

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

October 2022

Birding in Oaxaca, Mexico

**Tuesday, October 11,
2022**

Program begins 7:00PM

**Montana WILD, 2668
Broadwater Ave.**

Free - All Are Welcome

Join Dan Ellison for a photographic birding tour of the Oaxaca, Mexico area. In December 2019, Dan and his spouse Jane Fournier traveled to Mexico for ten days of birding around Oaxaca City, Huatulco on the southwest coast, and Tehuantepec near the Isthmus. Traveling in Oaxaca also provided chances to speak Spanish with local people and learn about the Zapotec culture centered in that region. With their guide Eric Antonio Martinez, one of Mexico's foremost birders, Dan was able to observe more than 60 new life birds, as well as species that nest locally in the Rocky Mountains but winter in Mexico. Highlights of the trip included close contact with small owls and hummingbirds. Several of those species will be featured in Dan's presentation, along with his stunning photographs of many colorful tropical birds.



Colima Pygmy-owl by Dan Ellison.

Dan Ellison grew up in the Bitterroot Valley, graduated from the Naval Academy, and served on active duty for 26 years as a Navy pilot. He returned to Montana in 1999 and settled in Helena, where he worked for several years in state government, including as Chief Financial Officer for Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. In 2009 he was elected to the Helena City Commission and re-elected in 2013. He divides his personal time between managing the family ranch near Stevensville, bird watching, fly fishing, wildlife photography, and other outdoor pursuits.



President's Perch

The passion for birds and nature can be solo or a community-oriented pastime. For introverts like me, it tends to be a solo venture. My camera serves as an extension of my arm. It's a way to capture nature – including sunrises and birds – and also to rejuvenate, refuel, and come into balance with the rest of my world.

However, when the opportunity presents itself, birding with others is not just a delight, but also a chance to expand my knowledge of birds (vocalizations, flight patterns, plumage, and more). Besides birds, I often learn from my fellow birders about the vegetation, the little crawling/flying bugs, and how all of that serves the greater ecosystem.



Rough-legged Hawk by Janice Miller.

At LCAS we have a treasure trove of expert birders and naturalists who are happy to share their sightings, as well as tips for learning more about the various species. Plus, we have excellent birding hot spots right in town: [Nature Park](#), the [K-mart Ponds](#), and the [Fairgrounds](#), to name a few. If you're taking a morning walk in one of these places with your binoculars or your camera and happen to spy a person or a small group with binoculars, introduce yourself as an LCAS member and ask what they're finding. Going birding in places like this is a great way to meet some friendly and knowledgeable birders.

And if you're looking for a more formal event, mark your calendar for **Saturday, December 17**, our annual LCAS Christmas Bird Count and potluck. Watch for more details in the upcoming months.

So get out there and enjoy the autumn birding – either by yourself or with some friends! The songbirds are still passing through. Soon, we'll welcome the Rough-legged Hawks of the winter as they arrive from their breeding grounds on the arctic tundra.

-- Janice Miller, President, LCAS

Next Board Meeting

Are you interested in coming to an LCAS Board meeting? Would you like to contribute your ideas and energy to the mission of our organization? LCAS members are always welcome at our Board meetings. If you'd like to attend, mark your calendar for **October 18 at 7:00 pm**. Contact any Board member for details (see page 6).



Mountain Bluebird by Dan Ellison.

Save the date: ***Wings Across the Big Sky***

Mark your calendars for Montana Audubon's *Wings Across the Big Sky* festival next summer in Great Falls, **June 9 to June 11, 2023**. Watch for more details as the date approaches!

Montana's Baby Birds Need Your Help

Why Do They Need Help? Globally, over a 1,480 species of birds are considered threatened (datazone.birdlife.org). Baby birds are the most vulnerable stage.

How Can I Help? You can help baby birds fledge by planting native flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees.

What are Native Plants? Native flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees are ones that have evolved in a particular region and are an integral part of the ecosystem. They are ones that both support and are supported by the residents of that community. As Shane Sater says, “they play nicely with others.”

Why Native Plants? Butterflies, moths, and other insects lay their eggs on particular species of native plants. The insect eggs then hatch and become caterpillars or other larvae: essential food for baby birds.

In fact, 90% of insects depend on just a few particular native plants (which they have co-evolved with) in order to reproduce. (Doug Tallamy, [Nature's Best Hope](#))

One well-known example is the Monarch butterfly. The Monarch will only lay her eggs on a milkweed plant (*Asclepias* spp.). No milkweed – no Monarch larvae – no Monarch butterflies.

Why Do Terrestrial Baby Birds Need Insect Larvae? The larval stage of these insects contains essential nutrients necessary for terrestrial baby birds to attain adulthood. No larvae – no terrestrial baby birds.

96% of terrestrial birds need caterpillars and other insects to raise their young. (Doug Tallamy, [Nature's Best Hope](#))

Watch for ***What Can I do?*** And ***What Native Plants Are Recommended for Helena?*** in the November newsletter!

-- Article contributed by LCAS member Ruth Swenson.

Bird Seed Sale

Here's another reminder of this fall's LCAS bird seed sale, in partnership with [Birds & Beasleys](#). If you're stocking up for your winter birds, stop by Birds & Beasleys and let the staff know you're purchasing seed as a part of the LCAS sale. LCAS receives a portion of your purchase price plus a donation from Birds & Beasleys for each bag of seed sold. The sale runs from September 15 through November 30.

This year's prices:

- 20 lbs black oil sunflower seeds: \$30
- 20 lbs sunflower chips: \$45
- 20 lbs millet: \$25
- 10 lbs thistle: \$24, 20 lbs thistle: \$42



*Lincoln's Sparrow with a caterpillar
by Dan Ellison.*



*A Monarch caterpillar [on show](#)
[milkweed in the Helena Valley.](#)
Photo by Shane Sater.*

The View from... Nature Park September 24, 2022

Bird migration touches all of us, whether we realize it or not. And to me, there's something special about those times when we can come together as a community to tell these stories of the places where we live.

Without any planning, this day has become one of those times. Sarah Kamis and I met this morning to bird [Nature Park](#), an urban patch of habitat in the middle of Helena. But almost immediately, we saw fellow birders Bob Martinka and Sharon Dewart-Hansen here. Immediately, our morning of birding turned into a community event.



White-crowned Sparrow by Bob Martinka.

It's a perfect fall morning. The acrid wildfire smoke has cleared. The golden currant leaves have turned a deep burgundy, and some patches of yellow are starting to appear among the cottonwood foliage. We seem to be in a lull between waves of songbird migration this morning. Nevertheless, the White-crowned Sparrows are very active along the asphalt trail that runs through the park. They make soft, lispy calls as they forage for the fall's abundance of seeds.

Sharon, Bob, and Sarah all have a special connection with Nature Park. As part of their local birding routines, Sharon and Bob both visit this place regularly. Several years ago, when Sarah lived next to Nature Park, she also became deeply familiar with the park and its birds. In fact, it was her observations of a rare [black-throated gray warbler](#) here in 2019 that inspired the Helena birding community to take notice of this park.

All of these visits have turned up some incredible bird stories. Over the years, birders have documented **18 species** of warblers at Nature Park. It's a phenomenal diversity for anywhere in the Helena area – and particularly notable here, in the heart of the city.

The birding is quiet this morning – and so our conversation becomes a walking story of this park and its birds. I don't know Nature Park nearly as well as my fellow birders. For the past six years, Sevenmile Creek has been my equivalent of this place, a habitat patch that I visit regularly throughout the seasons. So today I get to listen, coming to know this place through the stories of my friends.

I can't capture these stories fully in such a short article (but watch for a fuller version next week on [my blog](#)). Here are some highlights:

- The robins have passed through already and cleaned out the chokecherry fruits. Black-billed Magpies have returned to the park after being mostly absent during the summer.
- The bulk of fall songbird migration seems to be wrapping up. Wilson's Warblers, White-crowned Sparrows, and Lincoln's Sparrows are still passing through the park.
- Along the creek is a spot where Sharon and other birders found a Chestnut-sided Warbler and a Black-and-white Warbler in fall 2020. Today, it's quiet in this special spot.



Wilson's Warbler by Shane Sater.

The stories I hear today are tales of rarities, the progression of the seasons, and changes over time. And together, what they tell me is this: we, as a birding community, have a deep connection with the landscape around us. These stories help remind us

that places like Nature Park are special. They're special not just because of the birds, but also because **any of us** can show up here and experience this connection with place.

The morning has been quiet in terms of birds, but rich in companionship and stories. And it has reminded me, again, of why I write. I love that we, as a community, share this depth of connection with nature in the midst of this city. By writing, I hope that I can share that inspiration with a few more people.

So this fall, I invite you to take a walk through Nature Park. Notice the seasons changing, and keep your eyes and ears open for the birds. And if you show up early in the morning, there's a good chance you'll find a friendly local birder with a wealth of stories about this place. I'll see you there.

-- *Shane Sater*



Black-and-white Warbler by Bob Martinka.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Robert Martin.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Theresa Green and Larry Urban.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Sandra Renner, Holly Silkman, and Ronald Schwartz.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Barbara Bayer, Barbara Bessler, James Driggers, Maribeth Goodrich, William Hall, Shirley Hudson, Susan Jackson, Deborah Jones, Larry McEvoy, Mike & Helen Murray, M. Pasichnyk, and Montana Outdoors.

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

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