

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.

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Citizen Science Updates with Boaz “Bo” Crees

Tuesday, December 9th, 2025 – Program begins 7:00PM

Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free - All Are Welcome

Join us for our final public program of the year as we welcome Boaz (Bo) Crees, Avian Specialist with the Montana Natural Heritage Program and Montana Audubon. Bo will share updates on Montana Audubon’s most exciting ongoing citizen science projects, offering a behind-the-scenes look at what volunteers across the state have discovered.

During this month’s presentation, Bo will highlight recent findings and upcoming priorities for surveys focused on Nightjars, Screech-Owls, Long-billed Curlews and colonial waterbird species whose populations and behaviors are helping scientists better understand the health of Montana’s landscapes. He’ll also discuss Montana Audubon’s collaborative work with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and explain how these partnerships strengthen conservation efforts across the state.



*Eastern Screech-owl
by Tyler Pockette*



*Common Nighthawk by
Bo Crees*

In addition to sharing current results, Bo will introduce several new and developing citizen science initiatives that will soon be seeking volunteer participation. Whether you’re an experienced birder or just beginning your birding journey, this is a perfect opportunity to learn how your observations can directly support conservation.

Bo brings over a decade of experience in bird research and field-work, including projects with universities, federal agencies, and NGOs. A graduate of the University of Montana with a B.S. in Wildlife Biology, he has contributed to wide-ranging studies—from river birding surveys on the Missouri to statewide species monitoring.

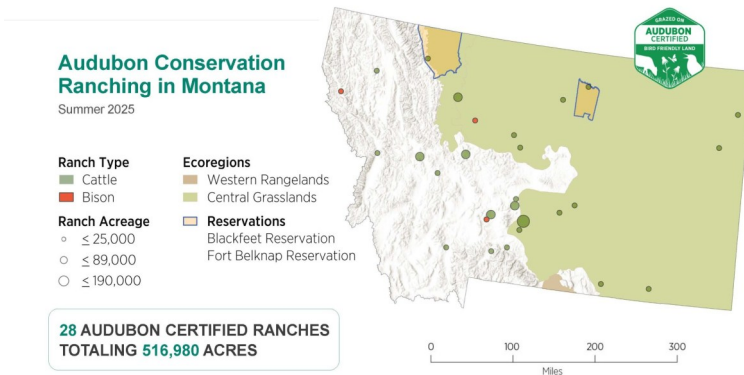




Audubon Conservation Ranching Program

December 1, 2025

A week ago, The Union restaurant featured Montana Audubon in their “Pour it Forward” fundraising event. \$1.00 from every beverage served goes to this effort. In particular, the funds raised are to benefit birds and conservation ranching. I hope you were able to attend.



Are you familiar with Audubon’s Conservation Ranching Program? It was started in 2019 as an effort to recruit landholders to practice conservation techniques that would improve and conserve habitat for birds, as well as improve vegetation and soil health. Ranchers follow a Habitat Management Plan that is customized for the particular ranch. These

may include regenerative grazing and/or moving water sources away from stream banks. Planting of native plants and pollinators is encouraged. Ranchers make a commitment to practice methods that respect the health and welfare of livestock, including NOT using growth hormones or antibiotics.

And by restricting pesticides, minimizing fertilizers and protecting stream banks, these practices result in cleaner waterways, healthier soils, and increased plant diversity. With these changes, birds naturally return to these areas and thrive. An independent third party regularly monitors the participating ranches to be sure that the management plan is being adhered to. “We measure the effectiveness of these practices by monitoring bird diversity and abundance, vegetation change and soil health.”

Twenty-one states participate in Audubon’s Conservation Ranching program, which in a recent count, included over 3 million acres. Montana currently has about 500,000 acres in the program, which includes twenty-six ranches already certified and two in the on-boarding process. Montana stands out as the only state with participating ranches on reservations (Blackfeet and Fort Belknap.) We also have 3 bison ranches.

The process to become an Audubon Conservation Ranch takes about 6 months. When fully approved, the rancher is able to use the special green hexagonal seal that denotes the product as being grazed on Audubon Certified Bird Friendly Land. Read more about this great program: [Audubon Conservation Ranching Initiative Fact Sheet](#)



Last Chance Audubon Christmas Bird Count

In 1900, a group of birdwatchers and conservationists, led by renowned ornithologist, Frank Chapman, decided to go out on Christmas Day and count all the birds they could find in their area. This was a big change from most of the late 1800's where teams (sides) of people would scour the countryside in an attempt to shoot as many birds and other small animals as possible! The Christmas Side Hunt was a popular activity in Europe during the Victorian Era and grew in popularity in the Eastern US. Records were kept, winners were commended, and thousands of birds were killed every year.



Chapman and others were concerned about the status of birds in the United States. He proposed a Christmas Bird Census instead of a Side Hunt. And on Christmas Day he and 26 other participants completed 25 bird counts from New England to California. They counted about 90 species and 18,500 individual birds! The Christmas Bird Count was begun!

Today, the Christmas Bird Count continues. It is the longest running citizen science project in the world. Last year saw over 83,000 people participate in over 2,600 locations across North America and the Caribbean! There's even a count conducted in Les Cayes, Haiti, the birthplace of John James Audubon!

The Last Chance Audubon Society conducted the first Christmas Bird Count in Helena in 1954. One person conducted the count and found a total of 17 species and 280 birds! LCAS has been conducting the count ever since. Over 70 counts have tallied 151 species with an all-time high count of 86 just last year!

The Last Chance Audubon Society is hosting the Christmas Bird Count in Helena again this year. We will meet on the morning of December 20th at Shellie's Country Cafe at 6am. Teams will leave for their designated areas around 8am.



We encourage you to come out for this fun event. You need not be an expert. Our group leaders are all very experienced and enjoy the opportunity to share what they know. Participants can sign up for a half day or full day in the field.

Last Chance Audubon Society also hosts an evening get-together to celebrate the day. We will meet at Montana Wild from 5:00pm to 7:00pm. We'll share food and stories!

Please join us for both! If you have questions, please contact Coburn Currier (CBC Coordinator) at 449-2475 or email him at clcurrier@hotmail.com.

Montana Audubon News!

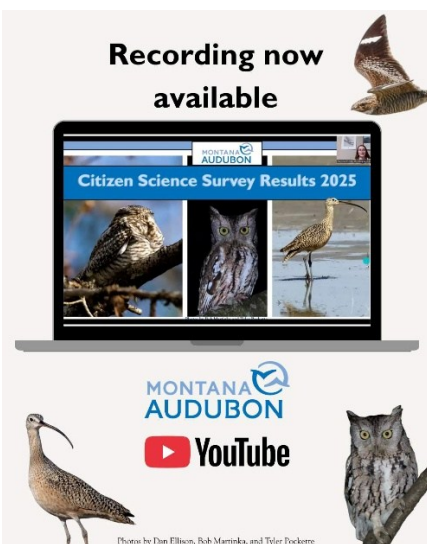
The Fall 2025 Montana Audubon Newsletter is here!

Inside this issue, you'll find stories from across Montana, including: a feature article on the power of citizen science and the volunteers helping track birds across the state; updates on our Black Swift research; news from the Audubon Conservation Ranching program; a celebration of 10 years of Fledgling Preschool at the Montana Audubon Center; and much more!

Read the full issue online on the [Montana Audubon website](http://www.mtaudubon.org).



2025 Citizen Science season wrap-up recording now available



For those who missed it back in October, the recording of our Citizen Science season wrap-up presentation is now available on YouTube. In the presentation we reviewed each of our 2025 citizen science projects, surveying for screech-owls; Long-billed Curlews; and nightjars. Make sure to watch through to the end for a preview of next year's citizen science projects.

Thank you again to all of our amazing volunteers- you make all this work possible! Thank you also to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Tracy Aviary, the L.E.A.W Family Foundation, Blackfoot Challenge, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Montana Natural Heritage Program for their support.

Watch the recording on [Montana Audubon's YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

LCAS Board Meeting Highlights

- The board established a new committee to gather information needed to proceed with LCAS's fall fundraiser project: establishing one or more monitoring stations in the Helena Valley to track migrating birds and other small wildlife. This includes construction cost data, and coordination with MDFWP on possible sites and identifying species that would benefit the most and the associated banding costs.
 - The board is evaluating ways to increase usage of the LCAS website.
 - The Board is working on identifying a new restaurant as the morning gathering site for the December 20 Christmas Bird Count, since the old location at Jorgensen's has closed, and also a site for the evening potluck gathering.*
*Since the board meeting, we have reserved a room at Shellie's Country Café for our pre-bird count breakfast. Stay tuned for more information.
 - The board will purchase copies of Peterson's Guide to Bird Identification in 12 Steps, and hold a raffle and drawing at future monthly membership meeting to distribute the copies.
 - The next board meeting is December 2 ,2025.
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LCAS FALL FUNDRAISER — Motus Station



This year's Fall Fundraiser is to raise money for installation of a MOTUS station in the Helena Valley. A MOTUS station would be able to track migrating birds, bats, and insects flying over our area and would help fill a gap in data collection. To donate, send a check to Last Chance Audubon, PO Box 924, Helena MT 59624-0001 Or click on the DONATE button [on our website](#).

We would appreciate your contribution to this project!



More LCAS News

Bluebird Trails

Last summer LCAS volunteers monitored two bluebird trails: one at Seven Mile Creek and one at Prickly Pear Park in East Helena.

Seven Mile Creek has a trail of fourteen boxes that have been up for four years. Two Western Bluebirds nested this year, each nest with six eggs. All the eggs hatched and all the birds fledged. Tree Swallows nested in ten boxes and two boxes remained empty all summer.

In April this year, LCAS volunteers put up 13 boxes in Prickly Pear Park. Tree swallows nested in two boxes, with four eggs in one nest, and seven in the other. All the eggs hatched and the birds fledged. Eleven boxes stayed empty all summer—not surprising for a first year.



Sue Jackson and Grant Hokit at Prickly Pear Park

In early October volunteers who are interested in taking care of a bluebird trail next year met at Prickly Pear Park. They took a look at some boxes, talked with this year's volunteers about how the monitoring is done, and cleaned out the two swallow nests.

Seven Mile Creek is still not open to the public. Prickly Pear Park is open daily and is a delight to go to. The park is just south of the slag piles and out of East Helena on Route 518 (the road to the cement plant and Montana City).

MONTHLY RAFFLE AT LAST CHANCE AUDUBON MEETINGS!

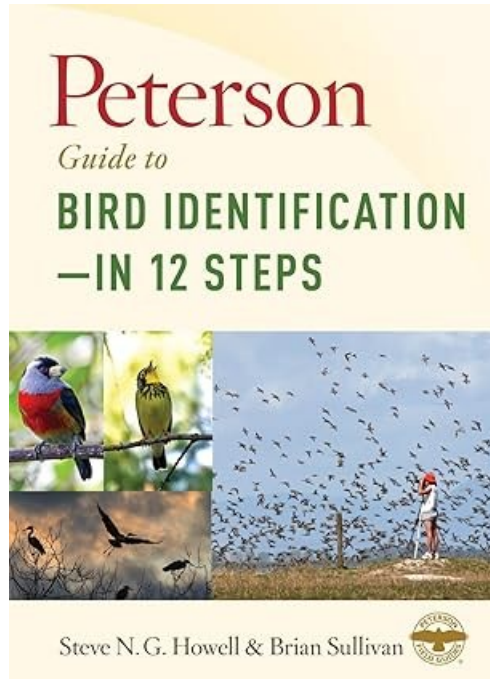


We will be giving away a copy of the **Peterson Guide to Bird Identification in 12 Steps**, by Steve N.G. Howell and Brian Sullivan at each monthly meeting. Come to the meetings (second Tuesday of each month at 7 pm – MT WILD) to get your free raffle ticket. Read more about this book in the **Birding Books** article in this newsletter.

Birding Book Reviews

Peterson Guide to Bird Identification – In 12 Steps

by Steve N.G. Howell and Brian Sullivan



This little guidebook is a good accompaniment to the field guide you normally use. It's directed at folks who already know something about bird identification, not rank beginners. It could easily be titled "How to Become a Better Birder."

While suggesting a series of 12 steps to help identify birds in the field, this book also helps unmask some of the mystery of field guides. Such as...how and why can taxonomy be different, depending on which guide you're using? Isn't this straightforward scientific classification? Well, apparently not!

After reading this section of the book, my personal recommendation is this: find a field guide you are comfortable and familiar with and stick with it. It might not be very helpful to have a variety of reference books.

The 12 steps are presented in order of importance as if you're in the field trying to identify birds. The initial steps are needed before you even spot that bird. Location, habitat and season are things you can identify before you begin. The authors' point is that knowing those 3 things will narrow down the possibilities of species that could be present.

After that, you will be doing more specific examination of the subject bird: What is the lighting it is in? How far away is it? What is its behavior, sound, structure and plumage? Without the guidance of this book, we might normally start with these.

The book is written with great experience and knowledge of bird species. It's written with humor and insight into birder behavior. That's not a typo!

Here are a couple of good points made by the authors:

- When you are photographing birds as a means of identification, *continue to observe* the bird! Try not to lose sight of the bird's behavior while struggling with your camera.
- Use some kind of system for tracking what birds you see. It could be writing the date and location of your sighting in your field guide, taking notes in a journal, or using eBird. All of these methods have value.

I'd recommend that you add this book to your collection. And guess what? You have the opportunity to win your own copy at one of our Last Chance Audubon Tuesday night programs. Starting in December, you will receive a free raffle ticket when you attend our program. Some lucky person will take home a copy.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Rebecca Lewis, Boaz Crees, Penny Swanson, Don and Tedra Skaar, and Richard Swanson.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Rich Wirak, Georgie Rehbein, Robyn and Jay Carter, Mary Lou McGrath, Elizabeth Poletti, Connie Fiske, Grant Hokit, Shawn Watts, and Stephanie Wallace.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Clifton and Diane Alston, Shawn Frederick, Greg Schaffer, and Ann Swisher.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Barbara Bayer, Alton Beaver, Susan Buringrud, Beverly Daehn, Debbie Gabse, Mark Nigon, Kimberly Schaefer, Donna Uken, and Gloria Wels.

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 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

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We are always looking for volunteers for various projects ranging from working at a table to promoting Last Chance Audubon and educating folks, to helping with clean up at some of our birding areas to taking part in bird surveys. We need you!

Please get in touch with me, Leslie, at 406-431-4995 / leslie_smi@yahoo.com, or with our new Volunteer Coordinator, Pete Strazdas, at 406-461-2728 / petestrazdas@gmail.com.

We want to hear from you!

Last Chance Audubon Society
PO Box 924
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membership today!*

Membership

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