

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 Dec. 2023/Jan. 2024

Winter Birds of the Helena Valley

Tuesday, December 12, 2023

Program begins 7:00PM

Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

One of our favorite birding events is the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This program is an enjoyable and informative way to review and prepare for the CBC. Using her photography of our winter birds, our speaker, Sharon Dewart-Hansen, will focus on the birds most likely to be seen in the Helena Valley during this winter count. At this program you can join in with other winter birders, hone your birding skills, and enjoy Sharon's exceptional photography. Information on the logistics of the upcoming CBC, to be held December 16th, will be discussed by Coburn Carrier. This will also give you an opportunity to sign up to participate in this year's count.

Sharon Dewart-Hansen has been a birder "off and on" since 1972. She is a willing teacher about birds and frequently shares her photos on social media. Sharon has led field trips for Montana Audubon Big Sky Festivals, Last Chance Audubon and Birds and Beasleys. She is a Christmas Bird Count section leader. Her photographs are seen on eBird and have been published in Montana Outdoors magazine as well as newspapers. She is the Membership Committee chair and Board member of Last Chance Audubon Society. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education/History from Northland College and a Master's Degree in American Studies from the University of Wyoming.



Snow Buntings - Photo by Sharon Dewart-Hansen

Join us for our January 2024 Program too!

Tour Australia with Bob Martinka

Tuesday, January 9, 2024

Program begins 7:00PM

Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

Australia harbors many fantastic endemic birds and bizarre wildlife found nowhere else on our planet. Searching for new birding, cultural, scenic, and wildlife experiences, Bob Martinka could not resist the lure of this distant and fascinating country, so he headed there in October 2016. Join Bob for this tour, illustrated with his exceptional photography and descriptions of this unique land.

Bob will describe the area and habitats visited including the humid tropical forests of northern Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef, the cool mountain forests around Lamington National Park in southern Queensland, and the coast, mountains, and arid interior of New South Wales. Bob's tour extended all the way down to the rugged coastlines and highlands of Tasmania, home of the Tasmanian Devil! At sunrise the first morning Bob observed many hundreds of Spectacled Flying-Foxes, a fruit-eating bat with a 3-foot wingspan. Marsupial species, including several kinds of kangaroos, were common. The most unique mammal seen was a Duck-billed Platypus, one of only two mammal species that lay eggs! Unique bird species include Southern Cassowary and several Emu.



Southern Cassowary - Photo by Bob Martinka

Bob Martinka worked for nearly 30 years with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. He began as a field biologist and then held a number of positions, closing his career as Deputy Director. He has served as a member of the Montana Audubon Board and the Montana Bird Records Committee. In 2022 Bob received the Montana Audubon Lifetime Achievement Award. In retirement, Bob has become an avid photographer, traveling to all seven continents to pursue his interest in birds and most wild things. His personal statistics include having seen 1/3 (3426) of world's bird species and having photographed about 20% (2036). In December 2023, Bob will have submitted an eBird checklist on 1,800 consecutive days.



What problems do you want to help solve?

Dec. 1, 2023

This caught my eye a few years ago: “Don’t ask your child what they want to be when they grow-up, but what problems they want to solve.”

So, I’m asking you, in the world of conservation – from habitat protection, to education, to environmental advocacy – what problem(s) do you want to help solve?

If you’re reading this, chances are you’re not a child – you’re an adult who recognizes your strengths, cultivated through education and a lifetime of practice. And, since you’re reading the LCAS *Chat*, chances are you have a heart for conservation.

I’m asking you to consider stepping-up to volunteer your problem-solving skills for LCAS and its mission, “to promote understanding, respect, and enjoyment of birds and the natural world”. Whether it’s behind the scenes – assisting with the newsletter or website, or housing field trip leaders for the upcoming Bird Festival – or more physical – burdock removal, building or maintaining a trail, such as the Beasley Trail at Spring Meadow Lake – or looking for and counting birds – the Christmas Bird Count, or posting sightings on eBird, or leading a field trip, or doing a Winter Raptor Survey – or utilizing your “people skills” as we work with other conservation organizations – such as MT Audubon and Prickly Pear Land Trust – or education - assisting with our high school scholarship fund, making presentations to kids in classrooms, or helping place children’s birding field guides in local school libraries - we can use your skills to assist our Board members.



Beasley Trail — Spring Meadow Lake State Park

Whatever your strengths, whatever your problem-solving skills, we can use you.

This is a volunteer organization and LCAS volunteers communicate, have fun, and are grateful to work with like-minded people. I know you’ll fit in.

Check the back of this newsletter and contact anyone listed under LCAS Board of Directors, and let them know you like to help solve problems. You’ll be glad you did.

And so will the birds.

Janice Miller, LCAS President

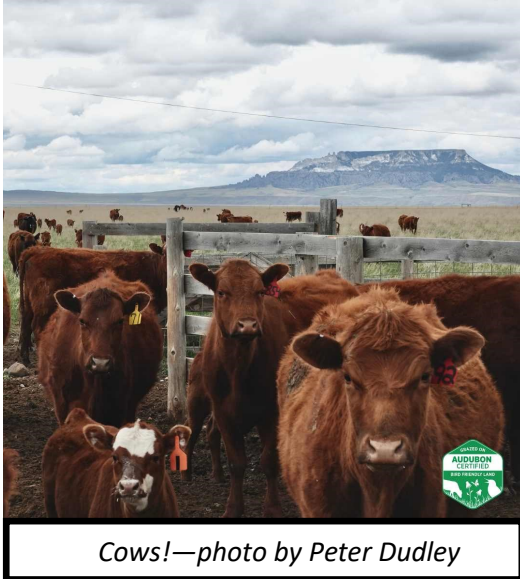
News from Montana Audubon!

Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival field trips are finalized!

Our partners at Last Chance Audubon have some amazing field trips planned! We'll be sharing more information and previews on our website and social media leading up to the event, but we wanted to start by highlighting the *Birds & Botany* trip. Along with surveying birds in riparian and sagebrush hills, trip participants will also pause to identify the predominant native plant species, and consider the relationships between the birds and the plant communities that support them. The trip concludes with stops to observe nesting boxes placed by the trip leaders, which have hosted bluebirds, swallows, and wrens.



Stay tuned for more field trip highlights and festival updates!



Cows!—photo by Peter Dudley

Audubon Conservation Ranching attends regenerative agriculture conference

In early November, Montana Audubon staff attended the 2nd annual Expanding Markets Conference in Billings. Hosted by Western Sustainability Exchange, the conference brought together ranchers, industry leaders, and non-profits like ourselves.

After the success of last year's conference, Montana Audubon both sponsored the conference this year and covered the attendance fee for some Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR)-certified ranches. Speakers and attendees represented a breadth of stakeholders across the cattle industry with one question in mind: how can we work together to feed

people, sustain rural communities, and work with nature?

Read more about the conference, and two of the ACR-certified ranches in Montana, in this recent post - [ACR on the road: Expanding Markets Conference](#).

Birdhouse Recap — by Sue Jackson

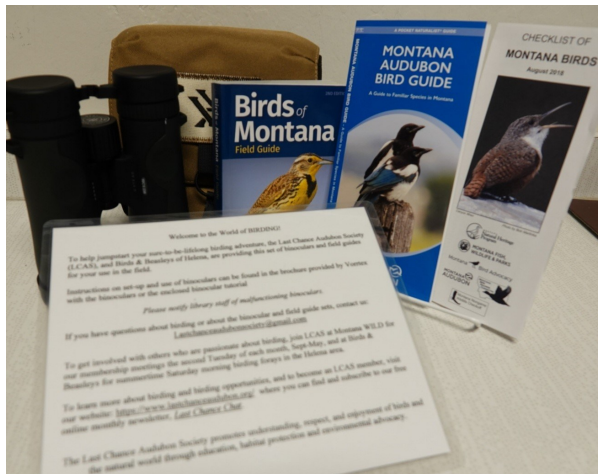
LCAS members have built, installed, and maintained several bluebird trails in the Helena area including at Sevenmile, K-Mart Wetlands, Nature Park, MDT Wetlands, the Regulating Reservoir, and Spring Meadow Lake SP (with help from local Boy Scouts and Montana WILD). For the past two summers I've been monitoring the Sevenmile trail west of town where the birdhouses are being used by both Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. When I do the surveys I get to see the complete reproduction cycle: nests being constructed, incubating eggs, naked hatchlings begging for food, young feathered birds just before fledging, and then the empty nest again. Some adults are very protective parents and stay on the nest even as I peek inside. At one box I was intimidated by three very determined adult swallows swooping down around my head. That visit, I just kept on moving down the trail.



Sevenmile Creek on the west side of Helena—photo by @elizaphoto406

New Birding Equipment Now Available!

The LCAS Education Committee has been busy bringing birding resources to area schools and libraries. The Lewis and Clark Library recently received two sets of binoculars and field guides



Binoculars and other birding supplies currently available for checkout at all Lewis and Clark County Library branches.

for each library branch...with the possibility of adding more, depending on demand. These sets are available to the public for check out and use in the field. We thank Sandy Shull of Birds and Beasleys for helping us bring this project to fruition. We also want to thank John Finn (Library Director) and his amazing staff at the Lewis and Clark Library.

In addition, the committee sent out a questionnaire to local elementary school librarians, asking for feedback about the Audubon Adventures they received this past year (LCAS donated a subscription to the National Audubon publication to all elementary libraries in the Helena School District) and, due to the positive responses, the subscription will be renewed for another year.

We received some excellent ideas from elementary school librarians about other resources they could use and the LCAS will work with each individual library to address their specific needs.

Waterfowl Survey for 2023—By Brian Shovers

The 2023 waterfowl survey was conducted by Ducks Unlimited. Click on the link to read the entire article - [Nov./Dec. 2023 edition of the magazine.](#)

The area covered includes Alaska to western Ontario and south to the Dakotas and Montana. The species showing a decline in populations included Mallard (-23%), American Widgeon (-28%), Northern Pintail (-43%), and scaup (-29%). The species showing an increase are Gadwall (+25%), Green-winged Teal (+15%), Blue-winged Teal (+2%), Northern Shoveler (+8%), Redhead (+27%), and Canvasback (+5%).



Northern Pintail pair —photo by Bob Martinka

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!

Helena Area Hotspot Highlight! - Kmart Ponds

This city-owned stormwater retainment 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. In the summer, the retainment ponds provide habitat for many waterfowl species including Canada Goose, Cinnamon Teal, and a variety of other ducks.



Sandhill Crane with colt —photo by Bob Martinka

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](#)

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Margaret Schaefer, Tara Rice, Vicki Wilson, and Margo Brooke.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Rich Wirak, Georgie Rehbein, Mike Bishop, Sue & Bruce Newell, John Moore, Ann Lauer, Slim & Sharon Miller, Sandy & Gary Barker, Robert Ray & Fran Penner-Ray, Liz & Carl Hiltunen, Lawrence Urban, Carolyn Fox, Evana Newberry, Sumner Sharpe, and Sue Jackson.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Mandy Alvino, Roy Hemry, Buddy Henry, Diane Meyer Van Note, and Connie O'Connor.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Terry Copenhaver, Stephen Cade, Marlys Forbes, Debbie Fosket, Holly Franz, Bradley Heil, Margaret Hubber, Everett Lynn, Glenn Phillips, Kimberly Schaefer, and Sumner Sharpe.

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: Now, 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,
smdewarthansen@charter.net



*Lapland Longspur — photo by
Sharon Dewart-Hansen*

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.

Last Chance Audubon Society
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membership today!***

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