

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**

**Jan 2026**

## **Saving the Prairies Together: Ranchers, Birds, and A New Path Forward with Montana Audubon's Conservation Ranching Initiative**

**Tuesday, January 13th, 2026 – Program begins 7:00PM**

**Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.**

### **Free - All Are Welcome**



*Cattle on the Prairie. Photo by Peter Dudley*

North America's grasslands are among the most threatened ecosystems, and the birds depending on them are declining at alarming rates. Because most grassland bird species nest on private lands, meaningful conservation depends on partnering with ranchers who steward these vast landscapes. For our January program, Last Chance Audubon Society welcomes Peter Dudley to share how Montana Audubon is meeting this challenge through its innovative Conservation Ranching Program.

The program works with ranchers across Montana to develop Habitat Management Plans grounded in regenerative, bird-friendly grazing. By mimicking the natural movement and impact of historic bison herds, this type of grazing revitalizes plant communities, strengthens nutrient cycles, conserves water, and even draws carbon from the atmosphere into the soil. Progress is measured through monitoring of bird diversity, vegetation, and soil health, ensuring conservation outcomes that are real, lasting, and locally informed.

Our presenter, Peter Dudley, serves as Montana Audubon's Policy & Conservation Ranching Specialist. Raised at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Peter has woven together experience in anthropology, horticulture, trail work, and native plant conservation. Now based in Helena, he brings a passion for agroecology, birds, and Montana's open landscapes to his work. When not in the field, he can be found hiking, birding, making music, or tracking down one of Montana's elusive squash courts.

Join us for an inspiring look at how bird-friendly ranching is restoring the prairies we all depend on.





## A New Birding Year!

January 1, 2026

Happy New Year! Your Last Chance Audubon board decided that we really need to have a January newsletter for two reasons: to report the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) results in a timely manner and to let you know about our January program. This newsletter will be short and sweet.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Coburn Currier and all the section leaders for another successful and enthusiastic bird count. Coburn organizes this every year. It's a lot of work, both beforehand and afterwards, when he compiles all the numbers and submits them to the National Audubon Society. Our knowledgeable team of section leaders this year were Bob Martinka, Cedron Jones, Coburn Currier, Don Skaar, Grant Hokit, Janet Ellis, Janice Miller, Larry Urban, and Stephen Turner. Great job!

We have good things planned for 2026, so stay tuned.

To great birding in the new year!



*Photo by Janice Miller*

Leslie Smith, LCAS Board President  
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## 2025 Last Chance Audubon Christmas Bird Count Summary

2025 CBC - December 20, 2025 - Summary of 71 counts, 1954-2025 (no count in 1958)						
Species	2025 Count	Prev. High Count	Year(s)	Times Seen	Freq.	
Snow Goose	4	41	24	16	23%	
Canada Goose	3066	6,757	24	57	80%	
Cackling Goose	2	18	24	4	6%	
<b>Trumpeter Swan</b>	<b>53</b>	40	<b>25</b>	17	24%	
Tundra Swan		35	88	21	30%	
Wood Duck	34	36	04, 20	37	52%	
Gadwall	27	61	95	31	44%	
American Wigeon		26	90	22	31%	
Mallard	1775	10,216	80	67	94%	
Blue-winged Teal		5	11	6	8%	
Cinnamon Teal		7	93	3	4%	
Northern Shoveler		13	03	9	13%	
Northern Pintail		11	90	27	38%	
Green-winged Teal	42	49	24	34	48%	
Canvasback	1	10	06	7	10%	
Redhead	13	35	20	15	21%	
Ring-necked Duck		350	24	44	62%	
Greater Scaup		4	23	4	6%	
Lesser Scaup	13	34	24	18	25%	
White-winged Scoter		1	87, 17	2	3%	
Long-tailed Duck		4	03	1	1%	
Bufflehead	25	32	20	30	42%	
Common Goldeneye	280	683	24	69	97%	
Barrow's Goldeneye	1	305	09	52	73%	
Hooded Merganser		9	91	20	28%	
Common Merganser	36	214	73	57	80%	
Red-breasted Merganser		12	99	4	6%	
<b>Ruddy Duck</b>	<b>3</b>	3	<b>23, 24, 25</b>	14	20%	
Chukar		1	98	1	1%	
Gray Partridge	10	137	78	51	72%	
Ring-necked Pheasant	20	60	62	37	52%	
Ruffed Grouse		6	86	1	1%	
<b>Dusky Grouse</b>	<b>5</b>	1	<b>25</b>	2	3%	
Sharp-tailed Grouse		12	81	13	18%	
Wild Turkey		29	24	6	8%	
Common Loon		7	91	10	14%	
Pacific Loon		0	18	0	0%	CW only
Pied-billed Grebe		4	92	9	13%	
Horned Grebe		2	89	5	7%	
Eared Grebe		1	88, 12, 24	3	4%	
Western Grebe	1	5	12	17	24%	
American White Pelican		6	04	10	14%	
Double-crested Cormorant		1	04, 24	2	3%	
Great Blue Heron		5	88	32	45%	
Turkey Vulture		1	66	1	1%	
Bald Eagle	40	36	94	63	89%	
<b>Northern Harrier</b>	<b>28</b>	28	<b>13, 25</b>	63	89%	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	7	03, 22	43	61%	
Cooper's Hawk		3	77, 03	27	38%	
American Goshawk		4	83	19	27%	
Red-tailed Hawk	16	19	24	29	41%	
Ferruginous Hawk		1	76, 24	2	3%	
Rough-legged Hawk	34	62	17	62	87%	
Golden Eagle	3	7	64	44	62%	
American Kestrel	4	4	17	24	34%	

2025 CBC - December 20, 2025 - Summary of 71 counts, 1954-2025 (no count in 1958)					
Species	2025 Count	Prev. High Count	Year(s)	Times Seen	Freq.
Merlin	2	11	22	54	76%
Gyrfalcon		2	90, 93	9	13%
Peregrine Falcon	1	2	70	9	13%
Prairie Falcon	2	4	87	38	54%
Sora		1	23	1	1%
American Coot		588	10	41	58%
Sandhill Crane		0	18	0	0% CW only
Killdeer		12	66	30	42%
Spotted Sandpiper		1	97	1	1%
Wilson's Snipe	1	11	78	54	76%
Ring-billed Gull	562	1,078	24	27	38%
California Gull	2	93	24	13	18%
American Herring Gull	5	15	01	16	23%
Glaucous Gull		1	97	1	1%
Lesser Black-backed Gull		1	21	1	1%
Great Black-backed Gull		1	24	1	1%
Rock Pigeon	777	1,306	05	52	73%
Eurasian Collared-Dove	258	607	17	19	27%
Mourning Dove		12	16	10	14%
Western Screech-Owl		1	69	1	1%
Great Horned Owl	2	7	87	50	70%
Snowy Owl		1	80, 84, 96	3	4%
Northern Pygmy-Owl		4	85	8	11%
Long-eared Owl		1	80	1	1%
Short-eared Owl		11	68	18	25%
Northern Saw-whet Owl		1	86	1	1%
Belted Kingfisher	2	6	88, 12	41	58%
Downy Woodpecker	12	18	00	66	93%
Hairy Woodpecker	1	16	12	56	79%
American Three-toed Woodpecker		1	12	2	3%
Northern Flicker (Red-shafted)	65	112	21	68	96%
(Yellow Shafted)		2	05	6	8%
Pileated Woodpecker	1-CW	1	09	1	1%
Loggerhead Shrike		1	65, 83	2	3%
Northern Shrike	2	17	19	62	87%
Canada Jay		24	90	6	8%
Steller's Jay		4	81, 86	12	17%
Blue Jay		23	19	23	32%
Pinyon Jay	2	156	60	33	46%
Clark's Nutcracker	7	220	91	64	90%
<b>Black-billed Magpie</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100%</b>
American Crow	111	169	13	39	55%
Common Raven	244	470	10	58	82%
Horned Lark		5,329	72	51	72%
Black-capped Chickadee	111	156	00	69	97%
Mountain Chickadee	50	225	94	70	99%
Red-breasted Nuthatch	6	273	94	65	92%
White-breasted Nuthatch	6	22	97	54	76%
Pygmy Nuthatch	5	45	14	36	51%
Brown Creeper	2	7	81, 04	24	34%
Canyon Wren		1	95, 01	3	4%
Northern House Wren		1	24	1	1%
Pacific Wren		1	97	1	1%
Marsh Wren		4	88	9	13%
American Dipper	3	9	87	63	89%

2025 CBC - December 20, 2025 - Summary of 71 counts, 1954-2025 (no count in 1958)					
Species	2025 Count	Prev. High Count	Year(s)	Times Seen	Freq.
Golden-crowned Kinglet		6	85, 01	5	7%
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		1	22, 24	2	3%
Western Bluebird		8	18	4	6%
Mountain Bluebird		1	97, 20, 24	3	4%
Townsend's Solitaire	92	142	07	70	99%
American Robin	139	428	24	55	77%
Varied Thrush		1	81	2	3%
Northern Mockingbird		1	87	1	1%
Brown Thrasher		0	19	0	0%
<b>European Starling</b>	<b>760</b>	722	<b>25</b>	66	93%
Bohemian Waxwing		16,101	05	59	83%
Cedar Waxwing	90	132	08	36	51%
Common Yellowthroat		1	24	1	1%
<b>Spotted Towhee</b>	<b>1</b>	1	<b>11, 25</b>	2	3%
American Tree Sparrow	38	145	86	71	100%
Song Sparrow	14	44	66	65	92%
White-throated Sparrow		1	87, 91, 11, 24	4	6%
Harris's Sparrow		2	63, 90, 21	8	11%
White-crowned Sparrow		12	18	6	8%
Dark-eyed Junco	69	147	21	54	76%
Lapland Longspur		40	70	7	10%
Snow Bunting		80	96	12	17%
Yellow-headed Blackbird		1	24	1	1%
Red-winged Blackbird	1	161	65	40	56%
Western Meadowlark		51	79	13	18%
Rusty Blackbird		9	17	6	8%
Brewer's Blackbird		17	67	13	18%
Brown-headed Cowbird		1	75	1	1%
Common Grackle		3	24	5	7%
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch		75	77	14	20%
Pine Grosbeak		253	77	24	34%
Purple Finch		1	95	1	1%
Cassin's Finch	1	100	64	30	42%
House Finch	367	946	00	46	65%
Red Crossbill	110	351	95	41	58%
White-winged Crossbill		30	84	3	4%
Redpoll	6	979	01	49	69%
Pine Siskin	163	388	95	43	61%
American Goldfinch	18	26	79	23	32%
Evening Grosbeak	3	141	84	34	48%
House Sparrow	524	2,826	08	71	100%
<b>TOTAL SPECIES</b>	<b>71</b>				
<b>TOTAL BIRDS</b>	<b>10,661</b>				

	Circle	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	Area 6	Area 7	Area 8	Area 9	
<b>2025</b>	Species	71	23	26	42	38	28	16	25	42	16
	Individuals	10,661	733	486	3,279	1,469	678	167	486	3,090	273
<b>20-year Species</b>	Max	86	30	32	48	38	37	24	26	42	28
	Min	57	19	13	19	22	23	11	10	25	6
	Average	65	24	20	34	29	30	18	21	33	17
<b>20-year Individuals</b>	Max	24,744	7,029	6,109	6,131	3,689	5,777	745	1,115	3,669	887
	Min	6,673	512	315	764	578	678	81	144	714	29
	Average	11,249	1,842	1,315	2,313	1,487	1,839	258	553	1,355	269

## LCAS Board Meeting Highlights

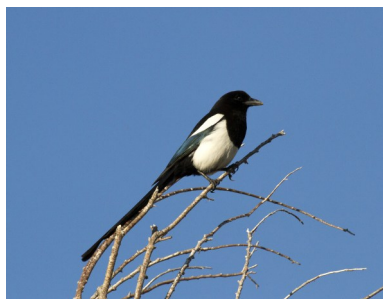
### December 2025

- Board representatives are meeting with MDFWP and MT Wild staff on technical details and You Tube connectivity for a new webcam LCAS will be purchasing and installing on the new osprey nest platform at Spring Meadow Lake State Park ahead of the 2026 spring nesting season.
  - The board decided to match LCAS Fall Fundraiser contributions up to \$5,000 to support construction of at least one and possibly two monitoring sites in the Helena valley area in the summer of 2026 for detecting birds outfitted with special micro-transmitters. The site (s) will become part of an international monitoring system known as MOTUS which we hope will be the speaker's topic at an upcoming LCAS meeting.
  - The board presently has several vacant jobs, including Conservation and Habitat Coordinator, a potential new position focused on large donor fundraising and philanthropy, and Education Committee chairperson as well as a need for new Education committee members. Volunteers interested in these subject areas and other special projects (e.g., bird nesting box maintenance, helping staff a table at community conservation events, etc.) are encouraged to inform LCAS' new coordinator of volunteers, Pete Strazdas.
  - The next LCAS board meeting is January 6, 2026, location to be determined.
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### Species seen on all 71 Last Chance Audubon Christmas Bird Counts!



*American Tree Sparrow*



*Black-billed Magpie*



*House Sparrow*

## CITIZEN SCIENCE OPPORTUNITIES

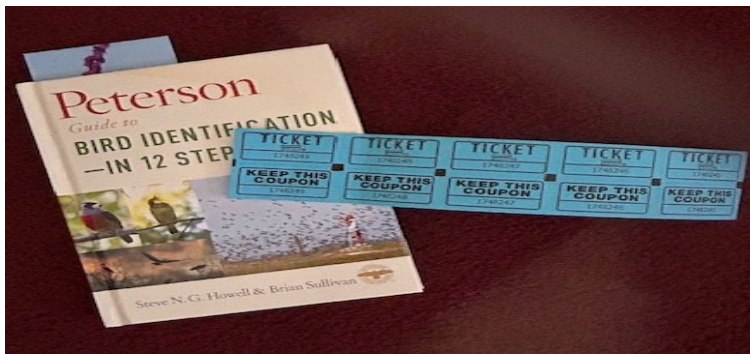
Starting with this newsletter, we will tell you about upcoming Citizen Science opportunities you might want to get involved in. This month, we are giving you a link for the Montana Natural Heritage Project's Citizen Science information page. If you were at our December program, the speaker Bo Crees showed this information as part of his presentation. Here it is again at leisure — [Montana Natural Heritage Project's Citizen Science information page](#)

Also, many of you are already familiar with [Montana Audubon's Citizen Science page](#).

Going forward we will give you links to other Citizen Projects. Let's get involved!

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## 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.

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## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We are looking for another person or two to help the Education Committee with its projects. Here are some of the things we are already involved with: we offer scholarships to graduating high school students; we offer grants to Carroll College students whose studies are in line with our Mission Statement; we provide birding kits to Lewis & Clark and Jefferson County libraries for check-out; we provide education materials, including owl pellets, to elementary schools for study...and if you are interested and have ideas, you could be a part of this, too! This is especially important work because it is involving a younger and more diverse demographic and this is one of our board's goals. If you are interested in being on the Education Committee, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Pete Strazdas: [petestrazdas@gmail.com](mailto:petestrazdas@gmail.com)

Last Chance Audubon Society  
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#### LCAS COMMITTEE CHAIRS/ CONTACTS

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**Education:** Sumner Sharpe,  
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**Field Trips/Website:** Don Skaar  
[tedradon@gmail.com](mailto:tedradon@gmail.com)

**Habitat:** open

**Meeting Set-up:** Doug Hansen,  
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**Monthly Program:** Sandy Shull,  
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**MT Audubon State Office:** 443-  
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