Citizen Science in Our Montana Watersheds
Tuesday, October 8, 2019
Program begins 7:00 p.m.
Cookies and Conversation 6:30 – 7:00
Montana WILD
2668 Broadwater Ave.
FREE - All Are Welcome

Join Montana Audubon’s Amy Seaman and Caroline Provost for a tour of the research and citizen science outreach they completed during the recent summer’s survey season. They visited sites including waterfalls throughout western Montana, the Madison and Missouri Rivers, Ninepipe NWR, and colonial waterbird habitats. Learn how each of these projects relate to the specific watershed and geography where they occur, and how your local watershed may shape the bird species you see around you. Wetlands and riparian areas make up just 4% of our state, but they harbor a great diversity of the unique breeding birds that our speakers surveyed this year.

Amy Seaman joined Montana Audubon in 2013 after earning her M.S in Biology from the University of Nevada, Reno and spending many seasons surveying birds in the west. She was appointed the Montana Audubon Director of Policy & Science in 2019. Her avian research experiences have taken her to Montana locations such as the Madison and Missouri Rivers, the Helena, Mission, and Blackfoot Valleys, the C.M. Russell NWR, the Bitterroot Valley, Glacier National Park, Bridger Ridge, and more. She holds a love for the natural world, especially bird songs, and is committed to preserving the values of the natural world for current and future generations.

Caroline Provost grew up in North Carolina and spent her free time exploring and birding along the coast. After graduating from the University of North Carolina, Wilmington with a B.S. in Environmental Science and a minor in Biology, she moved to Montana to work with Montana Audubon as a Big Sky Watershed Corps member. Caroline is thrilled to be able to connect with heart-grabbing habitats and communities throughout Montana while expanding her ecological knowledge.
Community Building

Imagine a young man lying on his stomach on the grass above a pond, using his hands to pull himself closer to the edge. Then, resting on his elbows and aiming the binoculars, he watches the large, brown waterbird up close. He has never seen a Mallard before. At this moment he doesn’t know the name of the bird, only that it is, in his experience, “large.” “Can it fly?” he asks.

Otmane (pronounced “aut-mon”) is from Morocco, where some people hunt migratory songbirds for food. He arrived in Montana this fall and is studying Psychology at Carroll College. His exchange program requires that he volunteer twenty hours of community service, so Shane invited him to use those hours at Sevenmile Creek surveying birds. He accepted. Shane loaned him boots, jackets and binoculars, and told him the survey would last about seven hours.

I was pleasantly surprised when Otmane pointed out Barn Swallows as they zipped past overhead. He knows them from back home.

He asked a lot of questions, like “Do you eat the birds?” “How big is that (distant) bird?” “What is that in centimeters?” I used my iBird Pro app to show him the birds we were finding and to help answer his questions. He described magpies he had seen on campus and wanted to know their name. He was interested in the harriers, vultures, and Red-tailed Hawks, in addition to the smaller birds.

But when he spied the “large” brown bird swimming by on one of the ponds, he was smitten! He walked around to the other side, laid down, and then watched the female Mallard with his binoculars for quite a while.

When Shane told Otmane the lateness of the hour, he said he wasn’t in a hurry to return to campus.

We shared our Montana landscape and our Audubon culture that day with this young man from a different landscape, and watched as he embraced it fully.

Community-building, at least in birding and conservation, is often a one-person-at-a-time effort. Sharing the experience, the passion, and the knowledge in the field is contagious.

Sevenmile Creek is a place – a space – where that community can hatch, grow, and fledge. It happens often on our LCAS field trips.

- Janice Miller, President
**LCAS Colombia Birding Extravaganza**

Last Chance Audubon has asked Rockjumper Worldwide Birding Adventures to prepare a custom birding tour in Colombia for us. Colombia has more bird species than any other country: a staggering 1,900 birds occur within the confines of this incredible nation. It is also one of the most endemic-rich regions in South America, hosting nearly 50 endemics and regional specialties plus numerous endemic subspecies. Our guide for this fantastic adventure will be Forrest Rowland, who lives in Livingston, MT. He has been guiding bird and bird photography tours in Colombia since 2003 and spends at least two months there annually. Forrest has birded all over the world, but this is his favorite international birding destination. In late September of 2019, he flew to Colombia to be on tour with the world's number one bird lister for 25 days – the lister’s third trip to Colombia with Forrest.

The dates that have been set aside for our tour are **July 15-31, 2020**. For the trip to proceed, we need at least 6 individuals, but no more than 8. On this trip you can expect to view between 600 and 700 species of birds. WOW! We now have details of the proposed tour: including itinerary, some of the bird species expected to be seen, costs, and other details. Please contact Bob Martinka at rmartink@aol.com for all details. At this point, there are several folks who are interested/committed to this fantastic birding trip of a lifetime. Although this tour is 10 months away, DON’T WAIT to throw your hat in the ring. This will be a fantastic adventure!

- Bob Martinka

**Last Chance Birdseed Sale**

Have you ordered your winter’s supply of birdseed yet? Last Chance Audubon Society, in partnership with Birds & Beasleys, is still taking orders for the chapter’s annual birdseed sale. Help our chapter raise money for education and conservation, while stocking up on food for your feathered friends! All profits from this sale go to LCAS.

To order, simply call Birds & Beasleys (449-0904) or Sue Jackson (443-4486) – 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.
Regulating Reservoir Blind Update

Since late last summer, Last Chance Audubon (LCAS) has been working with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) to establish a wildlife/photography blind at the south end of the Helena Regulating Reservoir. LCAS’s blind committee developed a set of plans, staked out the area, and set aside funds from the 2018 fall fundraiser to support construction of the blind.

The committee spent much of the summer season watching water levels at the reservoir, anticipating lower levels in August and September of this year for construction. In early July, the reservoir level was raised to the point that it flooded the potential blind location, as well as the boat ramp and the road leading into the ramp access. This circumstance gave the committee pause to consider the potential location of the blind. Discussions with FWP indicated that the water levels are controlled solely by the Helena Irrigation District and that it may be difficult to anticipate how water levels might be managed by the water district.

Since July, the water at the reservoir has remained extremely high. Although we might expect that irrigation requirements for the Helena valley should be slowing with the approach of fall, the water district’s requisitions (water orders) from Bureau of Reclamation (Canyon Ferry Dam) continue to be substantial enough that the water level may not drop for some time. This is also dependent on how outflows from the reservoir are regulated.

The LCAS Board of Directors has decided that the construction of a blind needs to be postponed until further research can be completed. Conversations with the water district are needed, and will be key to understanding irrigation requirements, water needs for the City of Helena, and whether or not the construction of a blind on the reservoir would be compatible with how the water is currently managed. LCAS will continue to work with the entities involved, and will keep the chapter and its membership up to date through the monthly newsletter and the chapter website, lastchanceaudubon.org.

- Stephen Turner
The View from Sevenmile Creek: September

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.

11:30 a.m., September 21. It rained last night, and the ground is moist. I could hear the rain in the dark hours of the morning, coming down gently on my roof. As I write this, the wind is picking up from the east. The clouds have broken and intermittent sun and patches of blue sky are showing through. In the last half hour, there have been Accipiters moving. I’ve seen three along the creek – a Cooper’s Hawk, a Sharp-shinned, and one that went unidentified. There was another Accipiter that flew over, along with a Red-tailed Hawk. There are small and large flocks of Cedar Waxwings along the creek, and occasionally I run across groups of Wilson’s Warblers, Black-capped Chickadees, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. In fact, this has been an amazing day for Ruby-crowned Kinglets; the most I’ve ever seen at once here during fall migration, with 12 on my list so far.

About an hour ago, bird activity was quiet as I walked down into a grassy area on a stream terrace, between the willows of the creek and some chokecherries farther up the slope. Imagine yourself there with me, sitting on the damp grasses. We scan the skies, knowing that there could be a lot of raptors moving today. Though it’s early yet, the sky is clearing. We can feel the sun beating down, warming up the ground, and there might be some thermals starting. As we sit here, we hear some “seep” calls. A couple of sparrows take off before we can identify them, but we get great views of two Spotted Towhees and a Song Sparrow in the chokecherries. Occasionally we hear a well-hidden Warbling Vireo calling along the creek, and a few minutes later a Wilson’s Warbler moves through.

The chokecherries are getting a spattering of orange in their leaves and the coyote willows are turning a bit yellow, but the alders are still dark green. It’s that beautiful time in the middle of fall: we don’t know what we’re going to find out here, but we know that a lot is moving through and using this habitat. Especially at this time, I feel so grateful that this is here: this grassland and stream, tied in with the Scratchgravel Hills, the boreal forests of Canada, and all the places where these birds will winter. As warblers and sparrows stop in these alders or chokecherries – maybe for a day, maybe for a few – and fuel up for the next leg of migration, these bushes seem really important.
So what can we do? Together we can continue supporting projects like this, trying to preserve and encourage healthy habitats in our community. And we can thank the plants and insects that feed so many migrants. Is there a spot in your yard that needs a chokecherry?

- Shane Sater

Final note: The day ended with a Loggerhead Shrike, catching grasshoppers from the field and impaling them on the barbed wire fence, then gulping them down. The afternoon was quiet for warblers and sparrows – but the raptors were incredible. 4 American Kestrels. 18 Red-tailed Hawks. 11 Accipiters. 21 Turkey Vultures. In total, I counted 60 raptors, most of them “thermaling” or gliding high overhead. It makes me wonder: for every such day of phenomenal surprises, how many have gone unnoticed?

Contribute to the Newsletter!

Do you have a story about a bird sighting in the Helena area that you would like to share with our members? We would like to hear from you! Short stories and photos from LCAS members are incorporated in the newsletter as space allows. If interested, please submit your local bird story to Shane Sater, shsater@gmail.com. Thank you!
Membership Report

Please welcome Last Chance Audubon Society new members: Sarah Kamis, John Russell, Dick Franklin, and Jan Franklin.

Sincere thanks to Last Chance renewing members: Jim & Suzi Stanger and Joan & Don Bishop.

Please also welcome National Audubon Society new members: Allison Begley, Rebecca Currey, Susan Holton, James Posewitz, and Jane Shaff.

Sincere thanks to National Audubon Society renewing members: James Driggers, Ellen Taylor, Marilyn Hayes, Eleanor Parker, Thomas Bump, Helen Fee, Earl McCurley, Teresa Amsbaugh, Laura Quintell, and Marilyn Kelly-Clark.

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.

- Sharon Dewart-Hansen, Membership Chair, smdewarthansen@charter.net
**Last Chance Audubon Society**  
PO Box 924  
Helena, MT 59624

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**Find us on Facebook**  
https://www.facebook.com/lastchanceaudubon  
Website: https://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/

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**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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**Monthly Program:** Sandy Shull & Liz Hiltunen, 449-0904 or 227-5492  
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**Field Trips:** open  
**Habitat:** open  
**MT Audubon State Office:** 443-3949