

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

April 2025

Wildlife in the Helena Valley and Beyond

Tuesday, April 8, 2025 – Program begins 7:00PM

Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

Retired from FWP as an Education Specialist, Kurt Cunningham spends his time exploring Montana's wild spaces. As an avid wildlife photographer, he captures images of the wildlife he observes along the way. After retirement, he upgraded his camera equipment and enjoys spending time outdoors taking better photos of wildlife. This presentation will show people how easy it is to interact with wildlife in the Helena surrounding areas - from easy morning walks/paddles at Spring Meadow Lake to day hikes in the surrounding Helena National Forest. Of course, no presentation is complete without a few Glacier and Yellowstone critters. Kurt's presentation will provide a photo journey of all these places and the animals inhabiting them.

Kurt was hired from the Colorado Dept of Education by Vince Yannone for the position of Youth Education Coordinator with Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in 1989. Montana Audubon's Janet Ellis was key in securing this position for FWP from the legislature. He continued to work for FWP in the Education Bureau until retirement in 2020. An important part of his career included working as a member of the Montana WILD Education team. Kurt has a Degree in Wildlife Ecology and Masters in Education.



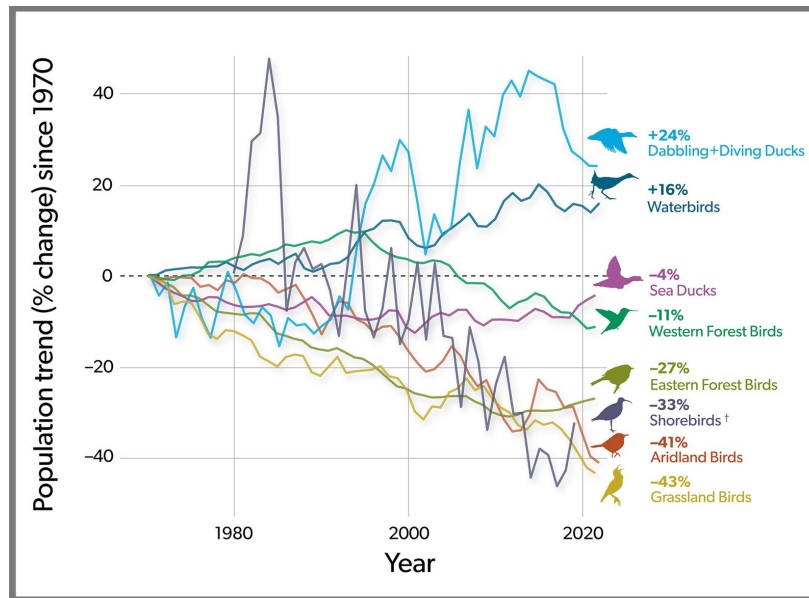
Pika. Photo by Kurt Cunningham



State of the Birds and Ways you can help

April 1, 2025

Since the shocking report published in 2019 in the journal *Science* on the loss of bird species in the U.S., the trend has continued. Bird loss occurs due to a variety of causes: loss of habitat, toxic environments, and climate change are some of the most impactful.



Grassroots efforts to protect the environment in general and birds in particular are effective means to slowing these trends. Environmental awareness is a high priority and one we should all promote at every opportunity. Loss of federal funding today could have harmful effects downstream on both State and Federal programs and non-profit organizations that promote the protection of the environment.

As such, it is more important than ever we do our part. Belonging to organizations such as Last Chance Audubon is one way to do this. Giving financial donations, our time, and our voices to environmental protection projects has never been more critical.

On an individual basis, here are some easy ways to help:

- protect birds from impact with windows and keep cats indoors
- reduce lawn and plant natives
- avoid the use of pesticides
- drink “[bird-friendly](#)” coffee
- eliminate plastics wherever and whenever possible
- be bird aware and share your enthusiasm

Leslie Smith, LCAS Board President
406-431-4995 or leslie_smi@yahoo.com

LCAS 2025 Field Trips—Join the Fun!!

May 15: K-MART WETLANDS

Leader: Kyle Strode. Join Kyle for a morning of birding at the K-Mart Wetlands – an urban ecotone site that includes a marsh, ponds, woody thickets, and small patches of open grass-land. An impressive 195 species have been observed here over the years, including many waterfowl, sparrows, and warblers. Meet at 7:30 am at the intersection of Cole Ave and N Harris St. Most of this area has dry ground but footing is uneven in some spots. This meandering walk will last roughly two hours. Contact Kyle Strode, kstrode@carroll.edu, to sign up.

May 18: ELLIOTT’S EDEN

Leader: Janice Miller. Trip limit: 10 participants. Elliott’s Eden, formerly known as Stansfield Lane, is adjacent to Upper Prickly Pear Creek, and as such has cottonwood trees with warblers and flycatchers, and a pond full of waterbirds. In the trees we’ll look for Lazuli Buntings, Bullock’s Orioles, and Western Wood-Pewees. On the pond we hope to find Wood Ducks, Soras, Spotted Sandpipers, Northern Waterthrushes, and Great Blue Herons. Overhead and nearby, we’ll keep our eyes open for Bald Eagles and Sandhill Cranes. Thanks to Kim and Pete Elliott for allowing us to visit their bird-rich ‘Eden’. Meet Janice Miller at the northeast corner of the Costco Parking lot at 7:00 a.m. and expect to return by noon. We will walk a distance of just under a mile. Bring binoculars, light rain parka, insect repellent, and footwear for swampy ground. To reserve a place, email Janice at jan2854@gmail.com.



May 31: CANYON FERRY WMA

Leaders: Stephen Turner and Don Skaar. Trip limit: 10-person max. Meet at the northeast end of the Costco parking lot at 6:30 am to arrange for carpooling. We will make our way to the Canyon Ferry WMA on the west side of the reservoir before heading over to bird the WMA ponds on the east side. We will be looking primarily for songbirds associated with the cottonwood and riparian areas of the WMA. Species could include Yellow Warbler, Bullock’s Oriole, two kingbird species, multiple flycatcher species, Swainson’s Thrush, Black-headed Grosbeak, etc. We will also likely see plenty of waterfowl, pelicans, gulls, hopefully some terns, and possibly some straggler shorebirds. The species diversity can be amazing! Our list for the entire WMA could easily exceed 65 species. Please plan to bring lunch/snacks and drinks if you wish. Check the forecast and bring appropriate gear for any type of weather. Sturdy footwear is a

must. It may be early for mosquitos, but please be prepared. Time permitting, we will try to locate a grassland specialty, Thick-billed Longspur, on our return. Please register by sending a message to turnstonest@gmail.com. Please direct questions to Stephen (406-521-0000) or Don (406-465-6135).

June 7: BIRDING AT VISTA DA SERRA/Vigilante Campground



Broad-tailed Hummingbird.
Photo by Sharon Dewart-Hansen

Leader: Sharon Dewart-Hansen. Trip limit: 10. Participants will begin the morning surveying the Vigilante Campground area and will then proceed up the trail along Trout Creek. The campground area is the go-to spot in the area for breeding Oven-bird. Other bird species found here include Hammond’s and Western Flycatcher, Ruffed Grouse, MacGillivray’s Warbler, Veery, and possibly Golden-crowned Kinglet. The hike along Trout Creek is relatively easy with minimal elevation gain, and participants can expect a round-trip hike of less than 2 miles. White-throated Swifts and Violet-green Swallows nest in the towering cliffs along the riparian trail. The trip will end with a visit to the Prickly Pear Land Trust conservation easement, Vista Da Serra Ranch where hosts Tia and Derek Nelson will share excellent views of their feeders. Expect to find several hummingbird species which may include Calliope, Broad-tailed, and Black-chinned as well as other mountain feeder specialties. Meet at Costco northeast parking lot at 6:30am. Planning to be back by noon. Please email Sharon at smdewarthansen@charter.net to sign up.

June 14: BIRDS AND GEOLOGY OF THE BEAVER CREEK AREA

Leaders: Don Skaar and Ray Breuninger. Trip limit: 8. Join Don and Ray for a birds and rocks tour of the Beaver Creek area, following the road from the lower end near Holter Lake high into the mountains beyond Refrigerator Canyon. Expect to find typical riparian and montane bird species for this area. Most of our observations will be from the road, although short hiking forays are to be expected. Geology highlights range from the 1.4 billion year old rocks of the Belt Sea through the last Ice Age deposits of Glacial Lake Great Falls. Along the spectacular rocky gorge of Beaver Creek we'll see fossils such as trilobites, corals, and brachiopods, as well as structures such as folds and thrust faults. Meet at Costco northeast parking lot @ 7 am. Expect to be back by late afternoon, so bring a lunch and snacks. Please email Don Skaar at skaar.fcs@gmail.com to sign up.



Montana trilobite fossil

September 8: WORLD SHOREBIRD DAY



Black-bellied Plover. Photo by Bob Martinka

In celebration of World Shorebird Day this field trip will head to the east side of the Canyon Ferry WMA (Lower Ray Creek) to survey for migrating shorebirds. All levels of birders are welcome, and we will have several shorebird ID experts on hand to help with those tricky IDs. We will meet at the northeast end of the Costco parking lot at 7:00 am (please arrive a few minutes early) and return no later than 1:00 pm. Please dress for weather that can be unpredictable. Expect a 1.5-mile round-trip walk on dirt roads. This trip has limited space and generally fills up.

Plan to register early! Contact Stephen to register at turnstonest@gmail.com.

Last Chance Audubon News!

LCAS Board Meeting Summary – March 4, 2025

- The Board will seek assistance from LCAS members and through a potential student project to digitize historic records, including Christmas Bird Count lists and special bird survey projects.
 - The Board is finalizing plans with the City of Helena and MT Conservation Corps to clean up invasive and overgrown vegetation at the K-Mart ponds this spring.
 - The Board and LCAS volunteers will be conducting or collaborating in several spring 2025 projects: cleaning up fishing line and twine at Spring Meadow SP on April 11; hosting a table at the MT Conservation Elders' summer camp fair for children on April 19; placing bird boxes on new Prickly Pear Land Trust properties (dates TBD); and Migratory Bird Day on May 3. Additional volunteers are encouraged to sign up!
 - Several LCAS board members' terms are expiring at the end of May. Elections and/or reappointments will occur at the May 6, 2025, membership meeting. LCAS members will be encouraged to consider becoming candidates.
 - The next LCAS Board meeting will be held on April 1, 2025.
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Elections in May

LCAS's annual election will be held at the May meeting. This year we're looking for members who are interested in serving on the chapter's Board. The Board, which meets once a month during August through May, provides direction for the chapter, makes decisions about projects, and oversees finances. Board members serve a two-year term.

Nominations are open until the May meeting. To make a nomination – it can be yourself or someone else you know who is interested serving -- please contact Sue Jackson at suejacksonmt@gmail.com. All members are eligible to serve on the Board.

Line & Twine Removal at Spring Meadow Lake SP

Last Chance Audubon Society will host a cleanup event at Spring Meadow Lake State Park on **April 11th 2025**. The event, which is co-sponsored by Montana WILD, and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, will focus on the removal of monofilament fishing line from the trees and shrubs along the shoreline of the lake.



Fishing line caught in a tree branch.

There are several areas around the lake where fishing line has become entangled in shoreline trees and shrubs. Some of this line could potentially have fishing lures attached posing a threat to animals, birds, and humans. Each year, park personnel meet with mixed success when trying to help waterfowl that have become entangled. Additionally, fishing line can represent a problem for birds as they will readily use the line in nest construction. Young (and adult) birds can become entangled in the lines causing injury or death. Orioles, waxwings, and warblers have all been known to use discarded or

abandoned fishing line in nests around Spring Meadow.

The event will begin at 9:00am and last approximately four hours (depending on how much line we find). We will meet at Montana WILD Education Center (2668 Broadwater Ave) and make preparations to separate into teams in order to make quick work of the fishing line. *This event requires registration.* Volunteers can register by calling Montana WILD at 406-444-9941. Plan to dress for any type of weather; sturdy shoes and work gloves may be helpful as well. Much of the line could be right at the water's edge and a pair of muck boots may come in handy. Pack a lunch or snacks and bring water as needed. There are restrooms around the park.

What: Line & Twine Event. Fishing line removal around Spring Meadow Lake State Park

When: April 11, 2025, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm.

Where: Montana WILD (2668 Broadwater Ave.) We will walk to the park for the cleanup.

**Note: It may be helpful to bring some tools to help with line removal. If you have access to pruners or loppers, please bring them. If you have an A-frame ladder or a tall stepladder, please bring as well.*

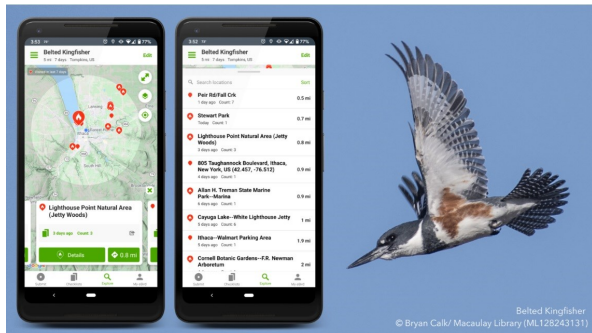
Please contact Stephen Turner (406) 521-0000 or email at turnstonest@gmail.com.

eBird for Beginners Course - Coming in May!

What is eBird? An AI overview states that “eBird is a free, web-based platform and app where birdwatchers can record and share their bird sightings, contributing to a massive global database used for scientific research, conservation efforts, and education”. In the past decade or so, eBird has become the “go to” for those wanting to actively (or even passively) participate in avian community science. But getting started in using new technology can sometimes be a bit intimidating.

eBird

This spring, Last Chance Audubon Society will offer an in-person introductory course to using the eBird mobile app. This course is specifically geared to those having an interest in understanding what eBird is all about, and want to dive into the basics of recording observations in the field. The course will address everything from logging in, to understanding basic navigation within the mobile app, and how to properly record your observations in the field. Students are even encouraged to play with their phones in class! The course will also offer a peek into the eBird website and the many offerings that can be found within the website pages. Finally, the class will take its new-found skills out to Spring Meadow Lake State Park for a walk around the lake while using the eBird mobile app.



Registration will open immediately and will be limited to twelve (12) participants. The course will be held at Montana WILD Education Center (2668 Broadwater Ave.) and will be offered free to the entire community. The class will take place on **Friday, May 9th**. We will gather in the Montana WILD auditorium at 8:30am for a presentation on the mobile app. Both Android and iOS applications will be ac-

commodated (Don't know what this means? Don't worry. We have you covered!) The in-class portion should not last longer than one and a half hours. At around 10am we will start a birding trip around Spring Meadow Lake State Park. This walk generally takes 1.5 - 2 hours. We will try to finish before noon. Participants will need a smartphone (Android or iOS) and a Cornell Lab of Ornithology account to use eBird. Please ensure you have the eBird app downloaded to your phone before arriving. Reach out if you need help doing this (email below). The class will take place regardless of the weather. Check the forecast and please dress for any conditions.

To register, please email Stephen Turner (turnstonest@gmail.com) your name and phone number. A waiting list will be created once twelve participants have registered. Don't wait! This class is sure to fill up very quickly!

Not able to join us in person? Ebird offers an excellent course called **eBird Essentials. It is a free course offered through Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and provides an excellent jump off point for understanding eBird. Please use [this link](#) to enroll in the eBird Essentials course.*

Around Montana! Long-billed Curlew Surveys Are Back!

The warm and sunny days of Spring are fast approaching. With that comes the familiar “*cur-leeeee*” call of the Long-billed Curlew and Montana Audubon’s citizen science surveys of these charismatic shorebirds.

The Long-billed Curlew depends on Montana’s grasslands for breeding, and continues to decline across its range due to loss of this habitat to development of agriculture and infrastructure. With this decline, more research is needed to assess the health and conservation needs of the population, meaning we need your help surveying across the Mission, Helena, and Blackfoot Valleys!

These surveys consist of 10 predetermined survey points along a driving (or biking if you’re feeling adventurous) route. Each point includes 5-minutes of looking and listening for any Long-billed Curlews, and any nearby birds.

Survey efforts for Long-billed Curlew began in 2012, and since then these surveys have not only tracked curlews, but have also tracked land use changes in these three valleys. Two survey windows will be available for citizen scientists to participate in this unique effort: **April 8th - May 7th**, and **May 8th - May 31st**. The virtual training was on March 25, and you can view the recording on the Montana Audubon YouTube page.

Email Gwynne at gwynne@mtaudubon.org or visit our [citizen science website](#) for more information and to sign up!



Registration Now Open for the Wings Across the Big Sky Festival!



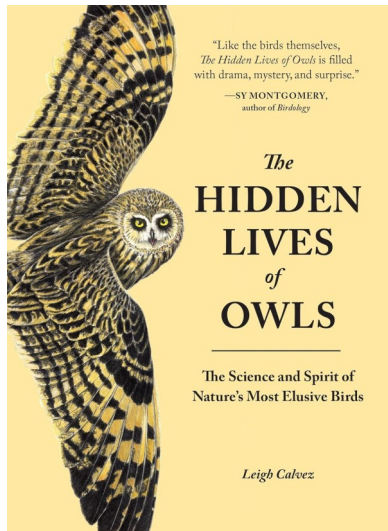
Registration is now open for the 2025 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival! Join us this summer in Missoula, May 30- June 1, for a weekend filled with birds, nature, and community. For more information and a link to registration, visit the [Festival website](#)

Field trip highlight: ***Bird Banding with the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab***

Join the University of Montana Bird Ecology Lab (UMBEL) staff for a unique songbird banding experience. We will see birds up close during capture and learn about species ID, plumage, molt, breeding biology, and survival of songbirds at the Five Valleys Land Trust Confluence Property at Rock Creek. There’s a 15-minute, fairly flat walk along the Clark Fork River to the netting site.

Birding Book Reviews - This month's books are about owls!

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF OWLS: The Science and Spirit of Nature's Most Elusive Birds, by Leigh Calvez



A non-fiction book about owls, written for adults. However, though Leigh Calvez is a naturalist and approaches her subject from a scientific standpoint, her writing is accessible for anyone, including young adults.

Each chapter deals with a different owl species. She starts the book when she is new to owl studies and is a rookie when it comes to netting owls at night, in the dark and cold. She soon learns to hold the birds properly and gets more comfortable with this particular, nocturnal form of birding and bird study.

You will learn about owl behaviors (not the same for every species), nesting and incubation and hunting of prey (sometimes an owl is the predator; sometimes it is the prey.) While educating us about the individual owls, the author gives us stories of her first-hand experiences with them.

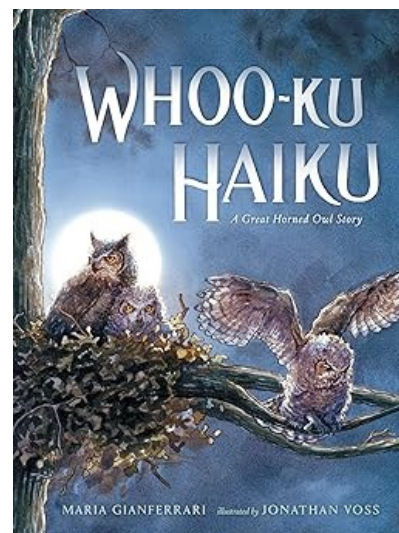
Interesting, easy to read, and makes you want to know more!

WHOO-KU HAIKU, A Great Horned Owl Story, by Maria Gianferrari

This is a children's book, beautifully illustrated by Jonathon Voss, and written wholly in Haiku form. The story is a season in the life of a pair of Great Horned Owls trying to raise their chicks. It is sensitively told, although there are a couple of scary moments.

This book would be a great introduction to owls for young kids. It would be especially nice if the child could listen to the calls of the Great Horned Owl on one of the bird apps. If you are a parent or grandparent of young children, this book would make a great, interactive gift and a way to introduce them to birding.

This book is available in the children's section at Lewis & Clark Library.



Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Abby Hunthausen, Leonard Blinder, Susan Epstein, Randy Haight, Linda Kay Richter, and Dennis and Donna Liken.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Ginnie Talley, Catherine Maunu, Joel Maes, Robyn and Jay Carter, David Slaughter, Margaret Strachan and Sumner Sharpe, John Grant, Barb Belt and Jim Emerson, Brian and Pam Swalve, Nicholas Domitrovich, Helen Fee, Joy Holoway, Katie Knight, Bob Martinka, Mary Lou McGrath, John Sarti, Birds & Beasleys, Kathy van Hook, Howard Johnson, Gene and Julie Huntington, Roni Eisenmenger, Ann Bauchman, Kathryn Bramer, Mike Burke and, Alen and Nancy Nicholson.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Barbara Banks, Geoff Feiss, Barbara Keegan, Elaine Podry, and Teresa Hahn.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Joyce Bateman, Ann Bauchman, Barbara Cooper, James Driggers, Janet Ellis, Joseph Furshong, William Hall, B. Hall-Munger, Carol Josephson, Mary Kelley, Ann Kendall, Bonnie Lovelace, Cary Lund, William Mede, Dave Mott, Larry Peterman, Wendy Thomi, Wilma Wheeler, Liese Zebrun-Gero, 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. 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.

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

Bird walk leaders for World Bird Day

We need some bird walk leaders to help at World Bird Day at Spring Meadow. Saturday May 3rd. The walks are about 45 minutes between 9:30-11:30am. Call Sandy Shull at 406-461-2073 if you can help out.

Last Chance Audubon Society
PO Box 924
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Support LCAS through a donation or membership today!

Membership

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Website: <https://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/>

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