

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

November 2023

Monitoring Montana's Wolverines and Lynx: An Update

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Program begins 7:00PM

Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

After completing a fourth year of study of Wolverines and Lynx in the mountains along the Continental Divide and central Montana, Bret Davis and Kalon Baughan are returning to give an update on their popular presentation of November 2022. Since forming their own company, Wild Ideas, LLC they have focused on these two Montana iconic and threatened species. Their four years of study has given them a unique view into the world of these wild and seldom seen creatures. This past year has led to some new discoveries which they are excited to share. Their talk will also describe the novel ways they identify and monitor individual wolverines utilizing photographs. The animal's natural life histories, camera trap photographs (with both traditional game cameras and professional DSLR equipment), and perspectives on current issues in conservation and preservation of Montana's wild ecosystems will be covered.



Wolverine - Photo by Kalon Baughan

Bret currently works in Bozeman as a research scientist in a physics laboratory. He has worked on numerous conservation projects, primarily with birds, throughout the state of Montana and from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to the wild woods of Alaska. Kalon lives outside Helmville, Montana along the shore of Nevada Creek Reservoir and works as a professional artist and photographer. On the side, he has dedicated the past 13 years to wildlife conservation developing non-invasive methods integrating trail camera technology for monitoring rare forest carnivores.



Nov. 1, 2023

The summer has passed. Fall migration is also fading fast. It seems like it will be months of cold and dark before those colors and songs return to Montana. NOT TRUE! Winter can also be a great time to get out there and bird! There are so many species that have been gone from the Helena area since last winter, and now they are returning. Rough-legged Hawks, Snow Buntings, Bohemian Waxwings, Northern Shrikes, and so many more spend their non-breeding season here in Helena and they are arriving now. It's time to get excited again!

But where are they and how can you find them? Well, I have an answer for that too. The Last Chance Audubon Society will be conducting their annual Christmas Bird Count this December. In fact, this year's CBC will be the 69th count conducted in Helena. The first one was completed in 1954 by a single birder and the count has been done every December since. A few winters ago, the LCAS CBC had an all-time high of 77 participants! This event is a wonderful opportunity to get out there, spend a day with other birders, and count all the birds in the Helena valley. Sounds like fun to me!



Bohemian Waxwing - Photo by Bob Martinka

The Christmas Bird Count first started in 1900 by the Massachusetts Audubon Society and Ornithologist Frank Chapman. Dr. Chapman was worried about the decline of birds he'd been observing for some time. In those days, a common activity during the holidays was the Christmas Side Hunt. It was a contest between hunters to go out on Christmas Day and shoot as many birds as possible. The hunter with the most dead birds...won. Dr. Chapman decided to start a new holiday tradition. Instead of shooting the birds, he gathered a small group of friends and colleagues and just counted them. From that first Christmas Bird Census, there are now over 2,100 CBC counts across North America, as well as several Central American and Caribbean countries!

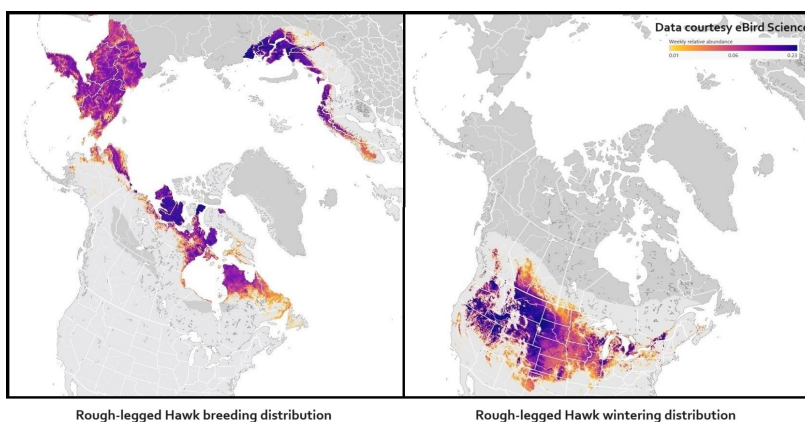
So, why not join us this holiday season and be part of the largest and longest running citizen science project in the world. You do not need to be an expert birder. We have experienced leaders who know the areas, the hotspots, and the birds. This year's CBC will be held on Saturday, December 16th. If you're interested in participating, please reach out to the LCAS CBC coordinator, Coburn Currier – clcurrier@hotmail.com. Everyone is invited to participate. Are you excited again? I am! See you in December.

Coburn Currier
CBC Coordinator and Guest Perch Writer

Winter Raptor Surveyors Needed

As the cooler months approach, and the birds move to their preferred wintering grounds, we are fortunate to have many raptor species move into the Helena valley to over-winter. The chances to see raptors perched on fence posts and power poles increases dramatically, as the birds visit these open spaces awaiting food opportunities. The need to survey these birds is important to maintain data on bird populations and trends.

This winter, our sister chapter, East Cascades Audubon Society (ECAS) will continue its program to monitor raptors in the Pacific Northwest. The program is in its 20th year. Over 500 designated survey routes have been established in Washington, Oregon, northern California, Idaho, Wyoming, northern Utah, and western Montana. Surveys are conducted once a month from December through February with optional surveys in November and March. The routes travel through open terrain that includes grasslands, agricultural fields and pastures - all of which can be prime winter habitat for many raptor species including Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks, Golden Eagles and Prairie Falcons.



WE NEED YOU!

Jeff Fleischer with ECAS has developed several new routes near the Helena area, and is looking for volunteers to survey these routes. Two routes, north and south of Townsend, and one south of Toston are currently available. If you like venturing a little further afield, there are also routes near Deer Lodge, White Sulphur Springs, and Ovando/Helmville. The survey routes



*Rough-legged Hawk - Photo by
Bob Martinka*

are approximately 70-90 miles and only one survey is needed each month. Surveys can take a good portion of the day to complete. Most finish by mid-afternoon. Surveyors should be proficient at raptor identification, and available to complete the December through February surveys at a minimum.

If you have an interest in one of these routes, please contact Jeff Fleischer at raptorrunner97321@yahoo.com. Jeff can provide additional information about the program and answer questions you may have about the surveys. If you would like to ride along and/or assist with a local survey, please contact Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Save the date for the 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival!



Though next summer seems far away, we're already hard at work planning the next Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival!

The festival will be held in Helena, May 31 – June 2 2024. Montana Audubon is excited to be partnering with Last Chance Audubon, and can't wait to share the details of what we know will be fantastic local field trips! For our out-of-town attendees we're going to have multiple hotel options, including a budget-friendly option to stay at Carroll College, our main festival location. More information coming soon!

North Bridger Bison becomes 1st Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana!

North Bridger Bison, located in Wilsall (about 30 miles north of Livingston), is the first Audubon Certified bison ranch in Montana! This means that North Bridger Bison can now use the Audubon Certified bird-friendly seal, a product label that lets consumers know that these products come from bison that grazed on ranches managed for birds and biodiversity.

Learn more about the Audubon Conservation Ranching program in Montana and North Bridger Bison in this [short video from Kyle Dudgeon Creative](#) (the link takes to you the Montana Audubon website, and you'll need to scroll to the bottom of the page to see the video).



The Skoglund family on their ranch, holding a sign with the Audubon Certified seal— Photo by Matt Skoglund.

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.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Kristan Brush, Mike & Shelly Pasichnyk, and William Snider.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Bryce Maxwell, Mike & Helen Murray, Bob & Carolyn Adams, Cliff Sheets, and Green & Green Realty Assoc.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Elizabeth Allen.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** William Gallea, Martha Haddock, Marilyn Kelly-Clark, and Lawrence McEvoy.

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. If you do not want to pay online, you can join or renew by filling out a registration form located at www.lastchanceaudubon.org or at membership meetings. 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. The 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, smdewarthansen@charter.net

Helena Area Hotspot Highlight!



*Calliope Hummingbird -
Photo by Bob Martinka*

Mount Helena City Park — Main access is at the south end of Park Avenue and through Reeder's Village subdivision. Several trails enter the park from the parking area. During the breeding season, Western Meadowlark, Vesper Sparrow, and Mountain Bluebird can be found on the lower north slopes of the park in the grassland areas. In the shrubby draws and brushy slopes Rufous and Calliope Hummingbird, Lazuli Bunting, Green-tailed Towhee, and Chipping Sparrow are usually present. Mountain Chickadee, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, Western Tanager, and Yellow-rumped Warbler inhabit the conifer forest areas surrounding the upper half of the mountain. Over 120 species have been reported in total!

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

Last Chance Audubon Society
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