

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*

*March 2025*

## **Chimney Swifts in Montana**

**Tuesday, March 11, 2025 – Program begins 7:00PM**

**Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.**

**Free – All Are Welcome**

Chimney Swifts are aerial insectivores and a Species of Greatest Inventory Need (SGIN) in Montana. Historically, they inhabited hollow mature trees and cave walls. With European settlement beginning in the 1600's, they shifted predominantly to man-made structures, expanding their range west with the growing availability of suitable nesting habitat, aka chimneys.

Prior to 2017, the Montana Natural Heritage Program database contained just 23 breeding records for Chimney Swift in eastern Montana. To fill this information gap Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) and the Montana Audubon Society developed a survey protocol to determine their breeding range and create a baseline for occupied towns in Montana. Between 2017 and 2024, FWP, MT Audubon, and citizen scientists surveyed 67 towns across central and eastern Montana. Survey results reveal a much broader distribution of Chimney Swift in Montana than previously recognized. Currently, FWP is using these data to help identify potential threats and conservation actions for Chimney Swifts to help maintain a robust population in Montana.



*Chimney Swift in flight. Photo by Bob Martinka*

Our speaker, 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.



## Call for Volunteers!

March 1, 2025

Greetings Last Chance Audubon members and friends! At the risk of repeating the same message, I'm going to repeat the same message! ***We need volunteers!***

We have a healthy and loyal membership numbering about 189. This is great! Our numbers sank a little bit during the pandemic, but we are back up to speed and doing well. With one exception. The Last Chance Audubon age demographic is at the upper limits. That's my age, too. I think folks our age are great and I'm happy we are active and concerned citizens. However, through attrition alone, our membership will diminish over time as we get too old to get out in the field or even to the monthly programs. We need to attract a younger population.

We've been invited to participate in a number of activities this spring by other like-minded groups: Montana Wild, Montana Conservation Elders, Gold Country Master Gardeners, and there is some informal conversation about an Earth Day event with Montana Native Plant Society, Gardenwerks, Birds & Beasleys, and Last Chance Audubon collaborating. Some of these activities are specifically geared towards kids and families. They would be a great opportunity to show off what we do and educate a different part of the local population about environmental concerns and conservation efforts.

In addition to these events, Last Chance Audubon has at least two projects we want to accomplish in the spring: our line and twine removal efforts at Spring Meadow Lake and a collaboration with the City of Helena to bring Russian Olive and Cottonwood under control (removal and treatment) at K-Mart Wetlands. Add to that our annual fundraiser, the Birdathon (on or around Memorial Day Weekend), and field trips offered during the spring and summer months.

It takes a lot of hours working at an information table, doing labor on a work day, organizing the field trips, coordinating our efforts with other organizations and to put it bluntly: The board alone can't do it. We've started passing around a sign-up sheet (first time was at the Feb program) and several of you contacted us to offer your services. Thank you! But we need more. We will continue to ask for help.

Through these varied efforts, we hope to become more visible to a younger population, some of whom might like to become Last Chance Audubon members. I am sure there are some young people out there in Helena who could potentially be our future board members. First, they need to know that Last Chance Audubon exists. If you can volunteer, please contact me or sign up at the monthly program.

Leslie Smith, LCAS Board President  
406-431-4995 or [leslie\\_smi@yahoo.com](mailto:leslie_smi@yahoo.com)

## Around Montana!

### Attention all citizen scientists: Screech-Owl Surveys are back!

With Spring fast approaching and warmer days on the horizon, now is a great time to break out of hibernation and do some citizen science! March 1st marks the start of our second-annual citizen science survey targeting Western and Eastern Screech-Owls, and we are looking for dedicated volunteers anywhere in Montana to collect some much needed data on these Potential Species of Concern.

This survey consists of 10 nighttime callback stations a mile apart along a driving route to listen for any owl responses. These surveys can be completed anytime between March 1st and April 30th, which lines up with the owls' breeding season and heightened vocal activity.

Interested in participating? Fill out the interest form here, or email Gwynne at [gwynne@mtaudubon.org](mailto:gwynne@mtaudubon.org) to get started. Also be sure to check out our citizen science website at [www.montanabirdsurveys.weebly.com](http://www.montanabirdsurveys.weebly.com) for more information on this survey and others like it!



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## Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival- May 30- June 1, 2025

*Presented by the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab*



Join us this summer in Missoula for Montana Audubon's annual birding festival, hosted this year with Five Valleys Audubon Society. We are pleased to announce this year's keynote speaker will be Dr. Erick Greene, Professor Emeritus in the Division of Biological Sciences and in the Wildlife Biology Program at The University of Montana. In his presentation, "Ospreys As Environmental Sentinels," he will share an overview of the species, along with details from long-term studies on heavy metals in Ospreys and what this research can tell us about the envi-

ronmental clean-up of the Upper Clark Fork River, the largest EPA Superfund site in the U.S. Learn more on the Festival website: <https://mtaudubon.org/events/wings/>

Registration will open in March - keep an eye out for more information coming soon!

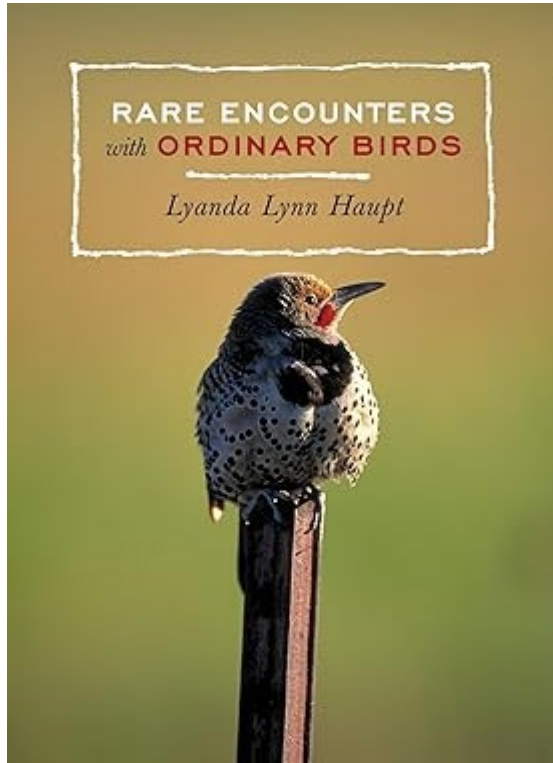
## Last Chance Audubon News!

### February 2025 LCAS Board Meeting Summary

- Additional LCAS Fall Fundraiser donations for Spring 2025 vegetation management and cleanup at the K-Mart ponds have been received, bringing the total to \$4,229. With LCAS' matching funds, \$8,458 is available for the project.
  - The Education Committee is working with Carroll College and Helena's high schools distributing applications for LCAS conservation scholarships. Also, LCAS will host a table again this year at the MT Conservation Elders' (MCE) summer camp fair on April 19, 2025, at the Lewis & Clark Co. fairgrounds. The MCE has a goal of providing 300 scholarships for students to attend its summer conservation camps.
  - The Board is coordinating with MT FWP on a new project to clean up tangled fishing lines, twine and old oriole nests at Spring Meadow SP, and will be soliciting help from LCAS members. The work needs to be completed by early April.
  - The Board is continuing liaison with Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT) on placing bird boxes being built by LCAS members at PPLT's two new properties, respectively located in the Birds Eye and East Helena areas. Survey work is underway to identify specific box locations. Interested LCAS members are invited to help put up the boxes this spring.
  - Spring is a busy time for conservation-related events. In addition to LCAS' own projects, the Board has been asked to participate in other organizations' events to share information about birds and their habitat needs. A partial list includes Master Gardener's training, Earth Day and World Migratory Bird Day. The Board will be providing details about these requests and inviting LCAS members' involvement.
  - The next LCAS board meeting is March 4, 2025, with location still to be determined.
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## Birding Book Reviews

*Rare Encounters with Ordinary Birds* by Lyanda Lynn Haupt



This book is about diving deep into the details of birds we commonly see and perhaps ignore because of that: flickers, crows, cormorants, to name a few.

The author, Lyanda Lynn Haupt, lives in the Pacific Northwest. Her birding area is a very different ecological niche than ours. For me, that made the book interesting because her lush and detailed descriptions of the physical landscape are so enjoyable. Imagine being in a cedar forest under dripping needles...

The book starts when she is pregnant. She starts her child's Life List before she is born. It counts because she was "on board" during the sightings!

Haupt's information about the birds she has chosen to discuss is enlightening, interesting and leads to ponderings about the larger issues of habitat loss, bird sound as part of a tapestry of sound (and how is that changing?) and the contradiction between scientific study and anecdotal information. She argues anecdotal information about bird behavior has a legitimate place in science.

I found the book easy to read, charming, informational, and inspiring.

Leslie Smith

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*Silent Spring Revolution. John F. Kennedy, Rachel Carson, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and the Great Environmental Awakening* by Douglas Brinkley

This book describes how environmental activism came to the forefront of American life in the "long 60s" - the period of time from the late 50s to the early 70s. The pace at which environmental legislation and wild lands protection occurred in that time is breathtaking, and was largely bipartisan and included landmark laws such as the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), Land and Water Conservation Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the Wilderness Act, not to mention the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, 104 National Wildlife Refuges, and 20 units of the National Park system.

The 1950s were a time of great industrial development and growth in this country, but with a huge cost to the environment: horrific air and water pollution, land development impacting plants, animals and wetlands, chemical and nuclear waste proliferation, growth outpacing sewage treatment capabilities, and so on. To paraphrase Neil Young, “Mother Nature was on the run.” Into all this came Rachel Carson. Her books, especially “Silent Spring”, were instrumental in galvanizing the momentum that was already starting to build in the United States. Silent Spring of course was famous for raising the red flag about the dangers of DDT, which caused shell thinning in bird eggs, and other pesticides in the environment.

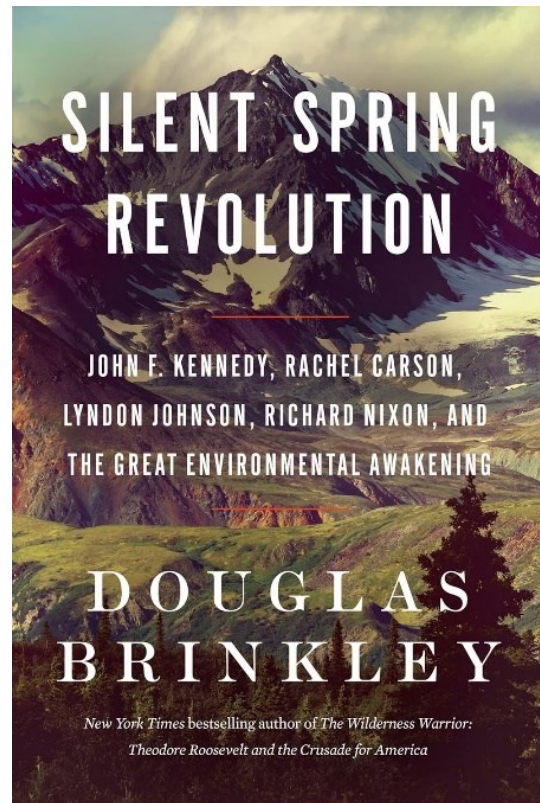
At the beginning of this era, most advocates of wild places were Teddy Roosevelt-style conservationists, looking to save the last natural gems and enshrine them as Parks, Monuments or “Wilderness” areas. John F. Kennedy was in this category, having a soft spot particularly for untrammelled seashores. Lyndon Johnson, in Brinkley’s view, is the most underappreciated President in terms of environmental legislation he helped pass. Johnson’s appreciation for nature came from his upbringing in the hill country of Texas. Richard Nixon, in Brinkley’s estimation, viewed his work on environmental issues more from a transactional standpoint—he saw the popularity of environmental issues and took advantage of the political gain he could get from passing laws such as NEPA and the ESA. Nonetheless, Nixon was drawn to the outdoors, especially the seashores of California and the Everglades in Florida.

It also wasn’t just Presidents that made this happen. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, Senators Gaylord Nelson, Frank Church and Scoop Jackson, Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall, and citizen advocates like Barry Commoner and David Brower of the Sierra Club all were players at important times and were given nice profiles in the book.

Montana didn’t come up much in this book, but the Bob Marshall Wilderness was mentioned as being in the first wave of Wilderness areas established in 1964, and a mention of the Craighead brothers (Frank and John) who were among the earliest proponents for preservation of wild and scenic rivers.

This book was personal to me because many of these laws provided me with the opportunity to have a career as a natural resource professional. It very much made me appreciate all that we owe these visionaries who fought for these protections and from which we benefit every day. I think most Auduboners will find this book as inspiring as I did.

Don Skaar



## Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Jeanne Koehne, Lowell Anderson, Judy Kilmer, Austin Anderson, and Karen Kling.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Pamela Mavrolas, Ray and Nan Breuninger, Donna Shull, Brad Robinson, Deborah Massett, Drake Barton and Kathy Lloyd, Ron and Ann Waterman, Mary Jane Bradbury, John Mott, Marilyn Hayes, Carmen Winslow, Pat Grantham, Mary Maj, Diann Fradette, William and Candace West, Greg and Wendy Wheeler, Vicki Fitzgerald, Mary Alice Chester, Joyce Bateman, Lisa Bay, Patricia Clark, James Driggers, William Fairbank, Betsy Griffing, Liz and Carl Hiltunen, Jane Madison and Jeff Van Tine, Steven Liston, Michelle March, Robert Martin, Bryce Maxwell, Ken Metzger, Cathy Morris, Kurt Olofson, Shane Sater, and Jason Socci.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Ann Willcockson, Rhonda Haight, and Thomas Albrecht.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Barbara Bayer, Pamela Bompert, Bonnie Bowler, Robert Caldwell, Chris Cornish, Diana Corzine, Constance Enzweiler, Karen Fairbrother, Marlys Forbes, Jennifer Frazer, Robin Hall, Tvelone Hedges, Janet Hess-Herbert, Gene Huntington. Jo Lace, John Lambing, Phylis Marshik, Michelle Money, Peter Petek, Thomas Ryan, Tim Speyer, Clark Spranget, Pete Strazdas, Lisa Upson, Lucy Zarr, and Dennis Zeiler.

**LCAS MEMBERSHIP:** A new membership or renewal is \$15 per household and is current for one year, January 1<sup>st</sup> through December 31<sup>st</sup>. 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](http://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.

**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](mailto: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  
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**Membership**

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