

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

February 2023

Conservation Ranching in Montana

**Tuesday, February 14,
2023**

Program begins 7:00 PM

**Montana WILD, 2668
Broadwater Ave.**

Free – All Are Welcome

Also available via Zoom!

The purpose of Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR) is to stabilize declining grassland bird populations in partnership with ranchers – on whose land 95 percent of grassland birds live. Amy Seaman, Christian Meny, and Peter Dudley will discuss how Montana Audubon will support ranchland projects to improve grassland bird habitat for species like the Chestnut-collared Longspur, Lark Bunting, and Greater Sage-grouse. Grassland birds have suffered an unparalleled decline over the past half century, stemming from widespread development on North America's grasslands. ACR offers incentives to ranchers for good grassland stewardship.

Amy Seaman is Director of Policy and Science at Montana Audubon (MA). She joined MA in 2013 to work on citizen science and bird conservation. Amy earned her M.S. in Biology from the University of Nevada.



Chestnut-collared Longspur by Bob Martinka.

Her avian research has taken her across many of Montana's priority habitats in areas such as Glacier National Park, Charles M. Russell NWR, and the Madison and Missouri Rivers. Amy has been leading MA public policy and lobbying work since 2015.

Christian Meny is Director of Conservation Ranching for MA. Previously, he spent ten years managing the Montana Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions program. He has also contributed to Montana's State Management Plan for Common Loons and has been involved with the World Wildlife Fund Sustainable Ranching Initiative and the MPG Ranch.

Peter Dudley, MA Legislative & Conservation Ranching Assistant, graduated from Haverford College with a B.A. in Anthropology and an Environmental Studies minor. Last year he accepted a Conservation Fellowship with Montana Conservation Corps working with a trail crew in Hungry Horse, MT. With ACR, Peter looks forward to applying his interests in native plants, resource conservation, and agroecology.



AND... WE'RE BACK!

It's a NEW DAY and a NEW YEAR at LCAS. We offered our first hybrid membership meeting (in person plus Zoom) at our January program. Although we certainly faced a learning curve, our Board members worked as a team – with help from a PEAK student – and the reviews we received were very good. We plan to offer hybrid options going forward, with benefits on many levels.

Also looking forward:

- The wheels are turning to make the Bill Rainey Osprey Cam a reality.
- We are in the planning stages of our field trip season.
- We're getting to work maintaining bird boxes to have them in tip-top shape when the songbirds return.
- We're planning clean-up days at some of our favorite birding areas.
- We are working to supply *Audubon Adventures* educational materials to elementary schools, as well as scholarships to high school seniors and grants to Carroll students.



Western Bluebird by Janice Miller.

All of this in addition to scheduling our stellar monthly programs. WHEW! We have a LOT happening this spring at LCAS.

Volunteer hours accomplish many of these things and we ask for your hearty, work-glove participation. Real dollars are needed for the Osprey cam and scholarships for students planning their future education in environmental studies, as well as to cover smaller, recurring costs such as our Zoom subscription.

To support this valuable work, I hope you'll renew your 2023 LCAS membership and, if you're able, throw in a generous donation. We can do more with your strong financial support.

Many thanks!

-- Janice Miller, President

2022 CBC Results!

In terms of bird numbers, the 2022 Helena Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was fairly average. We recorded 66 species and 7300 individuals. Among the most abundant species were Canada Goose, House Sparrow, Rock Pigeon, and House Finch. We documented an unusual winter Ruby-crowned Kinglet for the first time ever on this CBC. This year we also had record high counts of Merlins and Wild Turkeys (11 each). Check out the full results here: <https://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/2023/01/22/results-of-2022-christmas-count-now-available/>.

Masonic Home: CALL BEFORE BIRDING!

The Masonic Home in the Helena Valley very respectfully asks birders to let them know ahead of time of plans to visit and look for birds. They politely reminded us that this area is private property, in addition to being a health care facility. They are experiencing a big increase in birding visitors this winter, and it is unsettling. They ask that we NOT drive around to the maintenance area in back. Please call: 406-458-5431, don't use an extension number, wait, and tell whomever answers the phone of your plans to visit. Thank you for your kind respect.



Bohemian Waxwing at Masonic Home. Photo by Shane Sater.

Observing Birds Course: Building a Cross-Country Community of Birders*

**The response for the Observing Birds course has been very positive and the class is currently full. The instructors are accepting wait-list names in the event of a cancellation. We are also accepting contact information for those interested in future courses. Please contact Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com.*

Beginning March 30, 2023 Craig Kesselheim and Stephen Turner will co-host a course on observing birds. This course is designed to be a low stress, supportive, and informative on-ramp to birding as a lifelong pursuit. We welcome active early birders as well as interested "newbies." Each session will improve observational skills, explore seasonal changes in bird life, and practice identification.



Blue-winged Teal by Dan Ellison.

The course will be presented via Zoom, and will meet each Thursday from 4:30-6:00 pm (Mountain Time) in the comfort of your own home! Classes begin March 30 and run weekly through May 4 (there will not be a class on April 20). A minimum of two field trips are included with the class, and additional short trips into the field will be scheduled as time allows for the class as a whole.

The course will be offered through the [Mt. Desert Island Adult and Continuing Education](#) program, and two options are available for the course. The Zoom only course is \$48 per person and the Zoom plus field trips is \$60 per person.

Wings Across the Big Sky: Save the Date

Mark your calendars for Montana Audubon's yearly birding festival, hosted this year by Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon. Wings Across the Big Sky will take place **June 9-11, 2023** at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls. Watch for more information to come: <https://mtaudubon.org/>



The Great Backyard Bird Count

Join the global community in sharing a love of birds & nature!

For over a quarter of a century, the annual Great Backyard Bird Count has been a bright spot for nature lovers. The 26th year of the event is **coming up, February 17 through 20, 2023**. Everyone is invited to join the count so that their bird sightings become part of a massive database used by scientists to track changes in bird populations over time. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a joint project of the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#), [National Audubon Society](#), and [Birds Canada](#).

Each participant counts birds for any length of time (but for at least 15 minutes) and reports what they see online. It's easy for people of all skill levels. Participants enter a new checklist for each new location or time of day during the four-day count. There are also tools and information on the [GBBC website](#) to help new and returning birders.

To learn more about how to take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, visit [birdcount.org](#). The GBBC is made possible in part by founding sponsor [Wild Birds Unlimited](#).

Step-by-step instructions for participating in the 2023 GBBC using:

- * Merlin Bird ID app: <https://www.birdcount.org/merlin-bird-id-app/>
- * eBird Mobile app: <https://www.birdcount.org/ebird-mobile-app/>
- * eBird on a computer: <https://www.birdcount.org/ebird-on-computer>

Bird Seed Sale - Year-round!

During the LCAS bird seed sale last fall in conjunction with [Birds and Beasleys](#), 14 individuals purchased 300 pounds of seed. The fundraiser brought \$75 to our chapter. Thanks to all the participants – seed purchasers as well as the staff at Birds & Beasleys!

What's more, Birds & Beasleys has announced that from now on, the bird seed sale will run year-round! **When you're at Birds & Beasleys purchasing your seed, just let the staff know that you're participating in the sale. Birds & Beasleys will donate a portion of the price to LCAS.** Many thanks to Sandy Shull and her staff for their generous support!



Red-tailed Hawk by Mike Chapman.



Pine Siskin by Janice Miller.

Update from Montana Wetlands and Waterfowl

Last September, Mark Mariano presented a program to our members about his work providing safe nesting platforms (hen houses) for ducks. Since the meeting, Mark has formed a non-profit organization, Montana Wetlands and Waterfowl (MTWW), based in Butte. Below is the information Mark sent to update LCAS members.

We have teamed up with Fish, Wildlife & Parks to incorporate our hen houses into the agency's Project Wild, a professional development program that Montana WILD does each year with educators from across the state. This February and March, Montana Wetlands and Waterfowl and Montana WILD will be bringing a waterfowl and pollution-themed program to two elementary schools, one in Butte and one in Anaconda. A big new part of this program will include building our hen houses with 5th and 6th grade students and a trip to the field to install and/or monitor them. During the field trips, the students will

learn about waterfowl and wetlands ecology, get to see all sorts of birds, and learn about the history and cleanup in the Upper Clark Fork Valley. Additionally, we are currently working to do a similar event with an 8th grade class at Helena Middle School (HMS). For this we are working with the Lake Helena Watershed Group's Education and Outreach Committee as well as Montana WILD. For the HMS class, we're going to work on getting permission to install hen houses in the Helena area, and hopefully we can get permission for at least one at Spring Meadow.



Mallard and Cackling Goose by Dan Ellison.

The LCAS Board voted to make a \$400 donation to MTWW, which will use this money for supplies and materials needed for the hen house program in the Upper Clark Fork and in Helena. For more information, visit the MTWW website (mtwetlandsandwaterfowl.org) and sign up to receive their newsletters.

Mellow Yellow Lights to Protect Our Nocturnal Insects (that feed our birds)

Whether you want to keep insects away from your house or you **want to stop killing the moths and other nighttime insects that help feed our birds**, replacing your outdoor lights with yellow LED bulbs works.

[An experiment by researcher Michael Justice](#) showed that LED porch lights attract less insects than incandescent, halogen, or compact fluorescent bulbs. And warmer, "yellow" LED bulbs attract less insects than cooler "blue" LEDs.

The bottom line is that replacing outdoor lighting with yellow LED bulbs is an easy, cheap step to reduce nighttime insect mortality. These lights can be found in hardware stores, home improvement centers, or online.



The nocturnal moth *Feltia jaculifera*.
Photo by Shane Sater.

Keystone Plants: Superstars of the Plant World

Remember the Roman arch? The keystone is the one in the center that keeps the arch in place – in other words, the most important stone.

A **keystone plant species** is a species that has a disproportionately large effect on its natural environment. If a keystone species disappears from an ecosystem, it's like pulling the keystone from an arch: the effects go far beyond the loss of that species.

Just a few **native keystone plants** provide sustenance for most of the Lepidoptera larvae (moths and butterflies) that are so important to our food webs – **and our birds**. About 5% of our local native plants host 70-75% of our local Lepidoptera species. These plants act like keystones: they have a disproportionately large effect on the abundance and diversity of other species in the ecosystem. Remove the keystone and the ecosystem falls down. **On the other hand, just think how good it could be for our birds if we add more of these plants to our neighborhoods and natural areas!**

What are the 3 keystone “superstar” native plants for the Helena area?
(find more information at <http://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder> and fieldguide.mt.gov)

- **Goldenrod** (*Solidago*) – 11 species; critical habitat for 65 species of moth & butterfly larvae. Note: **goldenrod does not make you sneeze**. Its pollen grains are large and sticky and do not float on the wind. The true culprit is ragweed; a nondescript plant that sheds its windborne pollen at the same time goldenrod is in bloom.
- **Strawberry** (*Fragaria*) – 2 species; critical habitat for 64 species of moth & butterfly larvae
- **Sunflower** (*Helianthus*) – 6 species; critical habitat for 48 species of moth & butterfly larvae



An adult moth visiting giant goldenrod (Solidago gigantea). Photo by Shane Sater.

What are the 3 Keystone “Superstar” Native Trees for the Helena area?

- **Willow** (*Salix*) – 30+ native species; critical habitat for 309 species of moth & butterfly larvae
- **Aspen, Cottonwood, Poplar** (*Populus*) – 4 native species; critical habitat for 245 species of moth & butterfly larvae
- **Chokecherry, Plum, Cherry** (*Prunus*) – 4 native species; critical habitat for 227 species of moth & butterfly larvae

-- Ruth Swenson, raswenson50@gmail.com



A Yellow-rumped Warbler foraging within a flowering chokecherry (Prunus virginiana). Photo by Shane Sater.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Jessica Allewalt, CD Avery, Austin Anderson, Mary Lou McGrath, Wanda Berndtson, Evan Parker, Sara Owen & Bill Schenk, Mike Menahan, and Sarah Hess.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Steve & Judith Bayless, Silvia Ceravolo, Don & Donna Eisenmenger, Susan Epstein, Carolyn Fox, Lee Harrison, Liz & Carl Hiltunen, Grant Hokit, Brian Shovers & Jo Lace, Daborah Amesbury & John Loe, Joe & Laurie Lamson, Deborah Massett, Sharon & Slim Miller, Janice Miller, Dave & Patty Mott, David Nimick, Larry Peterman, Shane Sater, Sumner Sharpe, Norma Tirrell, Stephen Turner, Shawn Watts, Roni Eisenmenger, Jan Horan, Ramona Turnbull, Gil & Jodi Schellenger, Sharon Liederman, Liz Gans & Rick Newby, Leslie Smith, Pete Strazdas, Mary Vandebosch, Fran Penner-Ray, Gail Moser, Kathryn Bramer, Hugh & Karen Zackheim, Donna Shull, Ann Waterman, Dan Ellison & Jane Fournier, Barbara Pepper-Rotness, Thomas & Marilyn Pearson, Constance Herzig, Marilyn Hayes, Bob Martinka, Curtis Larsen, Gail Kuntz & Terry Wheeling, Wendy & Gregg Wheeler, Bonnie Bowler, Mary Jane Bradbury, Marlys Forbes, Mary & Neal Ruedisili, and Mary Yeshe.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Crystal Bagwell, Beverly Daehn, William Drew, Patricia Farley, Paul Ferry, Laura Heit, Charles McCarthy, Charles McCarty, Mark Nigon, Nathan Phillips, Daryl Reed, Chris Cornish, Kurt Cunningham, Karen Fairbrother, D. Nigon, Mark Thompson, and Dick Warner.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Leslie Bass, Mary Carparelli, Christine Deveny, Constance Fiske, Alice Hinshaw, Susan Holton, Darlene Jatkowski, Julie Reardon, Shawn Watts, Dennis Zeiler, Lowell Anderson, Don Bishop, Mary Bradbury, Joan Daoust, Joseph Furshong, Ivelone Hodges, Joy Holloway, Wallace Jewell, Jo Lace, Robin LeNeve, Connie Lere, Terry O'Connor, Gary Peterson, Jorge Ramirez, Judy Scheier, Alison Schulte, Jay Simons, Kathleen Wanner, Judy Fjell, and Andrea Rankin.

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

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Membership

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