

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

March 2020

The Path of the Condor: Guided Movie Night Tuesday, March 10, 2020

Program begins 7:00 p.m.

Cookies and Conversation 6:30 – 7:00

**Montana WILD
2668 Broadwater Ave.
FREE - All Are Welcome**

Join Last Chance Audubon for a “Movie Night” featuring the Animal Planet film “The Path of the Condor.” This film features the Andes mountain range, incredible landscapes, and Andean Condors, regarded as “Kings of the Skies”. Experience the life of the condor, the world’s largest flying bird, through the unique perspectives of an ornithologist and a paraglider pilot. The film will show how condors can glide through the air in the most extreme conditions and how they select which air currents to use for reaching these heights. Follow the paraglider pilot as he learns to improve his own flying and shares what he



Andean Condor. Public domain image.

knows about the Andean Condor.

Jim and Leslie Smith will introduce the film and share some of their experiences in Northern Patagonia while on two guided expeditions with the ornithologist and guide, Lorenzo Sympson. Although Jim and Leslie did *not* paraglide, they enjoyed birdwatching with the guidance of Lorenzo, mostly in riparian and woodland areas in the countryside away from the towns of San Carlos de Bariloche, Esquel, and Trevelin in northwestern Patagonia.

Upcoming Election

The 2020 LCAS election will be held at the chapter’s May meeting. We will be electing all chapter officers (president, vice president, secretary, treasurer) and three board members. Officers and board members all serve two-year terms. Nominations remain open until the election. If you’d like to nominate someone to serve on the LCAS Board, just contact Sue Jackson (443-4486). All LCAS members attending the May meeting will be eligible to vote.



Stories of Helena's Birds, continued

"Their [the birds'] stories are a few threads in the tapestry that is our knowledge of place. By coming together to celebrate these birds, these threads of story, we celebrate our community. We celebrate our connection to this place where we live. We celebrate that as spring comes, there are spaces on the edge of our town to which meadowlarks, Mountain Bluebirds, and Short-eared Owls may return. May that always be so." -- Shane Sater, February 11, 2020

Shane's February presentation for LCAS brought into sharp focus the reasons for us to celebrate together. These include the beautifully pictured birds, our local community, and a connection to place – THIS place we call “home.” We can also celebrate the coming of SPRING and of amazing flights of flocks flying north to their breeding grounds.

Celebrating these things reaches beyond the membership of LCAS as we extend a hand of friendship to our neighbors. Sharing our enthusiasm enhances and brings out their own thrill of birds and the stories they tell as they migrate north. Here are some ways you can celebrate and share your stories:

- Join a Last Chance Audubon field trip – the first one is Freezout Lake for the migration of Snow Geese (see field trip list below!)
- Survey Sevenmile Creek with Shane – shsater@gmail.com
- Share your own birding observations via eBird.org
- Work with MT Audubon to conduct citizen science projects – see the Great Blue Heron article on the next page

Happy Birding!

-- Janice Miller, President, LCAS

Upcoming LCAS Field Trips

As we gear up for spring, the first of an exciting lineup of Last Chance Audubon field trips have been scheduled! Field trips are open to birders of all ages and skill levels. They are a great way to get outside, find a new birding spot, or inspire a new birder. Watch for more opportunities to appear as we get closer to spring. Read the April newsletter or check out <https://lastchanceaudubon.org/> for updates.

Saturday/Sunday April 3-4, Freezout Lake WMA: Contact Janice Miller, jan2854@gmail.com

Sunday, May 10, Warm Springs Ponds: Contact Brian Shovers & Jo Lace, sholace0848@gmail.com

Saturday, May 23, Canyon Ferry WMA: Contact Bob Martinka, rmartink@aol.com

Sunday, September 6, World Shorebird Day: Contact Stephen Turner, turnstonest@gmail.com



Birders on an LCAS field trip. Photo by Shane Sater.

Citizen Science Opportunity: Monitoring the Majestic Heron

Though easily spotted and often seen, the iconic Great Blue Heron is a Species of Concern in Montana. Breeding Bird Surveys from 1966 – 2010 indicate a population decline of 2.2% per year. There is particular concern for colonial nesting species like the Great Blue Heron: impacts to one breeding site can affect many individual birds at once.

Though rookeries can be large and conspicuous, in many cases heron nesting colonies can be easy to overlook. Some can be small and well-hidden in dense

vegetation, in hard-to-access areas with limited roads and trails, or in rough terrain. Despite this difficulty, standardized surveys and rookery counts are key to conserving this majestic wader.

Montana Audubon has partnered with the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) to ensure better state-wide heron surveys. Most past surveys have been conducted with aircraft, but this winter these partners experimented with a different approach, “flying” the state’s waterways using Google Earth imagery. Along five sections of major Montana rivers, they relocated 94% of historically documented rookeries.

Although this digital approach has promise, field surveys are vital to help confirm possible new rookeries and to better understand heron populations. Starting in April, Montana Audubon is piloting a new citizen science project to help monitor the state’s Great Blue Heron rookeries.

And that’s where you come in! Your efforts have already helped provide hundreds of records for state species of concern like the Long-billed Curlew, Chimney Swift, and Black Swift. Would you like to help watch the nests and nesting behavior of Great Blue Herons? Read on!

- Surveys are needed all across the state, so you are sure to be near a site of interest.
- Data collection is simple and uses the Survey 123 platform available on any smart device.
- **There will be a survey training April 11 at the Montana Audubon Education Center in Billings (time TBD – with more locations likely to be announced).**
- Signing up is easy! For more information or to receive project outreach materials, contact Carmen Borchelt (cborchelt@mtaudubon.org, 406-443-3949) or Amy Seaman (aseaman@mtaudubon.org, 406-210-9449).

***Note: The Long-billed Curlew surveys of the past 7 years are continuing, but this year Great Blue Heron surveys are an even higher priority for conservation. Find more information about both surveys at montanabirdsurveys.com.

Wings Across the Big Sky: June 5—7 in Lewistown, MT

Mark your calendars: Montana Audubon’s 21st annual bird festival is coming up, headquartered at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown. Over 25 field trips are planned. Destinations include the James Kipp Recreation Area, the PN Ranch, Bear Gulch pictographs, and the Big Springs State Fish Hatchery. Watch in early March for festival registration brochures in the mail, as well as an online registration system.

For more information, please contact Montana Audubon’s bird festival coordinator, Danielle Dowden (ddowden@mtaudubon.org, (406) 443-3949).



Nesting Great Blue Herons by Janice Miller.

The View from Sevenmile Creek: February

Note: The surveys on Sevenmile Creek are a collaboration between Last Chance Audubon Society (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 bird surveys and restoration activities. Questions? Contact Nate Kopp, nate@pricklypearlt.org.

February 22, 2020. The snow is gone here, without more in the forecast. The sun lights up the golden grasses and a Red-tailed Hawk, perched a quarter mile away in the top of a chokecherry. A half mile downstream from him, a Prairie Falcon feeds from a fencepost “table” on the south slope. On this warm, sunny day, the landscape seems ready for spring. Do the birds agree?

The Black-capped Chickadees agree. Two pairs flit through the alders, one member of each pair whistling his spring song: “fee-bee.” A Song Sparrow tentatively agrees, singing briefly before dropping down under the willows to scratch and feed.

But mostly, the landscape remains deafening quiet. No meadowlarks singing. No soft calls as Mountain Bluebirds hover and perch. No scurrying of spiders and bugs waking up in the grasses. Just a puff of wind whispering through the smooth brome and the occasional rattle of machine gun fire from Fort Harrison.

The day warms up. We stop to take off extra layers near a shrubby stream bend. Suddenly a raptor launches from a clematis-covered alder and shoots north, out of sight behind the chokecherries. We run up the slope and stand panting a hundred yards north, where the bluebunch wheatgrass and phlox begins. There she is, perched on a fencepost beyond us, a bulky hawk at the edge of the heat waves. Long, banded tail. White eyebrow, splotchy back. A young goshawk. Minutes later, she launches again. Choppy wingbeats carry her north. She skims past a house, then continues toward the Scratchgravel Hills.

She reminds me of the young goshawk we saw here in December, who flushed from the streamside shrubs and also headed north. Was this the very same bird? Has she been visiting the creek frequently this winter, finding Gray Partridges or mountain cottontails to eat?

The quiet of not-spring-yet returns to the landscape. A sun-warmed raft of ice moves slowly down the stream channel, catches on rocks, and scours a cloud of sediment. For me, this is an expectant quiet. Waiting for meadowlarks, robins, and Red-winged Blackbirds. Waiting for the flood of migrant spring raptors that will soon come overhead.

Waiting – and hoping. All these birds have long journeys ahead of them. They have flashing cell phone towers and housecats to avoid, islands of habitat to find. Spring storms to survive. So many valleys, forests, and rivers to cross.

I think about Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*: her warning that a year might come when March and April bring no birds. In this quiet season, it is all too easy to imagine.

So I hope, while February’s landscape rests and the wind sighs over it, that March will again bring Western Meadowlarks and Mountain Bluebirds, Horned Larks and Red-winged Blackbirds. I hope for April’s Vesper Sparrows and Tree Swallows, May’s warblers and catbirds.

I hope for more places like Sevenmile Creek: places safe from the threat of subdivision, where streams can flood and willow thickets can grow. Where Northern Goshawks can hunt. And where – if all goes well – Western Meadowlarks can return and sing in celebration of spring.

-- Shane Sater



Western Meadowlark by Shane Sater.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Gina Murto, Linda Michael, Ellen Taylor, Carolyn & Bob Adams, Kelly Rusoff, Blake Running, and Jason and Susan Maclin.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Carol & Rodney Bischoff, Stan & Glenda Bradshaw, Jay Carter, Dan Ellison & Jane Fournier, Bruce Desonia, Don & Donna Eisenmenger, Susan Epstein, Bill & Vicki Fitzgerald, Marlys & Phill Forbes, Deborah Fosket, Donna Shull & Greg Holzman, Betsy Hamann, Pam Harris, Constance Herzig, Peter Mathes, Mike & Helen Murray, Deborah Rainey, Berma Saxton, Estelle Shuttleworth, Ramona Turnbull, Larry Urban, Gregg & Wendy Wheeler, and Mary Yeshe.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Greg Asbury, Jean Lindeberg, Curtis Lund, Jacob Martin, and Robert Oleary.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Chris Alke, Newell Anderson, Mary Arnold, Marilyn Atkins, Gretchen Bingman, Jean Bond, Loretta Carter, Wendy Clark, Janet Ellis, David Ewer, Dick Franklin, Edward Hale, Joy Holloway, Barry Hood, Shirley Hudson, Gene Huntington, Carolyn Jensen, Mikal Kellner, Fred Larsen, Robin La Neve, Terry O'Connor, Becky Piske, Joy Ritter, Tom Ryan, Judy Scheier, Linda Weber, Cathy Wright, and Dennis Zeiler.

LCAS MEMBERSHIP: A new membership or renewal is \$15/\$25 per household (see below) and is current for one year, January 1 through December 31. You can join and/or renew by using our website's online **MEMBERSHIP** button. Please be sure we receive all your correct contact information. If you do not have access to the website you can join or renew by filling out a registration form located either in this newsletter or printed from lastchanceaudubon.org. Please send completed registration form and your \$15 check (or \$25 check if you wish to get the newsletter in hardcopy) to: LCAS, PO Box 924, Helena, MT, 59624. If you are not sure if you are up to date with your membership, please feel free to email the Membership Chair to verify.

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, but due to increased printing costs, we will be asking for an additional \$10 for processing. See above. 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



Ruffed Grouse by Nancy Ewer.

Last Chance Audubon Society
PO Box 924
Helena, MT 59624

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Membership

Donate Now

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

*Clip and mail to:
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Habitat: open

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