as fall migration progresses our northern migrants will be moving through as they return “home”. Don’t miss the warblers, sparrows, thrushes and shorebirds as they stop by K-Mart Wetlands for a brief refuel before continuing their journey south. And don’t worry: if all goes according to plan, they’ll be back in the spring!

-- Stephen Turner

LCAS Grants to Carroll College Students

In spring 2019, Tessa Grove and Shane Sater were the first recipients of LCAS grants to Carroll College students. These grants supported projects and research applicable to Lewis and Clark County and consistent with the LCAS mission statement. Watch the LCAS website for the complete reports, which will be posted soon. Following are summaries of their efforts:

Tessa Grove: [A Spatially Explicit Analysis of the Costs and Benefits of Managing and Conserving Wild Bird Habitats in the Helena Valley](#), focuses on the costs and benefits of implementing conservation areas in eight different subregions around Helena. It concludes that the benefits outweigh the costs in all subregions; however, economic and social impacts should be considered. The detailed report includes the history of Audubon Societies, the scope of the project, model framework, predicted costs and benefits, and summary and discussion of results.

Shane Sater: [Status of the Bird Community on a Riparian-Grassland Restoration Site in the Helena Valley: April 2017 - March 2019](#), summarizes bird observations during two years of surveys on Sevenmile Creek, the site of an ongoing stream restoration project by Prickly Pear Land Trust. Included are background information about the context of the site such as geology and vegetation; a seasonal “calendar” with descriptions of typical conditions and tables of frequently seen bird species; and documentation of breeding bird species in 2017 and 2018.



Young Hooded Mergansers by Sharon Dewart-Hansen.



Flooded nesting box by Stephen Turner.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Bonnie Bowler, Berta Nason, and Cheryl Boid & Tom Woodall.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Marjean Heisler, Chris & Carol Hunter, Susan Jackson, K. Jane Phillips, Beverly Pickett, and Jean Smith.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Newell Anderson, Sarah Bond, Terry Copenhaver, Diane Dean, Richard Edelen, Marvin Hathhorn, Joy Holloway, Jo Kelly, Cary Lund, Suzanne Nybo, Caitlin Parke, Melanie Trost, Lorn Mitchell Vranka, Wade Wilkison, Penny Koke, Allison Begley, Curtis Larsen, Becky Piske, Hunter Coleman, John Russell, and Linda Weber.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Linda Galloway, Leonard John, Dallas Miller, Laurie Gaffney, Vicki Downhour, Glenda Bradshaw, Michael Opar, Russell Wrigg, Dennis Zeiler, Jay Simons, Carolyn Clemens, Walt Anderson, Victoria Wolfe, Irene Erdie, Kris Bakula, Richmond Franklin, James Shaver, Harvey Tudor, Michelle Silverthorne, Mark Cress, Joe Lamson, Jim Erickson, Mary Gardinier, and Sandra & Tag Rittel.

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. 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 or contact them directly by phone at 1-844-428-3826. We are unable to forward memberships to National Audubon.



American Goldfinch by Dan Ellison.



Prairie Falcon by Janice Miller.

-- Sharon Dewart-Hansen, Membership Chair, smdewarthansen@charter.net

Last Chance Audubon Society
PO Box 924
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<https://www.facebook.com/lastchanceaudubon>
Website: <http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/>

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Clip and mail to:
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59624 with check for
\$15.
All contributions are tax
deductible.

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Habitat: open

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