

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.

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New Trail Honors Jane Beasley

A new trail is now visible in the southwest corner of Spring Meadow Lake State Park – an improved version of a trail obliterated by fire in September 2007. After the fire, regrowth obscured the trail and made passage through the area difficult. The regeneration also made the area a magnet for riparian birds, including Common Yellowthroats, Yellow Warblers, Willow Flycatchers, Gray Catbirds, and many others – a real birding hot spot. Last Chance Audubon Society (LCAS), with the cooperation of Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP), has been working for the last year to re-establish the trail in memory of beloved LCAS member Jane Beasley.

The hours of behind-the-scenes work writing a grant and planning the trail paid off in early August, 2020, when a seven-person Montana Conservation Corps crew removed encroaching trees, brush, and plants; remade the trail surface; and put down a layer of decomposed granite.

Jane Shull Beasley, longtime Helena birder, educator, and artist, passed away in 2019. Jane hosted a radio show, gave birding talks, started Birds & Beasleys downtown, and facilitated LCAS's annual bird seed sale fundraiser. She also tirelessly depicted birds in her artwork, which is still available at Birds & Beasleys. Sandy Shull, Jane's daughter and an involved LCAS member, continues Jane's tradition of supporting birds, birders, and our chapter. Sandy says that the trail fits Jane's personality and interests.

To fund the project, LCAS successfully applied for a Recreational Trails Project (RTP) grant that was awarded in spring 2020. The RTP program is funded by the Federal Highway Trust Fund and is administered by FWP. LCAS requested \$8463.72 and will provide a match of \$2115.93 from the donations made in Jane Beasley's memory by LCAS members and Jane's family. Timing adjustments caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will delay completion of some aspects of the trail project, including signs, until next season. In the meantime, enjoy the trail and the new opportunities it provides for birders and recreationists. And remember: it is still a work in progress, so walk with care.



*The MCC crew and the rebuilt trail.
Photos by Sue Jackson.*



President's Perch

Adjusting the Sails

August 20, 2020

"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails." -- William Arthur Ward

The winds of change have arrived and LCAS is adjusting the sails to move forward. We realize we won't be enjoying our monthly membership meetings in person for the remainder of 2020, and probably much longer. Therefore, we are looking into electronic means of presenting our programs. Stay tuned!

We at LCAS had a vision back in 2007 to build a trail at Spring Meadow Lake State Park when a fire turned our plans to ash. With the growth of trees and shrubs in the area, we have revived the dream and worked behind the scenes, with various agencies, to make the trail a reality. Ground-breaking work has begun, and the trail is roughed-in, snaking through the southwest corner of the park from MT WILD to the picnic pavilion. We hope to name the trail after Jane Beasley, a major supporter of LCAS and all things in nature – flora and fauna. This has been a coordinated effort with MT FWP, MT WILD, MT Conservation Corps, and LCAS. The trail will be completed next summer (2021) when we will organize a celebratory dedication. Check it out!

This summer we had two work days at Nature Park, removing a total of 620 pounds of garbage from the streambed. The effort involved 13 volunteers for two hours on June 12 and 8 volunteers for two hours on July 17. (That's 42 hours of volunteer effort!) Removing the garbage from the streambed benefits the deer, foxes, and birds who live or visit there, in addition to us humans who visit. A clean stream is a healthy stream.

Although most LCAS field trips have been canceled, weekly bird surveys continue at Sevenmile Creek – with some exciting sightings, especially as fall migration begins.

Our sails are adjusted – FULL SPEED AHEAD!

-- Janice Miller, President, LCAS

LCAS Election

Since the May meeting was cancelled and we will not be having in-person fall meetings, LCAS was not able to hold a normal election in 2020. Because of this, at the August board meeting the LCAS Board decided to accept the slate of candidates from May and officially put those nominees in office, each to serve a two-year term: Janice Miller, President; Brian Shovers, Secretary; Sue Jackson, Treasurer; and Coburn Currier, Bob Martinka, and Sumner Sharpe, Board members. LCAS thanks them heartily for their willingness to continue to serve the chapter.



White-faced Ibis foraging in the Helena Valley, spring 2020. Look for them during migration this fall, too! Photo by Don Senn.

World Shorebird Day: September 6

In support of World Shorebird Day, LCAS will offer a field trip to survey shorebirds and other bird species at the Canyon Ferry WMA on Sunday, September 6. No experience is needed and several shorebird ID experts will be on hand. Due to COVID, we will not be carpooling and we will be observing all CDC

recommendations to the greatest extent possible. In addition, we will be unable to share optics, but LCAS will provide binoculars if needed. Please indicate this when registering for the field trip. We will meet at the northeast end of the Costco parking lot at 7:00 AM. Please plan to arrive a few minutes early. The trip will return from the WMA no later than 1:00 PM. This field trip is **free to current LCAS members** and has limited space availability (10). Members and non-members are encouraged to register for the field trip as soon as possible. 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.



Pectoral Sandpiper by Stephen Turner.

Nesting Boxes at the K-Mart Wetlands

In May, two additional nesting boxes were placed at the K-Mart Wetlands to improve nesting habitat for Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers. LCAS members took advantage of the City's drawdown of Pond 2 and were able to place one of the boxes over the open water. They placed a second box in the cattail area just south of Pond 3. We hope that the locations will be suitable for nesting birds in the future. Sincere thanks to Larry Urban and the Montana Department of Transportation for the nesting boxes and tools to assist with placement.

The City of Helena is currently adopting plans for work at the wetlands, including major renovation of the inlet and outlet flows between ponds as well as invasive plant remediation throughout the area. LCAS is working with the City to incorporate conservation measures to encourage habitat and support wildlife. Discussions with the City are ongoing and to date have included the placement of permanent island structures for nesting, weed and invasive plant mitigation, and appropriate management of water levels during bird migration. Work on the wetlands could begin as early as spring 2021.



K-Mart Wetlands nest box with Bob Martinka posing. Photo by Stephen Turner.

2020 Birdseed Sale

Last Chance Audubon's annual birdseed sale is on! As always, the sale is done in conjunction with Birds and Beasleys (2 South Last Chance Gulch). When you visit the store, just pick up your seed and let Sandy or her staff know that your purchase is part of our fundraiser. LCAS earns a portion of each sale. The birdseed sale goes from now until mid-November.



Black-capped Chickadee by Bob Martinka.

Birdathon Recap

The final tally for this year's Birdathon is in. Our five amazing teams raised a grand total of \$5,830.09. The Board approved the donation of 50% of this amount to Montana Audubon, as LCAS has done in past years. A check in the amount of \$2,915.05 has been presented to the state office. Great work by the teams and great support from everyone who made a Birdathon pledge!

Raptor Identification with Montana Audubon - Online

From September 15 through September 17, Montana Audubon is providing a three-part online class on raptor identification. The class will take place from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM each day and will be led by Montana Audubon's Director of Policy and Science, Amy Seaman.

Day one will cover *Buteos*. Day two will feature *Accipiters* and allies. Day three will delve into eagles and vultures. Each day will be jam-packed with introductory and advanced identification know-how.

Registration is \$10 for one class or \$25 for all three. Fees will help support raptor migration research. For details, please email Amy Seaman, aseaman@mtaudubon.org.



Bald Eagle with Rainbow Trout, attacked by Red-winged Blackbird. Photo by Janice Miller.

Get Involved with LCAS!

COVID may have thrown a wrench in our usual meetings, but LCAS continues to be very active – and you can help! From observing birds to writing grants, from conservation advocacy to on-the-ground work planting native species for bird habitat – the sky is the limit for LCAS volunteers! Do you have a passion for birds and habitat? Would you like to be more involved in our organization? Just a few of the opportunities this fall include collecting native riparian seeds for habitat restoration at Sevenmile Creek and submitting bird observations to eBird to improve our knowledge of migration. To discuss how you can be involved, please contact Shane Sater (Habitat Protection) or another board member.

Using eBird to Model West Nile Virus Risk

In spring 2020, Last Chance Audubon Society awarded Carroll College senior Kendall Frederics a \$1000 grant for her proposal to assess whether eBird data could be used in models of West Nile Virus risk in Montana. Bird distribution data is important for understanding West Nile Virus. A number of bird species have moderate to high “viral competence”; once infected, these species can function as reservoirs for the virus over the winter, re-infecting mosquitoes when they emerge in the next summer.

For her research, Frederics conducted standardized bird surveys (fifteen-minute point counts) in summer 2018 and 2019 at three mosquito trapping locations in the Helena Valley: Lake Helena, the Law Enforcement Academy, and the Helena Regulating Reservoir. She performed a regression analysis to determine whether there was a correlation between her more standardized point count data and eBird data from the same locations.

From her analysis, Frederics concluded that eBird data from these Helena Valley sites could be used with confidence in place of more standardized point count surveys to model West Nile Virus risk in the Helena Valley. As part of her report, she produced the following graphic, summarizing the species at each site with moderate to high viral competence. Thank you, Kendall!

SPECIES FOUND AT SITES WITH MODERATE TO HIGH COMPETENCE		
<i>Helena Regulating Reservoir</i>	<i>Lake Helena</i>	<i>Helena's Police Academy</i>
American Crow	American Crow	American Crow
American Robin	American Robin	American Robin
Brewer's Blackbird	Black-billed Magpie	Black-billed Magpie
Brown-headed Cowbird	Brewer's Blackbird	Cliff Swallow
Canada Goose	Canada Goose	European Starling
Cliff Swallow	Cliff Swallow	Gray Catbird
Common Grackle	Common Grackle	gull sp.
Eurasian Collared-Dove	Eurasian Collared-Dove	Killdeer
European Starling	European Starling	Mallard
Gray Catbird	House Sparrow	Mourning Dove
House Sparrow	Killdeer	Northern Flicker
Killdeer	Mallard	Red-tailed Hawk
Mallard	Mourning Dove	Red-winged Blackbird
Mourning Dove	Northern Flicker	Song Sparrow
Northern Flicker	Red-tailed Hawk	Swainson's Thrush
Red-tailed Hawk	Red-winged Blackbird	
Red-winged Blackbird	Ring-billed Gull	
Ring-billed Gull	Song Sparrow	

The View from Sevenmile Creek: August

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.

August 23, 2020. For many weeks now the birds have been silent. The dry, smoky landscape throbs with the pulse of a grasshopper chorus. The summer's green grasses are gone, and with them the meadowlark songs that greeted each morning. The meadowlarks are here still, but they are busy finding grasshoppers – too busy to talk about it. Fall migration has begun in its usual subtle way. Finding the birds today will take all of us, watching sharply.

As soon as we reach the shrubs along the creek, the morning is busy. Small groups of Vesper Sparrows flit from grasses to shrubs, flashing white tail feathers. I tally five at a time and the count climbs steadily – there are at least 60 of them here today. The summer's Yellow Warblers are still common along the creek, gleaning insects from the chokecherries. Or perhaps these are boreal birds already moving south. A sharp 'chip' call or a quick flash of yellow in the branches reveals them. Two weeks more and they will all be gone.

They are not the only yellow insectivores flitting through the shrubs today. We spot a Western Tanager struggling to swallow a grasshopper, the camouflaged insect held awkwardly between orange-pink mandibles. The first few Wilson's Warblers are hunting here as well, black caps and dark eyes contrasting with their yellow contour feathers.

A drab Dusky Flycatcher calls 'bean-dip' from a perch, then goes back to the important business of hunting insects. We try to spot all of the small groups moving through: Black-capped Chickadees, the fall's last Lazuli Buntings and first Yellow-rumped Warblers. Their foraging movements tell us of insects on the menu: invisible to our eyes, but clearly not to theirs.

For a few minutes I turn my attention to some of the insects I *can* see: the pollinators. There is a patch of Rocky Mountain Beeplant flowering near the ponds, where I scattered seeds from Lake Helena last fall. The purple flowers are a riot of fluttering and buzzing insects. Cabbage Whites and burnt-orange Woodland Skippers. Hunt's Bumblebees, metallic green bees, and tiny black ones. Narrow-waisted wasps in black and orange. Diurnal moths and colorful flies.

I am struck by the diversity – this landscape seems to be good for insects as well as birds. And no wonder. There are alder trunks, dead goldenrod stems, and bare soil patches for solitary bee nests. There are rodent burrows and bunchgrasses for nesting bumblebees. Along the creek there is water and a living canopy of native shrubs that provides homes for so many creatures.

An Eastern Kingbird sallies forth high above the beeplant and snatches a six-legged meal. A diversity of insects feeds a diversity of birds. Some are dinner for kingbirds and warblers. Others help to deliver the meal. Think of the bumblebees who pollinated the chokecherries this spring – chokecherries which the Cedar Waxwings are devouring today.



Rocky Mountain Beeplant (*Cleome serrulata*)
at Sevenmile Creek. Photo by Shane Sater.

As we seek to improve habitat for birds, I am inspired to think about insects as well. If we encourage more cottonwoods and chokecherries, will we support more of the insect herbivores that feed our fall warbler flocks? If we fill gaps in summer flowering with native plants like milkweed and Rocky Mountain Beeplant, will more pollinators and parasitoid wasps thrive? If we can make habitat for more diverse predatory insects in the spring, will we have fewer grasshoppers in the fall and more birds to eat them? I am excited to find out.

-- *Shane Sater*

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Patricia Bik, Nancy Kiser, Deborah Massett, Sandra Micken, Sharon Liederman, Frank Baele, and Barbara Pepper-Rotness.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Norma Tirrell, Bryce Maxell, Ann Bauchman, Larry Peterman, Toby & Carlene Armstrong, Leroy & Diana Schramm, George Blyman, Christie Strock, Marjean Heisler, Jeanne Perkins, Thomas & Marilyn Pearson, Dick & Jan Franklin, Jill Downing, Ed Rumberger, Susan & Bret Brunner, and Marilyn Hayes.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Kirstan Roush, Joe Kansier, Jamie Dwyer, Steven Goodson, Miley Solia, Matt Dalton, Lana Finch, Sylvia Jackson, Janine Hunt, Susan Buringrud, and Timothy Scheuer.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Patricia Peterson, S. Eriksen, Sam Samson, Everett Lynn, Eleanor Parker, Marilyn Hayes, Christopher Korow, Ken Swingley, Hunter Coleman, Linda Galloway, Sue Bennett, Penny Koke, Raleigh Hartmus, Christopher Manos, Cindy Yarberr, Sumner Sharpe, Lucas Thomi, Victoria Wolfe, Vicki Downhour, Tvelone Hedges, Stephanie Garko, Sandra McIntyre, Rebecca Currey, Phyllis Dagenais, Leroy & Diana Schramm, Kathryn Bramer, Joy Kelso, Jim Erickson, Jerry Wozniak, Jacob Martin, Irene Erdie, Gary Grzebielski, Douglas Abbott, Deborah Jones, Michael Opar, Alice Kirn, Dick Warner, and Van Bass.

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. 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
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Membership

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

*Clip and mail to:
PO Box 924, Helena MT
59624 with check for \$15
— or \$25 if you must
receive a paper
newsletter.
All contributions are tax
deductible.*

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Habitat: open

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