

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

Feb. 2024

Bird Banding at Spring Meadow Lake State Park

Tuesday, February 13, 2024 - Program begins 7:00PM

Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

Join Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Kristina Smucker and Montana WILD's Corie Bowditch to learn about bird banding efforts happening here in Helena. For the past 2 years, FWP has run a Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) bird banding station at Spring Meadow Lake State Park and has opened that station for the public to observe. MAPS is a continent-wide collaborative effort among public agencies, non-governmental groups, and individuals to assist in the conservation of birds and their habitats through bird banding. This program will describe what a MAPS banding station looks like, what data is collected, and what scientists hope to learn from that data. The importance of education and citizen science in relation to bird conservation will also be discussed.

Kristina Smucker is the Nongame Wildlife Bureau Chief at FWP. She leads an all-star team of wildlife biologists that manage and conserve over 500 nongame species in Montana. Prior to that she worked at the Avian Science Center at the University of Montana for 10 years where she directed bird research and monitoring programs. She obtained her MS in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana and her BA in Biology from Earlham College in Indiana where she took Ornithology and fell in love with birds during spring migration.

Corie Bowditch is Montana WILD's program manager. Her passion for environmental education began during her time as a camp counselor for a wilderness exploration camp in northern Minnesota. After moving to Montana and graduating with a degree in Organismal Biology from Montana State University, she became an instructor and eventually the summer program director for Montana Outdoor Science School in Bozeman. Since 2018 she has been working as an educator for Montana FWP in Helena.



Bullock's Oriole in the hand - Photo by Kurt Cunningham



BIRDING: HOW IT CHANGED MY LIFE!!

2/1/24

Guest President's Perch

By Bob Martinka

Several decades ago, in anticipation of my up-coming retirement, I penned several goals – 11 of them – that I wanted to pursue in my newfound leisure. With these goals, I listed some specifics, such as things to make, travel destinations, mind and body health, and possible income sources. Recently, the thought of revisiting and grading myself on these goals occurred to me. Evaluating my successes and failures ... would be an interesting exercise. As my family and friends at the time would have guessed, most of my goals were related to hunting and fishing, both lifelong pursuits and the likely primary reason that I was living in Montana. So, how did I do? What grade did I deserve? Initially, I did a lot of hunting and fishing, especially the latter. In fact, I even became a fly-fishing guide to feed my interest and add a little income on the side. GRADE – **A**. On the hunting side, my interest lay mostly in upland game-birds, some of which I would have to pursue in other states. GRADE – **C**. As for Genealogy/ Family History, my goal was to trace my primary lines back 3 three generations in Europe. With this one, Kathy and I even visited a few ancestral locations in Europe and met with relatives there. GRADE – **A+**. As for achieving several of my other goals, success was variable, and I would Grade myself a **B**.

Now to the “meat” of this message! One of my goals was stated as follows: “Montana bird list of 300+ species; 500+ US species”. While I have always been a casual birder, I never really got to the point of “compulsion” and/or “addiction”. And it was several years after retirement that the birding bug really hit me. My wife Kathy and I took a short vacation in Spring 2001 to Madera Canyon in SE Arizona, a famous birding location. One morning, I joined a group of birders who were being guided by an expert. Something clicked in me that morning, after having viewed several species that would have been exceedingly difficult to ID on my own. Almost immediately upon arrival back in Helena, I did some research and ended up buying an awfully expensive pair of binoculars. A spotting scope purchase followed soon afterwards. I was hooked. The dye was cast. My goals for species were exceeded several years afterwards. And I added a world species list that now approaches 30% of what is possible. Fishing and hunting are no longer a part of my life.

That is not the end of the story! A compulsion to document the birds I have seen lead to embracing digital photography, which was a relatively new technology 20 years ago. That is now a major aspect of my birding experience. Then one day in pursuit of some special bird photos, I detoured a bit and began taking shots of dragonflies. Another addiction spinoff from birding. Also, travel for birding adventures fit well into my passions. Birding goal Grade–**A+++**.

However, overall, the grades do not matter. All these relatively new directions that my life has taken really did change and expand my world. But the change that I hold most dearly is the fantastic, like-mined individuals that have become my friends and acquaintances. Thank you, BIRDS and BIRDERS, for my NEW WORLD!!

WINGS ACROSS the BIG SKY 2024

By Stephen Turner

Calling All Field Trip Leaders! Hosts Too!

Plans for the upcoming 2024 Wings Across the Big Sky bird festival in Helena are progressing nicely. Last Chance Audubon (LCAS) has provided our state office (Montana Audubon) with a list of 25 field trips for the festival. These field trips will be held on Saturday, June 1st and



Sunday, June 2nd. The trips will occur mostly around the Helena area, with a few trips planned further afield that will correspond nicely with festival participant's homeward travel on Sunday. LCAS is actively searching for field trip leaders for the festival. While many of the trips have leaders already, there are still a number that are open.

What's involved?

We are looking for experienced birders who have good identification skills (visual and auditory), and are familiar with the birds in the Helena area. Leaders should have excellent people skills, and should be able to help others find birds in the field. Field trip leaders will be scheduled for a trip on both Saturday and Sunday, unless the leader's availability is limited to one day. Montana Audubon is offering field trip leaders a waiver of registration fees for the entire festival (\$200 value). This offer includes all meals (Friday dinner through Sunday lunch) and festival events (keynote speakers, workshops and field trips). In addition, LCAS is offering to help find housing for out-of-town field trip leaders in order to offset travel expenses.

Can you help host?

Please consider hosting a volunteer field trip leader in your home. This commitment allows our out-of-town field trip leaders to volunteer for the festival without incurring added cost through accommodations. All that is needed is a spare bedroom for Friday and Saturday nights (May 31st & June 1st). Hosts will not need to provide meals as leaders will have their meals provided by the festival.

Those interested in joining the festival as a trip leader or have the ability to offer housing for our trip leaders should contact Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for providing this much needed service. Hope to see you at the bird festival!

Birds & Beasleys Saturday Bird Walks—Donations

If you participate in the Saturday bird walks sponsored by Birds & Beasleys, you've probably met Jane Fournier, Stephen Turner, and Rich Wirak. These three LCAS members have generously donated to our chapter the money they received for leading the walks. Thank you to Jane, Stephen and Rich, and to everyone who made a donation to LCAS in 2023.

Great Backyard Bird Count - February 16-19, 2024

By Stephen Turner

Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. Over these four days the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) invites people to spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them to us. These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations.



Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online participatory-science project (also referred to as community science or citizen science) to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near-real time. Birds Canada joined the project in 2009 to provide an expanded capacity to support participation in Canada. In 2013, GBBC became a global effort when the project began utilizing eBird for data collection. Each year participation has grown as more people of all ages around the world spend their weekend counting, learning about, and celebrating birds.



The Great Backyard Bird Count is now an inter-organizational effort between the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada, which work together to bring the joys of bird watching to our members. Whether you count one bird or hundreds, participating is easy and fun for all ages! Come join the project on **February 16-19, 2024** and let birds bring you closer to nature and to each other!

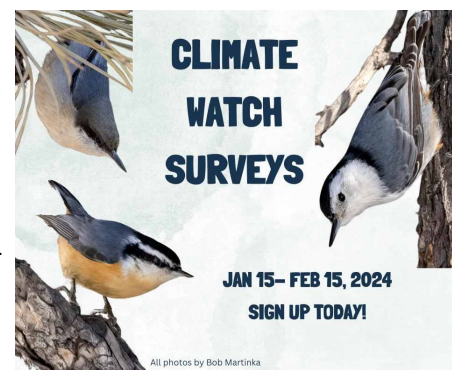
To learn more about the Great Backyard Bird Count, please view this [short video](#) on the project. Learn to participate at birdcount.org/participate/

Reprinted from birdcount.org

Climate Watch Surveys start Jan. 15, 2024

Mark your calendars! National Audubon's Climate Watch program is back from January 15th to February 15th, 2024. Each survey focuses on three target species: Pygmy Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and White-breasted Nuthatch.

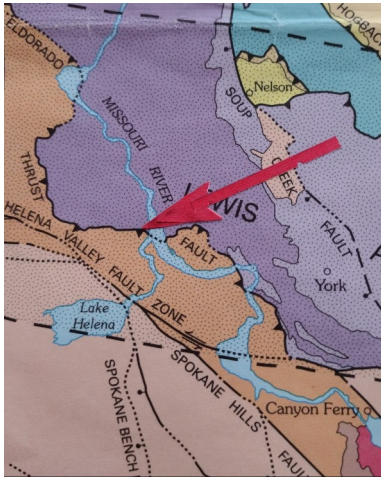
Interested in participating? [Montana Audubon](#) has a step-by-step guide on our website to help you sign up: Get ready! Climate Watch surveys start Jan. 15, 2024!



Geology near Birding Stops

By Ray Breuninger

Birding at the Black Sandy overflow parking lot is good. I've heard Canyon Wrens singing; seen House Wrens nesting; and watched a Great Horned Owl catnapping in a ponderosa. There are chickadees and nuthatches and the other usual suspects. Not only are there birds, just south of the parking lot, at the White Sandy turnoff is evidence of the Eldorado thrust



Map of Eldorado Thrust Fault at White Sandy

fault.

The Eldorado thrust fault pushed and twisted the Greyson Formation up and over the limestone at the top of the Amsden Formation. On the right, or south, side of the White Sandy turnoff road you see Greyson Formation siltstones. On the left side of the road are Amsden limestone cliffs. If you could see down below the road you'd find the older Greyson (1.3 billion years old) on top of the Amsden (310 million years old). That's a difference of more-or-less 1.3 billion years.

The Eldorado was active 74 to 58 million years ago. The crushing and shearing forces of the fault mashed the limestone so much that any fossils are broken to bits. The movement fractured the limestone, helping alcoves and caves form in the cliffs. The Greyson siltstone is broken up too and is stained with rusty yellow limonite along many of the fractures.



Limonite crust on siltstone

Helena Area Hotspot Highlight! - Little Prickly Pear Creek

Take Lincoln Rd. 12.5 miles north and west from Helena toward Canyon Creek. At the power Station turn east on Duffy Lane. Wetlands occur along Duffy Lane between Lincoln Road and the Prickly Pear canyon. Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's Snipe, Willow Flycatcher, Common Yellowthroat and Bobolink are reliable sighting. At the junction of Duffy Lane and the canyon road, there are two possible routes: 1) turning north takes you to the Sieben Ranch and Interstate 15 along a corridor supporting diverse riparian vegetation. Common bird sightings here include swallows, Gray Catbird, Warbling Vireo, Veery, American Redstart, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Lazuli Bunting; or 2) turning south takes you to Silver City along a dirt road bordered by grassland and sagebrush where Western Meadowlark, Sage Thrasher, Vesper and Brewer's Sparrow can be found.

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



Sage Thrasher —photo by Bob Martinka

2023 CBC - December 16, 2023 - Summary of 69 counts, 1954-2023 (no count in 1958)

Species	2023 Count	Times Seen	Prev. High Count	Year(s)	Freq.
Snow Goose		14	40	87	20%
Canada Goose	1919	55	3,656	07	80%
Cackling Goose		2	3	17, 20	3%
Trumpeter Swan	31	15	40	19	22%
Tundra Swan		21	35	88	30%
Wood Duck	29	35	36	04, 20	51%
Gadwall	10	29	61	95	42%
American Wigeon		21	26	90	30%
Mallard	805	65	10,216	80	94%
Blue-winged Teal		6	5	11	9%
Cinnamon Teal		3	7	93	4%
Northern Shoveler		9	13	03	13%
Northern Pintail		26	11	90	38%
Green-winged Teal	51	32	23	23	46%
Canvasback		5	10	06	7%
Redhead	22	13	35	20	19%
Ring-necked Duck	33	43	140	19	62%
Greater Scaup	10	4	4	23	6%
Lesser Scaup	577	16	10	23	23%
White-winged Scoter		2	1	87, 17	3%
Long-tailed Duck		1	4	03	1%
Bufflehead	6	28	32	20	41%
Common Goldeneye	776	67	377	23	97%
Barrow's Goldeneye	18	50	305	09	72%
Hooded Merganser		19	9	91	28%
Common Merganser	31	55	214	73	80%
Red-breasted Merganser		4	12	99	6%
Ruddy Duck	12	12	3	23	17%
Chukar		1	1	98	1%
Gray Partridge		49	137	78	71%
Ring-necked Pheasant		35	60	62	51%
Ruffed Grouse		1	6	86	1%
Dusky Grouse		1	1	95	1%
Sharp-tailed Grouse		13	12	81	19%
Wild Turkey	16	5	11	23	7%
Common Loon	1	9	7	91	13%
Pacific Loon		0	0	18	0%
Pied-billed Grebe	3	9	4	92	13%
Horned Grebe		5	2	89	7%
Eared Grebe		2	1	88, 12	3%
Western Grebe	2	15	5	12	22%
American White Pelican		10	6	04	14%
Double-crested Cormorant		1	1	04	1%
Great Blue Heron		31	5	88	45%
Turkey Vulture		1	1	66	1%
Bald Eagle	26	61	36	94	88%
Northern Harrier	10	61	28	13	88%
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	41	7	03, 22	59%
Cooper's Hawk		27	3	77, 03	39%
Northern Goshawk		19	4	83	28%
Red-tailed Hawk	15	27	18	19	39%

CW only

Ferruginous Hawk		1	1	76	1%	
Rough-legged Hawk	6	60	62	17	87%	
Golden Eagle		43	7	64	62%	
American Kestrel	1	22	4	17	32%	
Merlin	6	52	11	22	75%	
Gyr Falcon		9	2	90,93	13%	
Peregrine Falcon		8	2	70	12%	
Prairie Falcon	1	36	4	87	52%	
Sora	1	1		23	1%	
American Coot	4	40	588	10	58%	
Sandhill Crane		0	0	18	0%	CW only
Killdeer		29	12	66	42%	
Spotted Sandpiper		1	1	97	1%	
Wilson's Snipe		53	11	78	77%	
Ring-billed Gull	535	25	803	03	36%	
California Gull		11	57	01	16%	
Herring Gull	1	14	15	01	20%	
Glaucous Gull		1	1	97	1%	
Lesser Black-backed Gull		1	1	21	1%	
Rock Pigeon	929	50	1,306	05	72%	
Eurasian Collared-Dove	361	17	607	17	25%	
Mourning Dove		10	12	16	14%	
Western Screech Owl		1	1	69	1%	
Great Horned Owl	1	48	7	87	70%	
Snowy Owl		3	1	80,84,96	4%	
Northern Pygmy Owl		8	4	85	12%	
Long Eared Owl		1	1	80	1%	
Short-eared Owl		18	11	68	26%	
Northern Saw-whet Owl		1	1	86	1%	
Belted Kingfisher	2	39	6	88,12	57%	
Downy Woodpecker	12	64	18	00	93%	
Hairy Woodpecker	5	54	16	12	78%	
American Three-toed Woodpecker		2	1	12	3%	
Northern Flicker (Red-shafted)	103	66	112	21	96%	
Yellow Shafted Flicker (race)		6	2	05	9%	
Pileated Woodpecker		1	1	09	1%	
Loggerhead Shrike		2	1	65,83	3%	
Northern Shrike	4	60	17	19	87%	
Gray Jay		6	24	90	9%	
Steller's Jay	2	11	4	81,86	16%	
Blue Jay	2	23	23	19	33%	
Pinyon Jay	28	31	156	60	45%	
Clark's Nutcracker	1	62	220	91	90%	
Black-billed Magpie	315	69	453	77	100%	
American Crow	148	37	169	13	54%	
Common Raven	199	56	470	10	81%	
Horned Lark	1	51	5,329	72	74%	
Black-capped Chickadee	124	67	156	00	97%	
Mountain Chickadee	66	68	225	94	99%	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	13	64	273	94	93%	
White-breasted Nuthatch	21	52	22	97	75%	
Pygmy Nuthatch	16	34	45	14	49%	

Brown Creeper	2	23	7	81,04	33%	
Canyon Wren		3	1	95,01	4%	
Winter Wren		1	1	97	1%	
Marsh Wren		9	4	88	13%	
American Dipper		61	9	87	88%	
Golden-crowned Kinglet		5	6	85,01	7%	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		1	0	22	1%	
Western Bluebird		3	8	18	4%	
Mountain Bluebird		2	1	97, 20	3%	
Townsend's Solitaire	27	68	142	07	99%	
American Robin	26	53	227	05	77%	
Varied Thrush		2	1	81	3%	
Northern Mockingbird		1	1	87	1%	
Brown Thrasher		0	0	19	0%	CW only
European Starling	510	65	722	18	94%	
Bohemian Waxwing		59	16,101	05	86%	
Cedar Waxwing	12	34	132	08	49%	
Spotted Towhee		1	1	11	1%	
American Tree Sparrow	17	69	145	86	100%	
Song Sparrow	18	63	44	66	91%	
White-throated Sparrow		3	1	87,91,11	4%	
Harris's Sparrow		7	2	63,90, 21	10%	
White-crowned Sparrow		6	12	18	9%	
Dark-eyed Junco	17	52	147	21	75%	
Lapland Longspur		7	40	70	10%	
Snow Bunting		12	80	96	17%	
Red-winged Blackbird	2	38	161	65	55%	
Western Meadowlark	1	12	51	79	17%	
Rusty Blackbird		6	9	17	9%	
Brewer's Blackbird		13	17	67	19%	
Brown-headed Cowbird		1	1	75	1%	
Common Grackle	2	4	1	23	6%	
Rosy Finch		14	75	77	20%	
Pine Grosbeak	4	24	253	77	35%	
Purple Finch		1	1	95	1%	
Cassin's Finch		29	100	64	42%	
House Finch	354	44	946	00	64%	
Red Crossbill		39	351	95	57%	
White-winged Crossbill		3	30	84	4%	
Common Redpoll		48	979	01	70%	
Hoary Redpoll		2	2	77,01	3%	
Pine Siskin	8	41	388	95	59%	
American Goldfinch	9	21	26	79	30%	
Evening Grosbeak		32	141	84	46%	
House Sparrow	925	69	2,826	08	100%	
TOTAL SPECIES	68					
TOTAL BIRDS	9,247					

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Diane Thorsen, Alicia Reber and Pamela Mavrolas.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Mark & Dee Dee Cress, Stephen & Patty Turner, Grant Hokit, Elizabeth Poletti, Warren & Evelyn Norton, Tim Baker, Bob Martinka, Glenda & Stan Bradshaw, Nan & Ray Breuninger, Donna & Don Eisenmenger, Derek Reed, Jo Lace & Brian Shovers, Deborah Amesbury & John Love, Cid Avery, Sharon Liederman, Betsy Hamann, Shawn Watts, Jim & Leslie Smith, David Nardinger, Lee Harrison, Marjean Heisler, Sandra Micken, Gary Wiens, Eliza Frazer & Barry Hood, Hugh & Kren Zackheim, Gail Moser, Mary Maj, John Mott, Donna Shull, Cheryl Boid & Tom Woodall, Connie Herzig, Roni Eisenmenger, Kathy Major & Jeff Bisko, Teresa Kaiserski, Liz Gans & Rick Newby, Gerald Wozniak, Kurt Olofson, Janice Miller, Kathy Lloyd, Pete Strazdas, Dave & Patty Mott, Carol & Rod Bischoff, and Nancy Ewer.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Bonnie Lovelace, Tom Shively, Julia Vasquez, William Carrigan, Susan Hemion, Lia Leinonen, Bill Neal, Harnek Singh, and Don Skaar.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Eliza Frazer, Susan Holton, Darlene Jatkowski, Kathleen Wanner, Shawn Watts, Joe Lamson, Robert Putsch, Constance Fiske, Lowell Anderson, Van Bass, Don Bishop, Mary Bradbury, Susan Buringrud, Carolyn Clemens, Constance Cole, Diana Corzine, Kurt Cunningham, Beverly Daehn, Joan Daoust, Susan DeBree, Bruce Desonia, Christine Deveny, William Drew, Constance Enzweiler, Karen Fairbrother, Ellen Feaver, Linda Galloway, Roseva Guest, Pamela Harris, Tvelone Hedges, Ronald Herman, Joy Holloway, Shirley Hudson, Jo Lace, Robin LaNeve, Joel Maes, Gail Moser, Susan Near, D Nigon, Jorge Ramirez, Daryl Reed, Sandra Renner, Judy Scheier, Alison Schulte, Tedra Skaar, Kimberlee Smith, Lois Steinbeck, Janet Strandberg, and Muriel Wild.

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.

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS ONLY: Due to increasing costs, we will no longer be sending hardcopy newsletters. 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

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Membership

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Habitat: open

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