

MARCH MEMBERSHIP MEETING**-- PLEASE NOTE****DIFFERENT LOCATION --**

Last Chance Audubon Society will meet Tuesday, March 17, at 7:00 pm at the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Building. Please enter the building on 6th Street on the west side.

The March program:

The Burning Question: Are Burned Forests Birding Hotspots of Diversity?

Presented by Vicki Saab

Vicki Saab, a research biologist with the Rocky Mountain Research Station at Bozeman, will talk about the birds that inhabit western coniferous forests. Vicki will explore the mechanisms that create habitat for birds after fire and the importance of conserving burned forests for long-term persistence of many bird species. Vicki's presentation will focus on burned forest ecology, which she has been studying for the Forest Service since 1989, and fire's importance to a large suite of birds.

Saab completed a Masters Degree in Fish & Wildlife Management at MSU and a Ph.D. in Biology at the University of Colorado. Over the past 25 years she has conducted research on songbirds, woodpeckers, grouse, and raptors in the Intermountain West and Central America. Since 1994 she has been leading long-term studies of fire effects on habitats and populations of birds in Ponderosa pine forests of the interior West.

The evening will begin with a 5-minute presentation by Catherine Wightman, the new FWP Bird Conservation Director, about the waterbird project she is directing.

Last Chance Audubon Society promotes understanding, respect and enjoyment of birds and the natural world through education, habitat protection and environmental advocacy.

LCAS BEGINNING BIRDING CLASSES COMING SOON

There will be a Beginning Birding Workshop in early May this year. At two Thursday evening sessions we will discuss the basics of birding, bird identification tips, and take a look at bird behavior. We'll also preview some photographs of birds that might be seen on the field trips to follow. There will be two Saturday morning field trips. One will happen in conjunction with International Migratory Bird Day at the Regulating Reservoir, and the other will take place at a variety of local birding spots. The dates selected for the classes are as follows: **April 30 and May 7** (Thursday evenings) and **May 2 and May 9** (Saturday mornings). Times will be announced. There is a **\$15 registration fee** to cover costs and a **class size** limited to **20** people. If you are interested in learning more about birds and birding, give me a call at **443-6640**.

--Jo Lace

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LCAS FIELD TRIPS by Jim Greene

Although most of us look for birds year round, it is always exciting to hear and see the first birds each spring and anticipate seeing more as the season unfolds. You'll enhance your chances to see more birds by attending some of the field trips our chapter sponsors each spring.

LCAS can always use new trip leaders and new ideas for field trips. Please give serious thought to leading a small group to an area that you've enjoyed, or would like to explore with others. Remember:

You do not have to be an “ace” birder to lead a trip. Your responsibility is only to choose a location, receive a few phone calls, and get the participants into the field via carpooling. It’s a fun and rewarding endeavor. So if you have an idea for a trip, please give me a call, or you can email me at greenevogt@imt.net. (Check the April newsletter for a schedule of 2009 LCAS field trips.)

BIRDS MOVEMENTS REVEAL GLOBAL WARMING THREAT IN ACTION

Species Wintering Farther North Show Need for Policy Change

Following are excerpts from a National Audubon Society email dated February 10, 2009.

The northward and inland movement of North American birds, confirmed by thousands of citizen observations, provides new and powerful evidence that global warming is having a serious impact on natural systems, according to new analyses by Audubon scientists. The findings signal the need for dramatic policy changes to combat pervasive ecological disruption.

Analyses of citizen-gathered data from the past 40 years of Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) reveal that 58 percent of the 305 widespread species that winter on the continent shifted significantly north since 1968, some by hundreds of miles. Movement was detected among species of every type, including more than 70 percent of highly adaptable forest and feeder birds. Only 38 percent of grassland species mirrored the trend, reflecting the constraints of their severely depleted habitat and suggesting that they now face a double threat from the combined stresses of habitat loss and climate adaptation.

Population shifts among individual species are common, fluctuate, and can have many causes. However, Audubon scientists say the ongoing trend of movement by some 177 species closely correlated to long-term winter temperature increases reveals an undeniable link to the changing climate.

"Birds are showing us how the heavy hand of humanity is tipping the balance of nature and causing ecological disruption in ways we are just beginning to predict and comprehend," said Audubon Director of Bird Conservation, Greg Butcher, Ph.D. "Common sense dictates that we act now to curb the causes and impacts of global warming to the extent we can, and shape our policies to better cope with the disruptions we cannot avoid."

Movements across all species—including those not reflecting the 40-year trend—averaged

approximately 35 miles during the period. However, it is the complete picture of widespread movement and the failure of some species to move at all that illustrates the potential for problems.

Scientists say bold action is needed to overcome threats from global warming. Audubon calls on Congress and the administration to advance policies that will drastically reduce global warming pollution, cut oil dependence in half, and invest in a clean energy future and the economic benefits it offers. Americans can sign a petition at <http://www.birdsandclimate.org/> to demand aggressive federal policy action.

Habitats already under siege from development, energy production, agricultural expansion and other human uses will require enhanced protection and restoration to sustain bird populations and provide ecological benefits essential to human health, economic prosperity and quality of life. Conservation efforts based on forward looking projections such as those from Audubon California are essential.

Audubon anticipates that the new avian evidence will help attract attention and spark action among more than 40 million U.S. bird-watchers, including tens of thousands who contributed to the Christmas Bird Count data on which the studies are based. The 109-year-old census provides the world's longest uninterrupted record of bird population trends. "Citizen Science is allowing us to better recognize the impacts that global warming is having here and now. Only citizen action can help us reduce them," said Butcher.

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT BREAKS ALL-TIME RECORD

Feb. 27, 2009. With two days left to go for data entry, participants have submitted 90,505 checklists, smashing the all-time GBBC record. In the race for towns submitting the most checklists, Mentor, Ohio, leads with 259 checklists ahead of second-ranked Charlotte, North Carolina. Visit www.birdcount.org for details.

In this year's Great Backyard Bird Count, Snow Geese were the most numerous species counted. Did you know that Snow Goose populations were so threatened that in 1916, hunting them was banned in the United States? Since then, their populations have increased dramatically, and hunting began again in 1975 without slowing their population growth.



Cornell Lab eNews

COMING EVENTS and REMINDERS

► **Kelsey Chapter of the Montana Native Plant Society: Tuesday, March 24, 7:00 p.m.**

Steve Kohler will present Montana Butterflies and Their Plants. Steve Kohler will talk about some of the work he has been doing on the food plants of butterfly larvae. Even with all the studies that have been done with butterflies over the years, there are still a number of species about which little is known of the life cycle or biology, including their larval food plants. This is especially true for Montana, a very large state where few people have been actively and seriously studying butterflies. Free in the large meeting room at the Lewis and Clark Library.

► **Grant Funds Available Through LCAS Habitat Protection Fund:** Last Chance Audubon is pleased to announce a **\$2,000 grant** to individuals, conservation groups, public agencies, and schools in Lewis & Clark, Broadwater, Jefferson, and Meagher counties, to promote the protection or enhancement of habitat that has or could have significant value for birds and other wildlife. To apply, please submit a statement of the work proposed; an explanation of how it will enhance the habitat; a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the planned work; a timeline; explain how the project will benefit more than one species; and submit a detailed budget (not to exceed three pages). The applications will be reviewed by the three members of the LCAS Habitat Protection committee. **Mail applications to LCAS, Habitat Protection, PO Box 924, Helena, MT 59624, no later than April 1, 2009. The committee will make its decision by April 15.**

► **April Newsletter: Please submit April newsletter items by Wednesday, Apr. 1. Thanks!**

GET PAID TO BIRD WATCH

Birds & Beasleys will be hosting their Saturday morning bird walks from May 2nd to October 3rd again this year. Bill and Mary Ann Rainey will continue leading the bird walks, but we need another leader to help. The commitment would be 1-2 times a month on Saturday from 7:30am to around 10am. We are looking for someone who likes people and birds, you don't have to be an expert. We can be flexible with the schedule. Call Sandy at Birds & Beasleys, 449-0904, if you are interested or if you know someone we should contact.

2009 MONTANA AUDUBON BIRD FESTIVAL

WINGS ACROSS THE BIG SKY

*** **Register by April 15 and have a chance to win two nights lodging at the Holiday Inn during the festival! *****

Montana Audubon, in conjunction with Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon Society, will hold our annual bird festival in Great Falls, MT, June 5-7, 2009.

Please join us and featured speaker, **David Allen Sibley**, the author and illustrator of the comprehensive *Sibley Guide to Birds* and other books such as *Sibley's Birding Basics*. **Vince Yannone**, retired MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks biologist and educator, who has appeared on Discovery Channel and Animal Planet, opens the festival Friday evening with live birds.

Choose from over 28 different field trips to wildlife refuges and birding hotspots from the Rocky Mountain Front to the prairie marshes and the storied Missouri River, rich in birds, other wildlife and history. Birds of interest include: McCown's & Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Sprague's Pipit, Burrowing Owl, Calliope Hummingbird, Baird's Sparrow, American Avocet and Ferruginous Hawk.

Attend birdwatchers' and bird conservation presentations/workshops. Bring the whole family and experience a morning of games, a bird banding demo, guided hikes and activities involving birds and birding. This festival will bring you and your family up close and personal with the birds of Montana and their magnificent habitat!

Add to your festival experience by participating in the pre-festival canoe trip through the White Cliffs of the Missouri in the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, or one of the two post-festival field trips to Glacier National Park and Square Butte Natural Area. *(continued on next page)*

The festival will be held at the Holiday Inn, Great Falls, MT. For more information or to register, visit

www.mtaudubon.org/birdwatching/festival or call the Montana Audubon office at 406-443-3949.

♪ BIRDNOTE: SONGS OF THE CHICKADEE by Dave Slaughter

People get into birding for lots of reasons. Some just enjoy seeing birds, and leave it at that. More of us want to know the names of the birds we are looking at. Some folks develop an interest with lists, become experts at identifying birds and go to great lengths to add new species to their life list. This can become an obsession of massive proportions. As an example, a few years ago a directionally challenged red-footed falcon, an Old World bird, arrived on Martha's Vineyard. Articles and photos of this bird were posted in national birding magazines, it got an article in the *New York Times*, and folks came from thousands of miles to see it. To people in this category, I hope the coming year brings you flocks of lost birds. A few of us try to learn their songs. To anyone belonging in any of these groups, I think that's great. Others of us try to understand the lives of the birds we see.

I love chickadees. They are one of the most common winter birds and don't flee in terror at the sight of me. I'd like to share a few things in follow-up of my previous article (LCAS newsletter, Jan. 2009) which I found out in studying these birds, specifically black-capped chickadees.

As background, perching birds can be divided into two major groups, the Oscines, or true songbirds, and the Suboscines, represented in North America by the flycatchers. Suboscine birds are genetically programmed to sing a certain song. When I was a kid I learned about a bird called a Traill's flycatcher. Observers noted that some Traill's flycatchers sang a different song than others, and after much study, this species was divided into two species in 1973, willow flycatchers and alder flycatchers. If you raise a willow flycatcher baby in a lab and only let it hear alder songs, as an adult it will sing perfect willow flycatcher songs.

Oscine songbirds learn their songs, copying the adults around them. Just as a person growing up in New York develops a different accent than a person growing up in Georgia, so most songbirds develop regional "dialects." For example, in the Point Reyes National Seashore in California alone, 6 different white-crowned sparrow dialects have been mapped.

The usual black-capped chickadee song is a 2-part whistle, which we've all heard. The first note has a higher pitch than the second note. The second note has a decrease in amplitude in the middle of it, so it comes across as two "syllables." The song is described by various authors as sounding like *fee-bee-ee*, or *hey-sweetie*. There are several strange things about this song. Chickadees have been recorded across the continent, from Alaska to Maine, and with rare exceptions the song is exactly the same, without dialects. Why the song is so similar across the continent is unclear. One possibility, that it is genetically programmed into the birds just as it is in the flycatchers, was ruled out in experiments where chickadees were raised in captivity, and developed very abnormal songs. Surprisingly, on Martha's Vineyard, Chappaquiddick and Nantucket, there are four separate chickadee dialects, where in some locations the birds sing *sweetie-hey*, *sosweetie-sweetie*, *sweetie-sweetie*, or the usual *hey-sweetie*. There are also dialects in isolated areas in Washington and Oregon, but otherwise it's the same song across the rest of the continent.

The other weird thing is that most songs function to defend territory and to attract mates and are only uttered in the breeding season, but the chickadee song is sung year-round. Chickadees pair-bond while in their winter flocks. Males in winter flocks do sing the *hey-sweetie* song, but usually only after removing themselves from the flock, and it doesn't seem to play a role in attracting mates. In one study on this, the song was never sung by a male when he was within 10 meters of his mate. During the breeding season the song serves an unusual function. To quote from an article on this, the song is "not serving as a distant threat to other males, but rather as a means of locating the rival, challenging and beckoning him to a meeting site rather than as a means of repelling him from a fixed boundary." Once a rival male does appear, the bird may shift his song to a lower frequency, which is apparently an aggressive signal. If the birds approach one another closely, the *hey-sweetie* song is dropped altogether and the birds utter a two to thirteen note call that is called the "gargle" call. This is a battle cry, and if one bird does not depart a fight will break out. Interestingly, gargle calls do have regional dialects and each chickadee has a repertoire of different gargle calls.

Just as the words "love" and "leave" have similar letters but different meanings, so the gargle call is also used



in another context, as a love song. It is sometimes preceded by a high pitched *see* and is given during mating, although with very specific note combinations. To quote from some research on this, “We observed the complete copulatory sequence eight times . . . either sex initiated sexual activity by uttering variable *see*’s, ending in a gargle just as he mounted the female. All copulations were preceded by these calls.” To continue, “We found remarkable stereotypy in the sexual gargles for each population, although the agonistic gargles in each population are highly variable . . . Although both share the same syllables, sexual gargles have unique syllable combinations that may reduce the possibility of confusion concerning the message of the calls. Following agonistic gargles, the recipient usually moves away; if it does not, it is attacked by the individual giving the call. During sexual gargles the two birds remain in close proximity.”

Obviously this scratches the surface of understanding chickadee vocalization, but we are learning how these birds communicate and interact. A good review of this subject can be found in an article in *The Auk* 95:34-48, “The Vocal Repertoire of the Black-capped Chickadee,” which discusses 11 adult chickadee vocalizations (there are now felt to be 15 total, 12 given by adults). A discussion of the gargle call is found in *The Auk* 102:145-151. These and many other articles, can be accessed online through the Searchable Ornithological Research Archive at <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/>, and a discussion of white-throated sparrow dialects and the research on chickadee songs on Martha’s Vineyard are found in Dr. Donald Kroodsmas’s excellent book, *The Singing Life of Birds*.

The best way to learn about animals is to spend a lot of time watching them. Unfortunately, most of us have work and other responsibilities and can’t get out as much as we would like. If you are interested in animal behavior, I can recommend two books. One is *Built for Speed* by John Byers, about pronghorn antelopes. It is humorous, very readable, and will give you a rare appreciation for the society of these unusual animals. The other is *A Watcher at the Nest* by Margaret Morse Nice, which is a first-hand account of how she studied song sparrows in the 1930s. The research she did, published as *Studies in the Life History of Song Sparrows*, is still considered a classic in the area of field research. Her books have been reprinted and are available through Amazon.

APRIL 5, 1974 by Richard Wilbur

The air was soft, the ground still cold.
In the dull pasture where I strolled
Was something I could not believe.
Dead grass appeared to slide and heave,
Though still too frozen-flat to stir,
And rocks to twitch, and all to blur.
What was this rippling of the land?
Was matter getting out of hand
And making free with natural law?
I stopped and blinked, and then I saw
A fact as eerie as a dream,
There was a subtle flood of steam
Moving upon the face of things.
It came from standing pools and springs
And what of snow was still around;
It came of winter’s giving ground
So that the freeze was coming out,
As when a set mind, blessed by doubt,
Relaxes into mother-wit.
Flowers, I said, will come of it



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MEMBERSHIP from Sara Toubman

Welcome and thanks to the following new and renewing members. NAS-New: Gloria Butler, Lewis & Clark Library, Bonnie Bowler, Gordon White, Newman Myrah, Jean Baucus, Michelle McCall, Van Bass. NAS Renewals: Berma Saxton, Mary Beaudette, Thomas Altmaier, Stan & Glenda Bradshaw, Theresa Middagh, Arch & Gail Hewitt, Mary Kelley, Janet Ellis. LCAS New/Renewals: Barb Belt, Barbara Kenny, Bill & Marsha Davis, Bill & Jan Matheson, Carla Wambach, Coburn Currier, Dan & Delight Sullivan, Janet Grinde, Jim Greene & Martha Vogt, Kirk Eakin, Suzy Holt, Cheryl Cope, Toby & Carlene Armstrong, Jane Heath & Vic Andersen, Carol Taylor, Pam Harris, Barbara Twiggs, Ellen Taylor, Charlann Forbes, Eliza Frazer, John Delano, Molly Herrin, Sue Jackson.

**Last Chance Audubon Society
Membership Form**

Name _____

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Please send your \$15 check and form to Last Chance Audubon Society, PO Box 924, Helena, MT 59624.
All contributions are tax deductible.

LAST CHANCE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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LCAS Website: www.lastchanceaudubon.org . Contacts: Birdseed – Birds & Beasleys, 449-0904. Montana Audubon – 443-3949 / www.mtaudubon.org . Newsletter - 458-8170, 8982 Jackpine Dr, Helena 59602, samsper@mt.net . Non-members may receive the newsletter for \$5.50 per year. Send check to LCAS, PO Box 924, Helena 59624.	Website	Christian Frazza

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