

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

May 2021

Sevenmile Creek Kestrel Boxes

Last Chance Audubon Society recently received a generous donation of two American Kestrel nesting boxes from Montana City resident Jerry Wozniak. Jerry contacted LCAS and asked if we would be able to find a suitable location for the boxes in the Helena Valley. After several emails and phone calls, Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT) agreed to the placement of two boxes on their Sevenmile Creek property: one to replace the box lost in last fall's fire, and another half a mile upstream to encourage a second pair of nesting kestrels. The bonus came when Marks Miller Post and Pole generously donated three 16-foot poles for mounting the boxes!

On Thursday afternoon, April 8, a small group of LCAS volunteers braved snow squalls, gale force winds, and a smattering of sunshine to set up the boxes. The volunteers had to ford the stream to access the box locations; fortunately this went uneventfully. The drilling, mounting, augering, and digging commenced, and several hours later Sevenmile had two gorgeous new kestrel boxes and a few tuckered-out LCAS volunteers. The volunteers were all smiles, though. We hope that this project will result in some new residents at Sevenmile Creek.

Thanks to all who helped with this project: Jerry Wozniak for the boxes; Marks Miller Post and Pole (Clint and Carson) for the



Male American Kestrel looking out from the nest box destroyed in the fire at Sevenmile Creek and now replaced by Last Chance Audubon. Photo by Shane Sater.

donated poles; Dan Ellison and Jane Fournier for assuring the poles made it to Sevenmile; PPLT (Nate Kopp, Blake Sexton, and John Beaver); Shane Sater for help with box location and encouragement; and Stan and Glenda Bradshaw, Bob Martinka, Sue Jackson, and Stephen Turner for getting the boxes in place. It takes a village!

NOTE: By the time of newsletter printing, we are hoping that another box donated to PPLT will be placed at Tenmile Creek Park, near Spring Meadow Lake. LCAS is currently working with PPLT install this box.



President's Perch

Endings – and Beginnings

Guest President's Perch by Stephen Turner

A little over one year ago, the LCAS Board of Directors made the difficult decision to suspend in-person monthly programs due to the pandemic. It was a sad moment in our chapter's history and an uncomfortable ending to the 2019-2020 season. Our 2020-2021 year didn't fare much better. Field trips were cancelled or severely scaled back. Birdathon was done locally or not at all, and we still couldn't gather for monthly meetings.

In September 2020, Sevenmile Creek saw a devastating loss to the riparian habitat when a fire roared through the property. This winter, the final stage of stream restoration work furthered the feeling of loss as heavy equipment took over the normally quiet grassland. The diminished bird sounds and sights for the following seven months was difficult, even heart-breaking. Largely bird-silent surveys went on with a charred and muddied (or frozen) landscape for a backdrop. There wasn't even much winter snow to cover the blackened tufts of grass, the burnt stumps of alder and willow, and the barren stream channel.



Bufflehead by Bob Martinka.

It has been a year of challenges, and here we are staring down the end of another LCAS season that has left many of us feeling like the glass is half empty. But is it?

In 2020, LCAS participated in the first ever (and much-needed) clean-up at Nature Park. (Thanks, Berta Nason!) Glenda Bradshaw spearheaded an effort at Spring Meadow Lake to create the Jane Beasley Memorial Trail, now open for use. We surveyed birds at Sevenmile Creek and Canyon Ferry WMA and conducted the annual Christmas Bird Count in spite of Covid. We erected nesting boxes at the K-Mart Ponds, awarded a scholarship to a worthy Carroll student, sent out newsletters, and organized a post-pandemic birding opportunity to Colombia for members. We continued the work of Last Chance Audubon.

In spite of the pandemic, we are a strong organization filled with new beginnings. We just placed two new kestrel boxes at Sevenmile Creek, where the stream channel has been restructured and rerouted, and the planting of riparian shrubs is underway. LCAS seed sowing is on our spring list! The constructed ponds are starting to draw new bird species, such as Buffleheads and Common Mergansers. The grasslands are showing signs of greening up, the appearance of new shoots looks promising for new shrub beginnings, and surveys are showing birds returning!

In addition, LCAS is looking to the beginning of its next half century! This fall we will gather to celebrate our chapter's 50th anniversary. While we will certainly reflect on where we have been, we will also look ahead to where we are going. What new projects will move us forward as we support bird and habitat conservation in the Helena Valley?

Let's look at that glass again. Is it really half empty? Has the last year or so really been a journey toward an end? Or might it just be a pause in our journey, and the beginning of a new chapter?

-- *Stephen Turner*

LCAS Field Trips

In consideration of the still-ongoing pandemic, LCAS will be offering limited field trips this year. Contact the trip leaders for up-to-date information on COVID safety protocols. It is possible that more field trips might be offered as the summer progresses, so check the LCAS website for the most current information.

June 5: BIRDING 101

In cooperation with Montana WILD Education Center, LCAS is pleased to host a workshop on bird identification and natural history. The workshop is open to ages 12 and up and will run from 8:00-10:00 a.m. Due to COVID, the indoor portion of the workshop has been cancelled, and we will only be meeting for a bird walk around Spring Meadow Lake. The size of the group will also be limited to 10 people. There is no cost for the workshop. LCAS has a few pairs of binoculars for use, but if you have your own, please bring them. All participants should have the ability to navigate a one-mile walk around Spring Meadow Lake. We will meet rain or shine; please dress for the weather. Meet at MT WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave. To register for this field trip, please contact Stephen Turner, turnstonest@gmail.com.

*Participants in this workshop are also invited to attend a follow-up field trip on Sunday, June 6. The field trip will be held at K-Mart Wetlands beginning at 7:00 a.m. Additional information will be provided during Saturday's workshop.

June 19: SEVENMILE CREEK POST-FIRE

In early September 2020, most of the Sevenmile Creek stream restoration site, a few miles outside of Helena, burned in a rapidly moving grass fire. In previous summers, the grassland and riparian habitats here have provided rich habitat for a wide diversity of breeding birds. This year, however, following the fire, it is completely unknown what we may find here. This site remains closed to the public as stream restoration work is completed, so this field trip is a unique opportunity to check it out. Participants should plan to dress for bumpy terrain and any weather. Group size is limited to 10. We will meet in Helena at 6:00 a.m. and plan to be back around 12:00 p.m. To register, contact Shane Sater, shsater@gmail.com.

September 5: WORLD SHOREBIRDS DAY

LCAS will again participate in World Shorebirds Day by surveying shorebirds and other bird species at Canyon Ferry WMA. Several shorebird ID experts will be on hand. 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 return from the WMA no later than 1:00 p.m. 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. To register, contact Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com. The survey requires an approximately 1.5-mile round-trip walk on dirt roads. Participants are reminded to wear sturdy foot wear and to dress for any type of weather.



Yellow-rumped Warbler by Janice Miller.

50th Anniversary Celebration: September 12

LCAS turned 50 years old in January 2021. The world situation did not make a celebration possible at that time, but this momentous anniversary definitely deserves to be commemorated with a **PARTY!** So mark your calendars for the afternoon of Sunday, September 12, for a family gathering at Meadowlark Pavilion at Spring Meadow Lake State Park in Helena. Planning for the event is ongoing and all the details will be coming to LCAS members later in the summer. Just know there will be adult beverages and anniversary cake, a bit of birdwatching and trail walking, and all the excitement and camaraderie that happens when LCAS members get together.



White-faced Ibises by Don Senn.

Board Members Welcomed

The LCAS bylaws call for Board elections to be held at the May membership meeting each year. Since there could not be a meeting this year, the Board decided to accept the five individuals who had been nominated by the announced April 20 deadline. These nominees are Glenda Bradshaw, Sharon Dewart-Hansen, Jo Lace, Shane Sater, and Stephen Turner. Their upcoming two-year terms will officially begin on July 1, 2021. Thanks to these LCAS members for being willing to continue serving as Board members and for helping to carry on the work of our chapter.

World Migratory Bird Day Events

World Migratory Bird Day is returning to Helena this year in the form of a series of bird-themed events and activities in early May.

May 1: Helena Regulating Reservoir birding events. Choose from guided “early bird” walks beginning at 7:30 a.m., 8:30 a.m., and 9:30 a.m. Alternatively, come by the heron overlook from 8:00-10:00 a.m. to view the heron rookery.

May 2: Ten Mile Creek Brewery. Music, games, and prizes on the Gulch, inside and outside, 5:00-8:00 p.m.

May 4: Family Virtual Trivia Night with Montana WILD staff (on Zoom), 7:00 p.m. Email Corie Rice to register: corie.rice@mt.gov.

May 5: Guided morning bird walks with Montana WILD at Spring Meadow Lake, 8:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., and 9:00 a.m. Call Montana WILD to register: 406-444-9941.

May 6: Adult Virtual Trivia Night with Montana WILD staff (on Zoom), 7:00 p.m. Email Corie Rice to register: corie.rice@mt.gov.

Ongoing Activities: Bird activity bags for kids at the Bookmobile and Birds & Beasleys in downtown Helena; bird scavenger hunt and geocaching at local trails and parks!

Visit www.montanadiscoveryfoundation.org/programs/wmbd for more information.



Black-bellied Plover by Janice Miller.

LCAS: Remembering 50 Years of History

In 1971, avid Helena birdwatchers began the process of launching Last Chance Audubon Society, a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. According to founding member George Holton, Helena birders at that time had a close association with Bozeman's Sacajawea Audubon Society. George's birdwatching buddy, Sid Martin, was the one to suggest starting a Helena chapter. Martin had belonged to an earlier Audubon "club" in Helena. Its driving force had been Ron Keim, a teacher in the Helena schools, but the club did not persist, even though Helena had a dedicated core group of birders. These hearty souls had been conducting an annual Christmas Bird Count since 1954 under the leadership of Chuck Beveridge, missing only one year. Then, as now, many people in the area were interested in protecting the environment, another part of the Audubon mission.



Osprey by Bob Martinka.

On January 19, 1971, prospective members held an organizational meeting and chose a nominating committee headed by Sid Martin and Bob Cooney to present a slate of officers and board members. The following month, they elected their governing body: Vince Yannone, president; Phil Schlamp, vice president; Lorelei Saxby, secretary; Geri Brusett, treasurer; and Virginia Bompert, George Holton, Ron Keim, Sid Martin, and Bob Miller, board of directors. One of their first actions was to donate the book *Birds of North America* to the local public library and to set up a conservation shelf at the library, as required by National Audubon.

National Audubon also had requirements for local chapters regarding membership size. By March, the fledgling chapter had exceeded the 35-member threshold required for affiliation, and Robert Turner, the Rocky Mountain Regional Representative for National Audubon, visited Helena and presented a program on organizing a chapter.

Members voted on and accepted bylaws and a constitution in April and chose the name Last Chance Audubon Society. They picked the osprey for the cover of the newsletter, arranged a display of bird photos at the Capital Hill Shopping Center for Earth Week, and sponsored five field trips in the 1971 season. In October, Vince Yannone resigned as president to comply with a rule from the Montana Fish and Game Commission prohibiting Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks employees from holding elective office in sportsmen's organizations. Don Roberts was nominated to fill the position until the next regular election in May 1972.

In the ensuing years, Last Chance Audubon Society has continued its mission to promote "understanding, respect, and enjoyment of birds and the natural world through education, habitat protection, and environmental advocacy." The chapter presents programs at its monthly meetings from September through May (look for them to resume in fall 2021!), organizes and sponsors field trips, participates in national programs including the Christmas Bird Count and the annual Birdathon, contributes to Montana Audubon programs, and does a variety of local projects, including park clean-ups, the new Jane Beasley Trail at Spring Meadow State Park, stream restoration monitoring, educational partnerships, and more.

-- Glenda Bradshaw, with historical information from George Holton's article "The Origin of Last Chance Audubon Society" in the January 1996 *Last Chance Chat*.

The View from Sevenmile Creek: April

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.

April 18, 2021. A large white bird wheels low over the soft green grasses. At first I think it is a gull – a surprising-enough bird at Sevenmile Creek – but it is clearly not slender enough, and the black wingtips are more prominent. A Snow Goose! The lone bird lands in the bare earth around the new ponds and stream channel: a new “first” for this place, even in the midst of all the habitat disturbances since last fall’s fire.

To be sure, we have seen Snow Geese flying over before – on October 27, 2019, we counted 1105 of them migrating south in white flurries – but today is the first time we have ever seen one stopping and using the habitat here. The lone goose begins to graze on the tender green grasses that are sprouting back from the fire, just as seven pairs of Canada Geese are doing as well this morning.

The geese are not the only waterfowl of note today. We keep flushing Mallards from the stream, and then we see a pair of American Wigeons swimming among the cattails of one of the older ponds created in the 2018 stage of stream restoration. A group of Common Mergansers flies over, heading upstream. Perhaps one of these weeks soon we will get to see them landing here and exploring the new ponds, just as two pairs of Buffleheads did a few weeks ago.

The burned shrubs remain nearly silent, a silence they have been maintaining since last September’s fire. No Yellow-rumped Warblers, no Lincoln’s Sparrows, and no Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Just a few chickadees and robins prospecting for the few insects to be found here. But a closer look promises that, even this year, the habitat is beginning to grow back. Tiny shoots are emerging from the underground root systems of the native shrubs – golden currant, western snowberry, and Wood’s rose. And on the south slope, I spot the first new chokecherry leaves popping up from the earth beneath a burned thicket.

Meanwhile, contractors from Watershed Restoration Group have planted hundreds of native shrub seedlings in this year’s section of restored stream – not only willows, but also silver buffaloberry, hawthorn, red-osier dogwood, chokecherry, golden currant, and Wood’s rose. Sometime in the next month, LCAS will be pitching in by scattering seeds of local native plants collected last fall, including fireweed, Rocky Mountain beeplant, showy milkweed, and tall dogbane. (If interested in helping plant or organize volunteers, contact Shane Sater.)

Spring migration may be bittersweet here this year, but the future is already beginning to grow! (Let’s just hope for some rain). And while we’re waiting for it, we have a Snow Goose to tide us over.

-- Shane Sater



Snow Goose by Shane Sater.



Chokecherries resprouting post-fire by Shane Sater.



Riparian shrub plantings by Shane Sater.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Karen Lane.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Rick & Nancy Tuber, Ann Bauchman, Deborah Rainey & Jim Maher, Drake Barton & Kathy Lloyd, Dennis & Donna Uken, Beverly Pickett, Berma Saxton, Don & Joan Bishop, Jean Smith, Michele March, Patricia Helvey, David & Deborah Cooper, Bill & Nancy Wells, Bryce & Sarah Maxell, Robyn & Jay Carter, John Hofflan, Mary Vandebosch, Linda Huso, Joe Lamson, Pat Grantham, Elaine Pfund, Barbara Pepper-Rotness, Kelly Rusoff, Laurie Ekanger, Sandra & Gary Barker, Connie Geiger, Allison Begley, Marjean Heisler, Denise Pengeroth, and Constance Enzweiler.



Black-billed Magpie by Nancy Ewer.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Lowell Anderson, Bonnie Baker, Dean Grenz, B. Hall-Munger, Annie McElligott Hull, Samantha Sanchez, and Jack Troyer.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Alison Schulte, Ilollo Jones, Allison Begley, Gene Huntington, Gary Grzebielski, Becky Piske, Dennis Zeiler, Brad Robinson, Mark Murphy, William Wells, Joyce Krings, Ellen Taylor, Sam Samson, Mark & Connie Lere, Constance Fiske, Jacob Martin, Diane Dean, Steven Helwig, and Sharon Liederman.

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 are 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

Donate Now

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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
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