



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 2023

The Joys of Costa Rica

Tuesday, October 10, 2023 – Program begins 7:00PM

Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

Join David Ewer for a birding tour of some of Costa Rica's (CR) fantastic avian fauna, illustrated with stunning bird photography. David and Nancy Ewer joined the Roaming Naturalists company out of Bozeman with eight other birders in March 2022 looking especially for resplendent quetzals high in the cloud forest, and scarlet macaws in the far southwestern Osa peninsula. They returned to CR in early 2023 birding new places such as rivers flowing into Nicaragua and slogging through muddy jungle to see roosting crested owls along with bullet and leaf cluster ants.

Among the many areas visited were Costa Rica's central highlands, dry Pacific coast, several wetlands and the incredible Arenal volcano area. Nancy photographed typical sights of Costa Ricans in daily life and their tour generally. In the mid 1980's Costa Rica deliberately removed cattle from large tracts of over-grazed ranch land. Today the forests and jungle have returned along much of their original bio-diversity placing Costa Rica into one of the world's premier environmental and Eco-tourist success stories.

David Ewer's passion for birds goes back many decades beginning in his youth in Massachusetts. He was a summer naturalist for Massachusetts Audubon on Cape Cod and shorebirds remain among his favorite birds. He has held numerous positions with Last Chance Audubon including past president and he was an early proponent for Montana Audubon to open a staffed office. Since his retirement from state government, he and his wife, Nancy, have expanded their interests to wildflowers, lepidoptera, and nature photography.



Collared Aracari - Photo by David Ewer



What can you get for \$15?

October 1, 2023

You get:

Nine (9!) monthly membership meetings with programs ranging from the science currently happening in favor of birds – such as our September meeting with Ty Smucker, MT FWP, on the restoration of Sharp-tailed Grouse in Western Montana – to our upcoming October meeting with a stellar program on Costa Rica by David Ewer.

You get:

The opportunity to contribute to creating and/or maintaining bird habitat through various opportunities, including one we have ongoing with Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT). PPLT has applied for their second LCAS grant to purchase and plant native vegetation along Sevenmile Creek in the Helena Valley, welcoming birds with secure breeding and nesting areas, as well as food sources for various bird species.

You get:

To support education opportunities that promote our LCAS mission statement, including scholarships for graduating High School seniors and grants for Carroll College students doing research.

You get:

To be part of a community whose main public library – Lewis & Clark Library and all of its branches - offers binoculars for interested adults and families to check-out and step-out to experience the wonder of birding.

You get:

Multiple chances to go into the field with expert birders to learn about birds of the forest, prairie, and waterfowl, that are perhaps more difficult to find and identify on your own, especially if you can only hear the birds' vocalizations. We offer a slate of field trips each spring, summer, and fall, in addition to our annual Christmas Bird Count, for this outdoor classroom experience.

You get:

The opportunity to bring your strengths, ideas, and interests to the Chapter by stepping-up to serve on the Board, helping to serve birds and the natural world in the Helena area.

You get:

To VOTE each May for Board Members, as well as other issues that come up.

You get:

Up to THREE (3!) BONUS months when you become an LCAS member for 2024, or renew your membership, NOW before the New Year begins.

Visit our website: lastchanceaudubon.org and hit the yellow button, "Membership" and lend your \$15 to support all the good we have to offer. DO IT NOW for the bargain!

THANK YOU for making a difference for birds and their habitat in our neck of the woods.

Janice Miller
President

Birds and Beasley's Bird Seed Sale

LCAS and Bird & Beasley's continue to work together to raise funds for the Chapter. Whenever you're at the store (2 South Last Chance Gulch), just let the staff know you're participating in the Chapter sale and Sandy will donate a portion of the purchase price to LCAS.

Many thanks to Sandy Shull and her staff for their support!



Dark-eyed Junco in winter - Photo by Bob Martinka

And, seed prices haven't changed!

20 lbs black oil sunflower seeds: \$30

20 lbs sunflower chips: \$45

20 lbs millet: \$25

10 lbs thistle: \$24

20 lbs thistle: \$4

New Birding Resources at Lewis and Clark Library

The Last Chance Audubon Society and Birds & Beasley's of Helena are working together to provide the Lewis and Clark Library with binoculars and field guides for lending to the public. The Lewis and Clark library's five library locations - Helena, East Helena, Lincoln, Augusta, and the library's Bookmobile - will each receive two sets of these resources. Similar efforts by Audubon Chapters nationwide have proven successful and the LCAS hopes this endeavor in Lewis & Clark County will have similar, positive results with the potential for more!



Yellow-headed Blackbirds - Photo by Nancy Ewer

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.

World Shorebirds Day Recap

By Stephen Turner

LCAS members gathered in the early morning hours on Sunday, September 3rd, for a trip to Canyon Ferry WMA. Participants were headed to the WMA in search of migrating shorebirds to celebrate World Shorebirds Day. The day was mostly clear and warm, and the mudflats where the shorebirds congregate did not disappoint. BirdCast ([9/3/2023](#)), a migration tool powered by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, revealed a strong night of migratory birds pushing south through Broadwater County. Approximately 800,000 birds crossed the county overnight leaving behind a nice mix of passerines, waterfowl and shorebirds!

Upon arriving, the group was welcomed by trumpeting Sandhill Cranes and a Red-tailed Hawk scanning the stubble fields for prey. As the observers moved toward the mudflats at the Lower Ray Creek drainage, Wilson's and Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, and several Yellow-rumped Warblers chipped and squeaked in the nearby cover. Gray Catbirds were numerous along with Black-capped Chickadees and a few sparrows.



Baird's Sandpiper — Photo by Bob Martinka

The mudflat was filled with dozens of Semipalmated and Baird's Sandpipers wandering through the sparse vegetative mat. Least Sandpipers, our smallest *Calidris* sandpiper, was also found. Presently, we added the larger Stilt and Pectoral Sandpipers to our growing list. Pectoral Sandpipers numbered close to thirty birds!

Our hearts skipped a beat when a Peregrine Falcon made a lightning quick pass over a flock of startled shorebirds. The falcon's attempt at a meal was unsuccessful, but nerve rattling for the birds. The edgy shorebirds settled tentatively back on the mudflats, dispersing to their favorite feeding areas, revealing a few additional species – Semipalmated Plover, both yellowlegs species, and a Solitary Sandpiper. Killdeer, Wilson's Phalarope, Wilson's Snipe, and a lone America Avocet rounded out an incredible list of shorebirds.

All said, our eBird checklist ended with a whopping 52 bird species at the WMA! Notably, Belted Kingfisher, American Pipit and a number of waterfowl species, added throughout the morning, made for a perfect World Shorebirds Day!

Thanks to the eleven participants who made this a fantastic day. All eyes and ears were on deck, and our shorebird experts provided consistent and excellent support with identification and anecdotal information. If you would like to review the eBird checklist for the day, it can be found at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S148928952>.



American Avocet — Photo by Bob Martinka

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Alicia Stickney

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Derik Reed and Constance Fiske

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** John Andes, Angela McDannel, Darlene Templeton, and Vasiliki Zafiridou.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Gretchen Bingman, Maribeth Goodrich, William Hall, Pat Harper, Ivelone Hodges, Walter Ludlow, Judy Murphy, Pamela Bompart, Judy Kilmer, and Charles Stalnaker.

LCAS MEMBERSHIP: A new membership or renewal is \$15 per household and is current for one year, January 1st through December 31st. You can join and/or renew by using our website's online **MEMBERSHIP** button. Please be sure we receive all your correct contact information. You can also join or renew by filling out a registration form located at www.lastchanceaudubon.org. Please send a 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: Due to increasing costs, we will no longer be sending hardcopies. Those who have already paid for them will continue to receive them until the end of this year, 2023. 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 www.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
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Helena Area Hotspot Highlight!

K-mart Ponds — This city-owned stormwater retention area provides a wild space within the city of Helena. It can be reached by turning north on North Harris St. from Cedar St. Follow N. Harris St. until it deadends at a fence. The retention ponds provide habitat for many waterfowl species including Canada Goose, Cinnamon Teal, and a variety of other ducks. American Coots, grebes, Wilson's Snipe, and Killdeer are also common. A pair of Sandhill Cranes have nested here for several years running. During spring and fall, the cottonwoods and shrubs around the ponds are great spots to find migrating songbirds like warblers, kinglets, sparrows, and the occasional rarity. The ponds are also stopover sites for migrating shorebirds. Solitary Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, and several of the smaller peeps can be easily viewed from the walking paths.

For more Hotspot information, click here — [BIRDING the Helena Valley](#)



Yellow Warbler - Photo by
Bob Martinka

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membership today!*

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