

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*

*April 2023*

## **Dances with Ravens: Wolf-birds and Humans**

**Tuesday, April 11, 2023  
Program begins 7:00 PM**

**Montana WILD, 2668  
Broadwater Ave.**

**Free – All Are Welcome  
Also available via Zoom!**

Seeing ravens is a daily experience for many of us who live, play, and work in Montana. In this presentation, we'll consider how these birds provide a way for us to think about and connect with nature. From the Old Testament to the reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone National Park, ravens have always taught us. In Western civilization, cultural accounts of ravens have often been decidedly negative, perhaps based on observations of ravens scavenging human corpses after battles. In contrast, indigenous cultures typically characterize ravens as powerful mythological beings as well as practical helpmates for hunters. Scientists point out the complex nature of raven communication as well as the coevolution between ravens and wolves. The term "wolf-bird" has arisen from observations of ravens' interactions with wolves, including leading wolves to prey and scavenging wolf-killed prey.



*Common Raven by Bob Martinka.*

Our speaker, Pat Munday, PhD, is a professor of Science & Technology Studies at Montana Tech. His current research includes the relationship between humans and nature. His service includes major grants for environmental stream restoration, a popular book about the Big Hole River, and presidency of Butte's Mai Wah Society. He is a year-round outdoorsman, enjoying cross country skiing, trout fishing, backpacking, and elk hunting. Observing ravens during his outdoor adventures in the Montana mountains, Munday has noted that "raven joy is as apparent as a playful dog's joy."



## SPRING BIRDING!

Is there anything sweeter than our beautiful, colorful birds – in all sizes and colors – returning here, to this place we call “home,” after we have experienced a very LONG, cold, snowy winter?

We encourage all of our members to get outside and find out which birds are back and where they're setting up their breeding territories. In this issue of the *Chat*, find our current list of spring/summer field trips. Check them out, find the ones that you're excited about, and email the trip leader to sign up!

Join our knowledgeable trip leaders to learn about a wide range of topics: nature journaling, warblers, waterfowl, wetlands, and aquatic insects. There's a lot to be learned outside – and we have the field trip (or several) to fit your interests.



*Mountain Bluebird by Bob Martinka.*

In addition, you might consider putting together a Birdathon team to raise money for ongoing operation of the **Bill Rainey Osprey Webcam** (which will be up and running shortly!) and for MT Audubon's conservation and advocacy work. (This year's Birdathon fundraiser will be split 50-50 between these two projects.) It's easy and fun! Teams can include two to four participants. Create a team name, set a date, and then start asking for support from co-workers, family, friends, other birders, and other folks who enjoy being outdoors. Ask if they might consider sponsoring your team. Sponsors can either choose a flat rate donation (\$30, for example) – or they can donate on a per-species basis (such as \$1 for each species that you find during your Birdathon).

In advance, scout for birds among the various bird habitats in our area – along creeks, rivers and reservoirs, along the gulches, or at feeders. Then you're ready for your Big Birdathon Day in the field – with friends. It's a blast! You have 24 hours to find as many species as you can. Take photos to show the birds and the fun. Remember, the money goes to two GREAT causes. Let me know if you have the enthusiasm to get out there this spring and raise funds for LCAS – or if you have any questions.

Immerse yourself in the out-of-doors – spring has been a long time coming.

-- Janice Miller, President, LCAS

## Mark Your Calendar: 2023 Field Trips

Field trips are a long-standing LCAS tradition: a great way to celebrate our local birds, meet new people, and sharpen your birding skills. This year we have a diverse selection planned, so whether you're an avid birder or just getting started, join us in the field! Plan to dress for the weather and bring binoculars, snacks, and water. **All field trips are free for LCAS members. For non-members, they cost \$15 – which includes an annual membership.** RSVP required – contact the field trip leaders (listed below) to sign up (or if you've already signed up and need to cancel).

### May 15: K-MART WETLANDS

Join Kyle Strode for a morning of birding at the K-Mart Wetlands – an urban ecotone site that includes a marsh, ponds, woody thickets, and small patches of open grassland. An impressive 188 species have been observed here over the years, including many waterfowl, sparrows, and warblers. **Meet at 7:30 am at the intersection of Cole Ave and N Harris St.** Most of this area has dry ground; footing is uneven in some spots. This meandering walk will last roughly two hours. Contact Kyle Strode, [kstrode@carroll.edu](mailto:kstrode@carroll.edu), to sign up.



*Red-naped Sapsucker by Sharon Dewart-Hansen.*

### June 3: NATURE JOURNALING FOR BIRDERS

Keeping an observational journal is a great way to add to and improve your birding skills. Nature journaling combines words, pictures, and numbers to help focus our observations, and can enrich the time we spend in the outdoors. There are many ways to journal, and artistic talent is definitely not a prerequisite! The most important skill is simple curiosity, which birders have in abundance. This field trip will provide some ideas and resources to help you start your own journaling practice. Cindy Greiman will share information, resources, and tips on some different ways to approach journaling, and then we'll find a good spot to sit and make some observations. Bring something to sketch on, a pencil, an eraser, binoculars, and water. If you'd like, you can also bring colored pencils or ink pens, and a blanket or camp chair to sit on. **Meet at the fishing access at the west end of the Helena Regulating Reservoir at 7:30 am.** This trip will last until around 11:00 am. Contact Cindy Greiman by June 1 to sign up: [cgreiman3@gmail.com](mailto:cgreiman3@gmail.com) or 406-422-7033.

### June 4: MULLAN ROAD

Join Sharon Dewart-Hansen for a trip to Mullan Road on the west side of McDonald Pass. As many as 46 species can be seen. Possible birds in this area are Veery, Northern Waterthrush, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Red-naped Sapsucker, and Lazuli Bunting. **Meet at the west end of the Lundy Center (on Euclid Ave) at 6:30 am** and expect to return by roughly 12:00 pm. Contact Sharon Dewart-Hansen by May 30 to reserve a spot: [smdewarthansen@charter.net](mailto:smdewarthansen@charter.net).



*Veery by Sharon Dewart-Hansen.*

### June 12: NORTH JEFFERSON COUNTY

Join Dan Ellison and Jane Fournier for this field trip focused on two riparian areas: Prickly Pear Creek (at Ash Grove Park east of Montana City) and Buffalo Creek (northwest of Clancy). The streamside cottonwoods, alders, willows, and



chokecherries attract warblers, woodpeckers, flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, and sparrows. Likely sightings include Western Tanager, Lazuli Bunting, MacGillivray's Warbler, Veery, and Black-headed Grosbeak. Spotted Towhee, Belted Kingfisher, and raptors are also possible, as is a stop to observe Mountain and/or Western Bluebird nest boxes. Walking will be on mostly level ground along an improved trail, as well as some exploring within streamside vegetation. Hiking boots, hats, binoculars, sunscreen, insect repellent and rain parka are recommended. Restroom availability is a serviceable port-a-pot at Ashgrove Park. Maximum group size is 10 participants; early reservations are encouraged. To avoid cancellation, at least four confirmations are needed by June 7. To sign up, email Dan at [daellison70@gmail.com](mailto:daellison70@gmail.com) and provide your name(s), phone, and a good number for exchanging text messages. Participants will **meet at 6:45 am in the parking area for Ash Grove Sunderland Park**, one mile east of the Montana City I-15 exit. Maps of the two parking areas will be provided to participants when the field trip is confirmed. The trip will conclude by 11:00 am.



*Western Bluebird by Dan Ellison.*

#### **June 24: BIRDING AT VISTA DA SERRA**

Welcome to the Ranch on Trout Creek! Belted Kingfishers, Great Blue Herons and Osprey regularly fish the creek. Watch for Golden and Bald Eagles soaring overhead. The songbird residents include Mountain Bluebirds, Lazuli Buntings, and Common Yellowthroats. A pair of Sandhill Cranes inhabit the wetlands and yodel their throbbing cry. Thanks to Tia and Derek Nelson for inviting us to their ranch. **Meet Janice Miller in the northeastern corner of the Costco parking lot at 6:30 am.** We'll return by 12:00 pm. Contact Janice to RSVP: [jan2854@gmail.com](mailto:jan2854@gmail.com).

#### **August 5: AQUATIC INSECTS**

Join Sara Owen, ecologist and the author of *Seth and Mattie's Big River Adventure*, for an early evening trip to Tenmile Creek Park to learn about aquatic insects and the hidden world in the stream bed. Participants will have the option to get their feet wet, or participate from the bank. Participants will also have a chance to look for emerging insects, predatory spiders, birds, and maybe even a bat or two as the evening progresses. Wear shoes or boots for getting wet (or not). Sara will have bug guides, a few hand lenses for magnifying bugs, and a few shallow containers for viewing bugs up close. **Meet at 6:30 pm at the kiosk near the bridge between Tenmile Park & Spring Meadow Lake.** Email Sara at [sara.owen@swbell.net](mailto:sara.owen@swbell.net) to RSVP.

#### **September 3: WORLD SHOREBIRD DAY**

Stephen Turner will lead a trip to Canyon Ferry WMA to survey for migrating shorebirds. Several shorebird ID experts will be on hand. **Meet at the northeast end of the Costco parking lot at 7:00 am (please arrive a few minutes early).** Return no later than 1:00 pm. This trip has limited space. Expect a 1.5-mile round-trip walk on dirt roads. Contact Stephen to register: [turnstonest@gmail.com](mailto:turnstonest@gmail.com).

## Bill Rainey Memorial Webcam

March 23, 2023 was a sunny, calm afternoon: perfect weather for the installation of LCAS's webcam at the Osprey nest located on the west side of Helena. First, Justin Porter of Auxilyum Technical Services constructed a wooden frame. Next, Ray Bell of Duke's Tree Service carefully attached it to the 45-foot nest pole using a two-person bucket lift. A Canada Goose was at the platform when the crew arrived, but left (the nest was empty) when the work began. The four-hour installation went smoothly and all of the bucket work has now been completed. Electrical work and connection to the internet will be completed in the next week. As soon as the camera is working and the Ospreys arrive, activity at the nest will be streamed on YouTube. Stay tuned for updates and details.

This project, named in honor of long-time LCAS member Bill Rainey, was selected as the chapter's fall 2022 fundraising effort and was supported by donations from our membership. Other much-appreciated support came from Bart Stuart, owner of The Wreck Room auto repair shop where the Osprey nest pole is located, and Chad Duke of Duke's Tree Service for providing equipment and crew. Also, staff of MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the US Fish and Wildlife Service were consulted during project planning and provided information and advice.

-- Sue Jackson



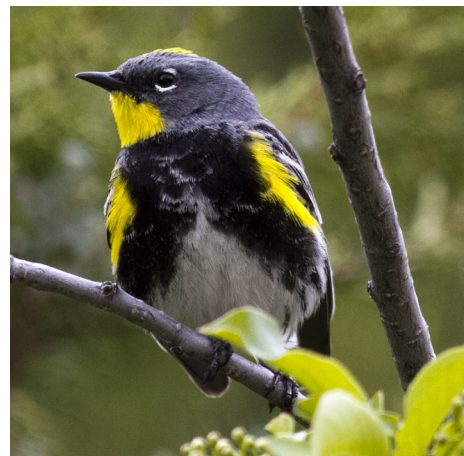
*Justin Porter and Ray Bell installing the webcam.  
Photo by Sue Jackson.*

## Board Members Needed

Last Chance Audubon is currently in search of members to serve on the Board of Directors. If you'd like to get more involved with our chapter, now is a great time! Board members are elected at the May membership meeting, take office on July 1, and serve a two-year term. The Board usually meets once a month (September through May) to set the direction for chapter activities including educational programs, scholarship awards, habitat protection efforts, fundraising goals, special projects, membership activities, programming, cleanup events, field trips, etc. LCAS welcomes your ideas and energy!

If you'd like more details about the Board, contact the Nominating Committee or any current Board member. You can nominate yourself or suggest someone else. Nominations are open until the election at the May meeting.

-- Sue Jackson, Nominating Committee (406-443-4486 or [suejacksonmt@gmail.com](mailto:suejacksonmt@gmail.com))



*Yellow-rumped Warbler by Bob  
Martinka.*

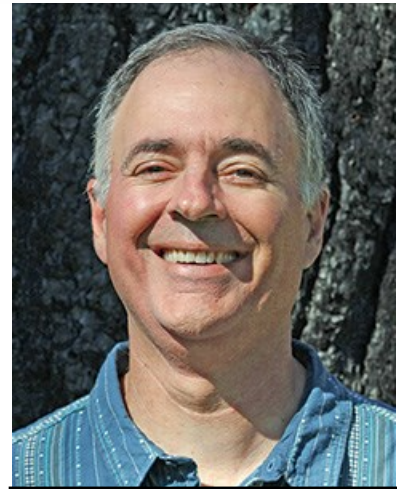
## Wings Across the Big Sky 2023

Montana Audubon's yearly birding festival will take place **June 9-11** this year, **at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls**. This year's festival is organized by Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon in collaboration with Montana Audubon. Registration will open in mid-April; visit <https://mtaudubon.org/> to register.

The keynote speaker will be acclaimed author Sneed B. Collard III, who has written more than 90 books for young people. Sneed is an award-winning speaker and has been a guest at numerous birding festivals and events.

During the presentation, Sneed will recount the entertaining adventures behind his humorous, award-winning memoir *Warblers and Woodpeckers: A Father-Son Big Year of Birding* (Mountaineers, 2018) and other bird books and articles. Along the way, participants will travel to some of North America's best birding hotspots as well as South America, the Galápagos, and the Middle East. Sneed will share highlights of his son's and his "accidental Big Year" of 2022 starring Pinky, America's most famous flamingo.

To learn more about Sneed, visit his websites [www.sneedbcollardiii.com](http://www.sneedbcollardiii.com) and [www.FatherSonBirding.com](http://www.FatherSonBirding.com).

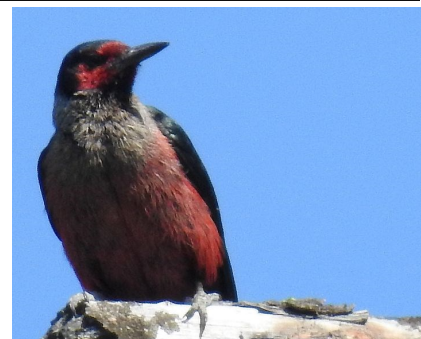


Sneed B. Collard III. Photo by Braden Collard.

## Into the World of Lewis's Woodpeckers

Lewis's Woodpeckers are relatively uncommon but regular breeding birds around Helena, where they use burned conifer forests. Farther west in Montana, around Missoula and the Bitterroot Valley, they can be locally abundant in mature cottonwood forests along the rivers. But the story of Lewis's Woodpeckers isn't just the tale of a beautiful, relatively uncommon bird of the Rocky Mountains. There's much more going on here than meets the eye – and research by Kate Stone and her team in the Bitterroot Valley reveals some surprising facts.

- Lewis's Woodpeckers frequently re-use their nest trees – but most of the time, it's actually different individual birds re-using the trees. In Kate's research, only 2% of marked individuals return to use the same nest from one year to the next.
- A whopping 80% of the Lewis's Woodpeckers that Kate has banded in the Bitterroot Valley simply disappear after one year. Are they nesting somewhere else the next year, or are they dying during migration or winter? We don't know yet.
- In spite of these surprising unknowns, the woodpeckers in the Bitterroot Valley have relatively high nest success. This is good news, because Lewis's Woodpeckers are declining across the west.



Lewis's Woodpecker by Shane Sater.

For many more details about this Lewis's Woodpecker research, read the full story here: <https://whatsgoingonblog.org/2023/03/17/lewis-woodpeckers-montana/>.

-- Shane Sater



## Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Edith Hallford, Blake Stanger, and Jerin Borrego.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Carol & Rodney Bischoff, Emily Brand, Nan & Ray Breuninger, Susan & Bret Brunner, Maryalice Chester, Bill & Vicki Fitzgerald, Diann Fradette, Patricia Helvey, Suzy Holt, Gene & Julie Huntington, Mike & Helen Murray, Elaine Pfund, Estelle Shuttleworth, Jim & Suzi Stanger, Murray Strong, and Ruth Swenson.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Pat Harper, Dorothy Cail, Meg Giddings, and Deborah Henson.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Joyce Bateman, Loretta Carter, David Gans, Ann Kendall, Christopher Korow, William Mede, Peter Petek, Timothy Scheuer, Heidi Youmans, B. Hall-Munger, Ronald Schwartz, and Pete Strazdas.

**LCAS MEMBERSHIP:** A new membership or renewal is \$15 per household 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](http://lastchanceaudubon.org). Please send completed registration form and your \$15 check 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. **Due to increasing costs, we will be phasing out sending hardcopies. Those who have already paid for them will continue to receive them until the end of this year.** 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](mailto: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](mailto:smdewarthansen@charter.net)



*Northern Pintail by Dan Ellison.*

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**Membership**

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59624 with check for \$15  
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