

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 2023

How to Grow a Bird-friendly Garden

**Tuesday, May 9, 2023
Program begins 7:00 PM**

**Montana WILD, 2668
Broadwater Ave.**

Free – All Are Welcome

Also available via Zoom!

When it comes to bird diversity, the difference between a manicured lawn and a grove of chokecherries is stark. The lawn might support a few starlings and robins. The chokecherries, on the other hand, support dozens of species during migration and the breeding season, from Wilson's Warblers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets to Cedar Waxwings and Western Tanagers. This presentation, by Shane Sater, is all about how to create a bird-friendly garden or neighborhood. What are some of western Montana's best plants for providing our local birds with caterpillars, fruits, and seeds? In this presentation illustrated with Shane's bird photography, learn which plantings will help our local birds and improve wildlife habitat.

Shane Sater is a naturalist and writer who has spent the last decade learning about the birds, plants, and insects of Montana and Idaho. He holds a B.A. in Environmental Science from



*Black-capped Chickadee foraging on
serviceberry. Photo by Shane Sater.*

Carroll College and serves as the Habitat Protection Chair for Last Chance Audubon Society (LCAS). Since 2017, he has also edited the LCAS newsletter and led an extensive volunteer naturalist project at the Sevenmile Creek restoration site, including bird surveys, a botanical inventory, and cataloging several hundred insect species. In this role, he has also supported habitat improvements such as the planting of hundreds of cottonwoods and willows. Find more of his work at whatsgoingonblog.org, a blog and podcast which explores the wonder of the natural world through the seasons.



Guest President's Perch by Shane Sater

May 18, 2020. In the soft darkness of the spring night, the patter of light rain saturated the air, dulling the distant rumble of a train climbing up towards the continental divide. The [migration radar](#) showed a substantial wave of migrant songbirds, flying northwest across Montana through the night. In the misty darkness below lay the Sevenmile Creek restoration site, the shrubs and grasses tender with spring growth. The midnight blackness hid the golden currants dripping with flowers and the wet, soft leaves of the chokecherry thickets. The shadowy bushes held uncounted millions of springtime insects, a buffet in the waiting for tired, sodden warblers and sparrows.

Shortly after dawn, a thunderstorm lit up the mountains to the west. I stood in the field with binoculars and rain gear, ready to begin the ritual of another springtime bird survey. Who had shown up in the night?

The sodden grassland held the usual suspects, Savannah Sparrows buzzing from last year's alfalfa stems and Vesper Sparrows whistling with plaintive abandon from rocky outcrops. Most of the Western Meadowlarks were apparently incubating now; only occasionally did a female give a rattle call in response to the singing males.

The stream and its attendant thickets and ponds were bursting with new arrivals. The year's first Lazuli Buntings and Bullock's Orioles lit up the shrubs, while handfuls of swallows darted over the water. Drab flycatchers flew out for aerial insects, hid frustratingly well in the thickets, and occasionally allowed me to identify them with brief outbursts of song. The airspace around the ponds was filled with the intense displays of nesting Red-winged Blackbirds, over 20 of them. Males sang vigorously, and I watched one female furtively carrying nesting material to a flooded alder.



Lazuli Bunting by Shane Sater.

And then I heard it: a faint, ticking buzz, high and uneven. A new warbler, one whose song I did not recognize. It took me a minute to spot the newcomer, flitting though a dead alder over one of the ponds. Solid black cap reminiscent of a chickadee, white wingbars, striking orange feet. My hands shook as I raised my camera and photographed the Blackpoll Warbler, long-distance migrant, boreal forest nester, a "life bird" for me and the eleventh warbler species documented at Sevenmile Creek.

Blackpoll Warblers or not, spring is an incredible time of year for birds in Montana. It's a busy time for Last Chance Audubon, too! We have our last indoor meeting until the fall, elections of Board members, and **a full line-up of summer field trips (find them in the April newsletter)**. June is the MT Audubon festival in Great Falls. And then there are all of our ongoing projects: collaborations with local schools, the Osprey cam, assistance with local habitat restoration projects such as Sevenmile Creek.... Together, the sky is the limit in terms of what we can do for the birds and the community. *Join us! Where would you like to help out?*

-- Shane Sater

Newsletter moving to electronic-only

Please note that, due to increasing costs, we will be phasing out sending hardcopies of the *Last Chance Chat*. Those who have already paid for them will continue to receive them until the end of this year (2023). However, we will discontinue all hardcopies as of 2024.

Bill Rainey Memorial Webcam

We announced the installation of the Osprey nest webcam at Spring Meadow Lake in the last newsletter. Now we're excited to let everyone know that the camera is working and streaming images (and sound) from the nest! As of April 24, the nest is still occupied by a pair of Canada Geese, but the Ospreys have returned to Helena and are in the area. In years past, the Ospreys have moved in after the goslings have fledged.

Once again we'd like to thank **The Wreck Room** and **Duke's Tree Service** for assistance in installing and powering the webcam, and **Auxilyum** and **Treasure State Internet & Telegraph** for providing technical services.



*The Canada Goose on the Osprey nest.
Photo from the LCAS webcam live feed.*

To watch the nest, go to YouTube and search "Osprey Nest – Spring Meadow Lake – Helena, MT" or use the link <https://www.youtube.com/@OspreyNest-yi7st/live>.

First Wednesday Bird Walks at Montana WILD

Summer is just around the corner, and Last Chance Audubon Society is teaming up with Montana WILD Education Center to host a series of guided summer bird walks. The walks will occur on the first Wednesday of each month beginning **May 3** and will end after the **August 2** outing. Two walks will be offered each first Wednesday, with an adult-oriented walk at 8:00 am, and a second outing at 8:30 am for all ages. The walks will take place at Spring Meadow Lake State Park and will focus on enjoying and learning about birds through sight, sound, and behavior. Each walk will last one to one and a half hours. After each walk concludes, bird guides will offer participants the opportunity to learn about entering data from the morning outing utilizing the eBird app.



Yellow Warbler by Dan Ellison.

To attend one of the guided bird walks, please contact Corie Bowditch at Montana WILD by emailing corie.rice@mt.gov. Alternatively, you can contact Stephen Turner (LCAS) at turnstonest@gmail.com. Please plan to join us! We look forward to birding with YOU this summer!

May Elections

The 2023 election for LCAS Board members will be held at the May meeting. Nominations for open positions include Glenda Bradshaw, Nan Breuninger, Sharon Dewart-Hansen, Barbara Pepper-Rotness, Don Skaar, and Stephen Turner. Nominations remain open until the vote is taken. All LCAS members attending the meeting are eligible to vote.

Nesting Boxes Ready for Summer Breeders

Already this spring, LCAS members have prepared many of the nesting boxes around the Helena Valley to welcome their summer occupants. LCAS's Berta Nason and a crew of willing participants worked diligently to clean out and spruce up boxes (and replace broken ones) at the Lake Helena WMA and the Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir. Thanks to them, the nesting boxes are now ready for the arrival of Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. In the weeks since then, we've been seeing a lot of bird activity around the boxes, suggesting that a healthy breeding season is ahead for these species!

Big thanks to Berta and her crew for braving the March storms in order to have the boxes ready! In addition, **special thanks to Sue Jackson** for donating three boxes to replace some of the well-used houses.

We are always looking for additional hands to help with nesting boxes around Helena. Boxes at Spring Meadow Lake State Park, Nature Park, K-Mart Wetlands, MDT Wetlands, Sevenmile Creek and other locations are in ongoing need of maintenance. If you would like to help build, repair, clean out or install boxes in the valley, please reach out to Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com. Thanks for your support.



Mountain Bluebirds at a nest box. Photo by Bob Martinka.



Tree Swallow by Shane Sater.

Photo Exhibit at Montana WILD

In conjunction with this year's Migratory Bird Day, MT WILD is preparing a photo exhibit featuring works by eleven LCAS members. The theme of the exhibit is "birds and water," and over thirty photos were submitted for consideration. The selected photos will be printed, framed, and put on display from May 6 through May 31 at MT WILD (2668 Broadwater Avenue). Featured photographers are Greg Asbury, Dan Ellison, Liz Hiltunen, Bob Martinka, Janice Miller, Kyle Moon, Gail Moser, Ross Peter Nelson, Shane Sater, Stephen Turner, and Larry Urban.

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 is now open; visit <https://mtaudubon.org/outreach/wings/> 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.

The festival also features a variety of bird-focused field trips to destinations in the Great Falls area.

Audubon Adventures

This winter, LCAS purchased copies of National Audubon's bird-focused elementary school curriculum, *Audubon Adventures*, for each elementary school within the Helena School District. We recently received this thank-you letter from Kessler School:

Last Chance Audubon Society,

What a wonderful surprise today when I opened the mail! We received our 1st shipment of the Audubon Adventures magazine. We are so grateful for your donation and can't wait to get started reading about owls and raptors. These are 2 of the 3 topics in the magazines this shipment. What a wonderful resource to encourage deeper reading and excitement about birding. There has even been an increase in bird books being checked out since I showed the students what we would be learning soon! :) Thank you!

-- Ginger Ratzlaff, Kessler Librarian



Sandhill Crane by Mike Chapman.



American Avocets by Dan Ellison.

Keystone Native Plants Available for Planting

96% of North American terrestrial bird species rear their young on insects, and the majority of these insects are caterpillars or adult moths. (Doug Tallamy, *Nature's Best Hope*)

Caterpillars are the mainstay of the diets of many North American birds during the breeding season. They're more nutritious than many other insects and are especially important for birds rearing young. Caterpillars are high in protein and fat and they are the best source of healthy carotenoids for birds. Carotenoids stimulate immune function, improve color vision and sperm vitality, and serve as antioxidants that protect proteins and DNA from oxidative damage.

Just a few **native keystone plants** provide the sustenance for most of the moth and butterfly caterpillars (Lepidoptera) that are so important to our food web and terrestrial birds. About 5% of our local native plants host 70-75% of our local Lepidoptera species. These are the keystone plants. These plants are unique components of local food webs and are essential to the functioning of the food web as we know it. Without these keystone plants, the food web begins to unravel.

The Top 3 Keystone “Superstar” Native Herbs for the Helena area:

(www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder)

- **Goldenrod** (*Solidago* spp.)
- **Strawberry** (*Fragaria* spp.)
- **Sunflower** (*Helianthus* spp.)

The Top 3 Keystone “Superstar” Native Trees for the Helena area:

(www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder)

- **Willow** (*Salix* spp.)
- **Aspen, Cottonwood, Poplar** (*Populus* spp.)
- **Chokecherry, Plum, Cherry** (*Prunus* spp.)

I have been cold stratifying several species of **native sunflowers** and **goldenrods**. I have some in pots and others will be ready to put in the ground in a couple of weeks, weather permitting. I also have **native showy milkweed**, **Rocky Mountain bee plant**, and **ground plum**. If you have a place in your garden/yard that you can devote and are interested, give me a shout.

-- Ruth Swenson, ruthannaswenson@gmail.com



Giant goldenrod (Solidago gigantea) with moth. Photo by Shane Sater.



Chokecherry (Prunus virginiana) with American Robin. Photo by Shane Sater.



Showy milkweed (Asclepias speciosa) with western tiger swallowtail by Shane Sater.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Malia Agee, Bonnie Barnard, Kerstin Jordan, Eric Clewis, Charlie Gorman, and Ian & Katherine Certalic.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Pat Bik, Cheryl Boid & Tom Woodall, William Bucher, Betsy Hamann, Barry Hood & Eliza Frazer, Justine Jam, Howard Johnson, Kathy Lloyd & Drake Barton, Michele Marsh, Jeff & Sue Miller, John Mott, David Nardinger, Sue Near, Alan & Nancy Nicholson, Denise Pengeroth, Barbara Piccolo, Blake Running, Melanie Schaefer, Linda Sharkey, Jean Smith, Ellen Taylor, Sara Toubman, Nancy & Rick Tuber, Joyce Bateman, Ann Bauchman, Lisa Bay, Scott Currey, Jill Downing, Ellen Feaver, Helen Fee, Joy Holloway, Ann Kendall, Robin La Neve, Steven Liston, Robert Martin, Ken Metzger, Betsy Nordell, Elizabeth Poletti, Rebecca Ridenour, Jason Socci, Dan & Delight Sullivan, John Vore, John Hoffland, and Nancy Marks & Hugh von Swearingen.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Sandra Barker, Theresa Green, Sanna Porte, Lavelle Saier, Kimberlee Smith, and Heather Zaluski.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Roger Bacon, Kristin Bakula, William Cook, Vicki Downhour, Richard Edelen, Helen Fee, Roseva Guest, Janet Hess-Herbert, Gene Huntington, Eleanor Parker, Patricia Peterson, Brad Robinson, Jean Smith, Terry Wheeling, Victoria Wolfe, Sally Angove, John Anthony, Nina Barfuss, Susan Buringrud, Robert Caldwell, Michael Chapman, Diane Dean, Mark Murphy, Montana Outdoors, Sumner Sharpe, Tim Speyer, and Ellen Feaver.

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. 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 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



A caterpillar in August, likely the larva of a salt marsh moth, by Janice Miller.

Last Chance Audubon Society
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Membership

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

*Clip and mail to:
PO Box 924, Helena MT
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– or \$25 if you must
receive a paper
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