

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.

When America Led the World in Conservation

**TUESDAY, MARCH 10TH, 2026 –
PROGRAM BEGINS 7:00 PM**

**MONTANA WILD, 2668
BROADWATER AVE.**

FREE - ALL ARE WELCOME

When most Americans think about conservation, the focus stays close to home — protecting grizzly habitat, restoring wetlands, safeguarding bird migratory flyways. But for decades, the United States was also one of the most powerful conservation forces on the planet, investing roughly \$350 million annually through USAID to protect wildlife and ecosystems across more than 60 countries.

That work touched nearly every corner of the globe — reducing wildlife trafficking, strengthening protected areas, supporting indigenous communities as stewards of their lands, and protecting species ranging from Sumatran orangutans to the warblers and shorebirds we look forward to seeing here each year. It was quiet, unglamorous work, largely invisible to the American public. And in early 2025, most of it came to an abrupt end when the Trump administration moved to dismantle USAID. Thousands of career staff were terminated and over 83% of program contracts were cancelled within weeks. Six decades of



institutional knowledge, partner relationships, and conservation infrastructure were gone.

Last Chance Audubon is pleased to welcome John Hansen to share this story at our March program. John spent 35 years in federal public service, including 24 years as a USAID Foreign Service Officer working in Romania, Guinea, Georgia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Ethiopia. He helped build Georgia's national park system, worked to curb illegal logging and fishing in Indonesia, and supported indigenous conservation efforts deep in Brazil's Amazon. He saw this work up close, across four continents, over the course of a remarkable career.

Now in Helena, John will talk about what American conservation leadership looked like on the world stage, what has been lost, and why it matters - both globally, and for for the birds and ecosystems we care about right here at home.

This is a program for anyone who loves the natural world.





PRESIDENT'S PERCH

Greetings! I hope you are one of the lucky ones who attended our program on Feb 17. The speaker was Mary Scofield from MPG Ranch. She talked to us about the successes of the MOTUS towers that they use at the MPG Ranch. She also demonstrated how gaps in coverage leave us with unanswered questions about birds' migration patterns.

Her presentation was excellent, easy for the layperson to understand, and was accompanied by graphics that illustrated her points. Mary Scofield says, "Collaboration is at the core of Motus, and every component of the network contributes to its success. From station hosts to researchers, it takes all of us together to seek answers to our questions. Tracking birds traveling across continents, countries, states, or even just the Helena valley, would not be possible without station hosts willing to put up a receiver and an antenna. Every station counts."

The data collected is free and accessible to the public: birders, students, researchers and citizen

scientists. For more information, go to MOTUS.org.

I am newly motivated to again ask for donations to this worthwhile cause.

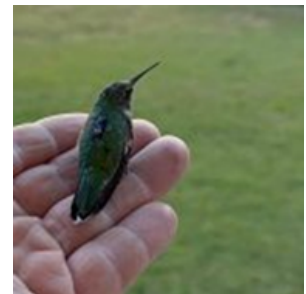
This season, we have had a couple of speakers who were surprised and/or pleased to hear that we are fundraising for the installation of one or two MOTUS towers. They are pleased because the tracking system that is envisioned with the existence of comprehensive MOTUS coverage would allow so much more knowledge to be available to avian researchers. They are strongly in favor of adding more towers. And they are surprised that a little chapter like ours is taking on such an important project.

Sophie Osborne says, "In trying to conserve the world's beleaguered birds, we are so often plagued by our lack of knowledge about their haunts, habits, and movements. The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is providing us with incredible information that can radically bolster our bird (and insect and bat!) conservation efforts. It is a transformative research and information tool that can also engage and inspire people

to help wildlife. I'm so grateful to the Last Chance Audubon for its remarkable contribution to this effort, which is an enormous gift to bird conservation that will keep on giving well into the future."

If you can find it in your heart, or in your checkbook, to donate to this effort, please do so.

You can go to our website, lastchanceaudubon.org, and click on the DONATE button. Or you can mail a check to us at PO Box 924, Helena, MT 59624-0924. Or you can bring a check to the next program, which is March 10th. We would be grateful.



*Ruby-throated
Hummingbird wearing a
tracking device*
Photo by: Cape May
Point Arts and Science
Center

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

LCAS BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

- The Education Committee is reviewing four applications from non-profit organizations requesting LCAS funding support for conservation-related projects and will bring its recommendations to the board for approval.
- The board is organizing 2026 birding field trips and will be announcing registration to join these trips in upcoming newsletters. Non-LCAS members will be charged \$15 to participate while LCAS members may continue to attend for free. New trip opportunities will include a MT Audubon “Conservation Ranch” property and a canoe/kayak excursion focused on shore birds.
- The board has prepared a spreadsheet identifying locations of the extensive number of bird nesting boxes that LCAS volunteers maintain and monitor in the Helena valley and surrounding vicinity. Additional volunteers are needed and will be solicited in upcoming newsletters. A training session for recording bird nesting activity on an app known as “Nest Box” will be offered in April.
- The board’s MOTUS committee recently met with MTDFWP staff involved in a statewide effort to build new tower sites for detecting the movements of birds and other wildlife outfitted with micro-transmitters. LCAS will be selecting a Helena area site for funding tower construction that complements MTDFWP’s program.
- The board is continuing to develop a new philanthropic approach to expand LCAS’s fundraising efforts. Construction of one or more MOTUS towers will be the initial target project for this new strategy.
- The next board meeting will be on March 3, 2026.

Volunteers Needed!

We are looking for volunteers in 3 separate areas:

1. Board secretary to job share with current secretary. This requires attending the monthly board meeting on a part-time basis.
2. Education Committee chair. Our Education Committee is going strong, but we will lose our chairperson at the end of June. If you are interested, let us know. We will continue the projects already going and you will be able to design new ones.

If you are interested in either of the above two positions, please contact the Nominations Committee: suejacksonmt@gmail.com.

3. Staffing at our booth for Migratory Bird Day. We will work in shifts if we have enough volunteers. We will be promoting Last Chance Audubon and also providing a kids’ activity: nest building. This event is Sat, May 2 at MT WILD.

If you are interested in helping with Migratory Bird Day, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Pete Strazdas: petestrazdas@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTION TO EBIRD WORKSHOP



STEPHEN TURNER

In 2025 Last Chance Audubon Society (LCAS) offered an introductory eBird workshop that was very well received by members and friends of our chapter. About ten graduates joined the ranks of those using eBird in the field! Congratulations! This spring, LCAS will, once again, offer this in-person workshop to those that are new to eBird. The workshop is specifically geared to those who have an interest in learning about eBird, and who want to learn the basics of recording bird 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 app. Participants will also get a peek into the eBird website, and some of the 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, and experience the app hands-on, entering data while birding around the park.

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 workshop will take place on Saturday, April 25th. We will gather in the Montana WILD auditorium at 8:30am for a presentation on using the mobile app. Both iOS and Android smartphones are welcome. (Don't know what this means? Don't worry. We have you covered!) The in-class portion should not last longer than an hour and a half. At about 10am, we will take a birding trip around Spring Meadow Lake State Park. This walk generally takes about an hour to an hour and a half. We will try to finish up before noon.

Participants will need a smartphone (Android or iOS) and a Cornell Lab of Ornithology account (free) to use eBird. Please ensure you have the eBird app downloaded to your phone before arriving. Reach out if you need help completing this part (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) with your name and phone number. A waiting list will be created once twelve participants have registered. Don't wait! This class will be offered to the entire community through both LCAS and Montana WILD. It is sure to fill up very quickly!



Belted Kingfisher. Photo by Bob Martinka

PLANTS FOR BIRDS!

NAN BREUNINGER

Our December windstorm blew over more than 1000 trees in Helena and damaged many more. Which trees and shrubs are best planted to replace them? There's a lot of advice out there.

- “Native trees in the urban landscape” a program by Scott Mincemoyer, botanist, Growing Friends of Helena, March 5, 6 pm, Lewis and Clark Library
- City of Helena, list of tree species allowed on boulevards, online
- Montana Native Plant Society website, many lists
- Growing Friends of Helena “Trees for Townsend” list
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology “Growing Wild” video course
- National Audubon’s Native Plants Database
- Xerxes society for invertebrate conservation, plant lists
- Local nurseries for experienced, professional advice
- Tri-county firesafe, list of fire-wise plants



Chokecherry flowers. Photo by Matt Lavin

Here are some native trees and shrubs that give food and shelter to birds: chokecherry, currant, service berries, elderberry, mock orange, dogwood, Rocky Mountain maple, hawthorne, wild grapes, wild roses, bitterbrush and buffalo berry. Maybe not spruce trees.

A HELENA VISITOR WITH A HISTORY!

COBURN CURRIER



The Helena Fairgrounds Duck Pond has been hosting several unusual visitors this winter. Two Snow Geese, a Greater White-fronted Goose, and a Ross’s Goose have all been overwintering! What a treat!

However, one Snow Goose has a USFWS band on its leg. After several trips to glass the birds’ leg band, lots of photos taken (thanks Bob!), and some trial-and-error with the USFWS bird banding website, there is some great data to share.

The Snow Goose is a female. She was banded on July 30th, 2012 as a white bird - meaning as an adult. She was hatched in the spring of 2011 or earlier, which means she is at least 15 years old! The bird was banded on the Elaktoveach Channel of the Colville Delta on the North Slope of Alaska (about 80 miles west of Prudhoe Bay). That’s over 1400 miles as the...goose...flies! How fascinating that this bird has travelled who knows how far over all these years and has now ended up wintering in a small pond in Helena! If you have an opportunity to visit the pond, take a moment to find her, see her, and wonder about where she’s been and what she’s experienced!

CITIZEN SCIENCE UPDATE: BLUEBIRDS, SWALLOWS, AND CURLEWS

GRANT HOKIT

Last Chance Audubon Society (LCAS) is announcing three local citizen science projects for the upcoming spring and early summer, 2026. The projects vary in time commitment from a few hours on one day to several days spread across a couple of months.



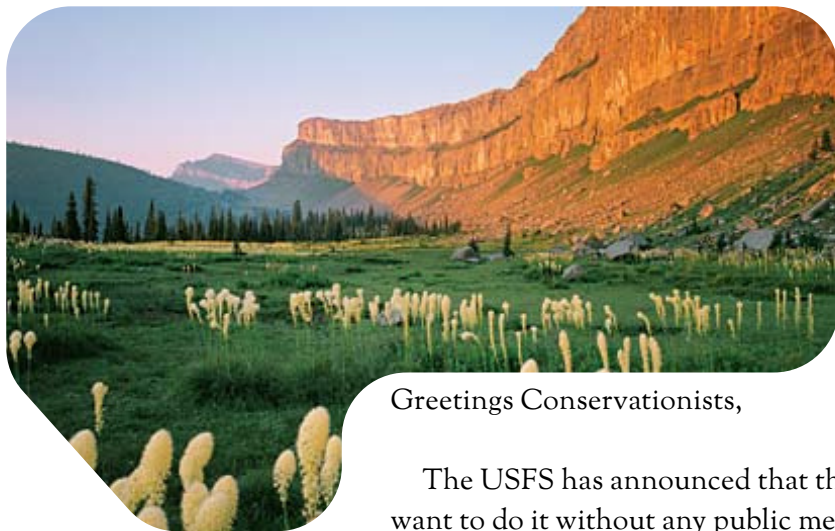
Nest box cleaning volunteers needed: Montana Wild and LCAS are hosting a spring cleaning day for the birds on Friday, March 20, between 9:00-12:00 at Spring Meadow State Park. We will clean nest boxes to get them ready for Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows and also collect fishing line and other litter. Plan to arrive at the Montana Wild Auditorium a few minutes early to divide into groups to tackle different segments of the park.

Long-billed Curlew surveyors needed: To prioritize work on other species, Montana Audubon has discontinued hosting Long-billed Curlew surveys. This provides an opportunity for LCAS volunteers to continue collecting data at least for the Helena region. We are looking for volunteers willing to drive established survey routes at least once, preferably twice, although you can survey more often if you like. The first survey must be between April 8 and May 7, with the second survey between May 8 and May 31, 2026. Each survey takes approximately two hours and must be completed between sunrise and 11:00 am. Further protocol details are provided at the [Helena Valley Curlew Protocol](#) page. Training video, Survey 123 data app, and data sheets are available at [Montana Audubon Curlew Survey Resources](#). (The content at the above links is provided by Montana Audubon from last year but the contact/coordinator/data collector this year will be Grant Hokit at LCAS). We have 23 routes to cover at least twice and volunteers can sign up at [Helena Valley Curlew Sign Up](#) or send your preferred routes to Grant Hokit at ghokit@carroll.edu. Just add your name to the spreadsheet. First come first served. To see a complete list of routes with detailed route descriptions, visit the [Montana Audubon Helena Valley Sites](#) map. You will see a map for the Helena and Townsend region with a list of routes to the left. Select a route name and see more detailed information including GPS and mileage descriptions for stops on the route. Further questions can be sent to Grant. He will be collecting data sheets at the end of the survey period to compile for an annual report.



Nest box surveyors needed: A longer-term project. We are looking for citizen scientists to participate in a nest-watch program for Mountain Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. Over the years, we have installed or adopted nesting boxes across the Helena region and this year, we would like to collect data on nesting behavior. Surveyors would commit to visiting a number of boxes at a particular location every 3-4 days and to record the status of each nest throughout the breeding season. This would be a minimum commitment of 30 days starting late April, perhaps longer if birds renest or double brood. Training will be provided on Saturday, April 11 at 8:00 am at Carroll College and will follow the [Nest Watch protocols](#) developed by the Cornell Lab for Ornithology. Participants will be required to take the online Nest Watchers Certification Quiz. Anyone interested in learning protocols and becoming certified is welcome to attend the training, regardless of whether you choose to participate in the nest box surveys. However, we are looking for volunteers willing to commit to surveying nest boxes left unclaimed by our current list of volunteers. Please contact Stephen Turner if interested at turnstonest@gmail.com.

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO ROADLESS RULE



Greetings Conservationists,

The USFS has announced that they plan to repeal the Roadless Rule and want to do it without any public meetings. The roadless rule was established after more than 600 public meetings. Many conservation groups have worked together to have our own public meetings so people can express their opinion in the repeal of the roadless rule.

The repeal of the roadless rule will be disastrous for Montana, for Montana elk populations and for many other wildlife species. More than 5600 square miles of grizzly habitat inside recovery zones are currently protected by the roadless rule.

Please join us in Missoula on Monday March 9 at the Missoula Public Library - Cooper Space, 455 E. Main St. 6-7:30 pm.

At this meeting:

1. Attendees learn about the Roadless Rule and how it has been implemented on/affects forests in Montana. People who already support the Rule come away feeling like they learned something new and are excited to comment during the DEIS comment period. People unfamiliar with the Rule come away supporting it, and willing to comment on the DEIS. People who didn't support the Rule come away having learned something new about how it works on their local forest and that it's a more nuanced issue than they previously thought.
2. By attending you will help demonstrate that the majority of attendees support the Roadless Rule. Thus press coverage reports that the Rule is widely supported, and so that we've proven strong public support exists for the Rule in 2026 (just as in 2001). Thus building a foundation to rebuild the Rule whether that is through litigation, future Rulemaking, or legislation. This requires that all of our orgs work hard to recruit attendees (our members, supporters, etc).



Yours in Conservation,
Five Valleys Audubon

MONTANA AUDUBON NEWS

50 FOR 50: HELP US BUILD 50 SCREECH-OWL BOXES IN HONOR OF OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY!

This year we're starting a new phase of our citizen science screech-owl project: building, placing, and monitoring screech-owl boxes!

Right now we're on part one: building the boxes. Can you help? We're looking for volunteers with carpentry know-how and the tools to build boxes themselves. If that's you, please email Casey at casey@mtaudubon.org for more information and to volunteer.

If carpentry and woodworking aren't your thing, stay tuned- we'll have more opportunities coming soon. Thank you to our project partners Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and to Fencecrafters for their generous lumber donation!



THE 25TH ANNUAL WINGS ACROSS THE BIG SKY FESTIVAL - SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars and join us this summer in Kalispell, June 12 -14, 2026, for the Wings Across the Big Sky Festival! Montana Audubon and our local chapter partner Flathead Audubon Society have been hard at work putting together a birding festival to commemorate the 50th anniversaries of both organizations- you won't want to miss this year's festival!



There are multiple field trips into Glacier National Park; tours of favorite local hotspots around Flathead Lake; a Friday afternoon pre-festival trip to Flathead Lake Bio Station; and for the more adventurous the opportunity to bike & bird Going to the Sun Road!

Registration will open in March 2026. Keep an eye on Montana Audubon's email newsletter and social media for updates.

BIRDING BOOKS

LESLIE SMITH

This month's book is *To See Every Bird on Earth*, by Dan Koepfel. It is a memoir of a man's relationship with his father who is a bird Lister, or in other words, the father's passion is to see and record on his lifetime master list, as many birds as possible.

Listing is different from seeing as many birds as possible in a given time frame.

It is different from enjoying birds in different environments, recording them and photographing them for pleasure.

And it is different from recording birds on eBird for the creation and updating of a global data base of birds.

Being a Lister borders on obsession, and for some, it unabashedly is obsession.

The Lister today with the highest number of birds listed is Peter Kaestner, who broke the 10,000 bird threshold in 2024 and has maintained it.

In order to be a top ranked Lister, one must have unlimited funds and time to travel the world. And this must be possible year after year.

Besides actually seeing the birds (which must meet these criteria: the bird be alive, wild, unrestrained, and correctly identified within a specific area and time), a Lister's list will expand and contract with the lumping and splitting of birds.

What on earth does that mean? An authority on birds, such as the North American Classification Committee (NACC) or American Ornithological Society (AOS) sometimes

decides that a group of birds that were previously separated into individual species, are really all the same species. What may have been 3 separate birds on one's list, suddenly becomes one bird. This is called "lumping." The Listers grumble and amend their lists.

But it can work the other way, too. The same authority can decide that a bird is really more than one species and not merely variations of color, for example. Now the one bird becomes four and the Listers are thrilled! This is called "splitting."

There is no prize that goes with being a superstar lister. It is a private goal, shared with a handful of others with whom the lister is competing. The drive to list and its necessary world travel, helps to support the bird guiding industry.

In *To See Every Bird on Earth*, the author explores the impact that his father's sneer addiction had on his marriage and family. As a child, the author felt that birds were more important to his dad than he was. But in the end, while the author was not mad about birds, he joined his dad and together they had some memorable experiences. I found the book interesting even if I couldn't personally relate to the activity itself.



Lewis and Clark Library has this book.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Please welcome Last Chance Audubon Society new members: Casey Zacney, Kirsten Walsh, Taylor Wilkerson, Cody Melton, and Christopher Korow.

Sincere thanks to Last Chance renewing members: Jo Lace and Brian Shovers, Thomas and Marilyn Pearson, Ann Bauchman, Pat Clark, Robert Ray and Fran Penner-Ray, Alan and Nancy Nicholson, Don and Donna Eisenmenger, John Mott, Sandy Shull, Mary Maj, Linda Kay Richter, Susan Epstein, Pat Grantham, Carmen Winslow, Mike and Shelly Pasichnyk, Nathan Phillips, Sara Owen and Bill Schenk, and Ruth Swenson.

Please also welcome National Audubon Society new members: Elizabeth Harrison

Sincere thanks to National Audubon Society renewing members: Thomas Albrecht, Marlyn Atkins, Bonnie Bowler, Constance Cole, Chris Cornish, Mary Craigle, Janet Ellis, Fed Flanders, Robin Hall, Janet Hess-Herbert, John Lambing, Marjorie Levine, Sumner Sharpe, Thomas Martello, Jacob Martin, Michelle Money, Dave Mott, Terry O'Connor, James Perkins, Thomas Ryan, Tim Speyer, Janet Strandberg, Mark Thompson, and Catherine Wright.

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

LAST CHANCE AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 924
HELENA, MT 59624

SUPPORT LCAS THROUGH A DONATION OR MEMBERSHIP TODAY

Membership

LCAS BOARD

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SECRETARY: Gail Kuntz, tdw596or@aol.com
TREASURER: Sue Jackson, 443-4486, suejacksonmt@gmail.com
WEBSITE/BOARD: Don Skaar, redradon@gmail.com
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422-4546, smdewarthansen@charter.net
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BOARD AT LARGE: Bob Martinka, 449-3313, rmartink@aol.com
BOARD AT LARGE: Glenda Bradshaw, bradshaw@mt.net
BOARD AT LARGE: Stephen Turner, 521-0000,
turnstonest@gmail.com
BOARD AT LARGE: Grant Hokit, 438-2938, ghokit@carroll.edu

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LCAS COMMITTEE CHAIRS/CONTACTS

Christmas Bird Count: Coburn Currier,
clcurrier@hotmail.com
Conservation/Habitat: Grant Hokit,
ghokit@carroll.edu
Education: Sumner Sharpe,
mtnutmeg@gmail.com
Field Trips/Website: Don Skaar,
redradon@gmail.com
Philanthropy/Development: John Hansen,
johnfhansen@gmail.com
Meeting Set-up: Doug Hansen,
mthusker@charter.net
Monthly Program: Sandy Shull, 461-2073
Publicity: Meghan Bahn, meghanjuly@gmail.com
Volunteer Coordinator: Pete Strazdas, 406-461-2728,
petestrazdas@gmail.com

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MT Audubon State Office: 443-3949