

## NOVEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Last Chance Audubon Society will meet on Tuesday, November 18, at 7:00 pm in the large meeting room of the Lewis and Clark Library.

The November program -- *The Birds Around Us* – will be presented by Vince Yannone.

Vince Yannone has long enjoyed presenting entertaining and informative programs about the birds that live around and among us. His stories, amazing facts and the live birds he brings delight all ages. The birds for this presentation will be a Great Horned Owl, a Screech Owl, a Raven and perhaps a surprise. The program will include where to see and hear Great Horned Owls in the Helena area. He'll tell stories about how smart and clever the Raven is and illustrate their calls. Don't miss this exciting opportunity to learn about and see these fascinating birds!

In his quest to help wildlife in the state of Montana, Vince has been a tireless educator. For twelve years he presented a TV program, Nature Today. He wrote the column, Nature's Call, in Montana Magazine for twelve years. And he gave programs on wildlife throughout the state. He is well known as the founder of the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, which currently is located next to Spring Meadow Lake State Park. And he is one of the original founders of Last Chance Audubon. Now retired, he continues to do work for MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

This is a great opportunity to learn about and SEE some of our feathered friends!

**THE LCAS SILENT AUCTION** will begin at the November meeting and end at the December membership meeting. This is a great opportunity to do some Christmas shopping and help the chapter raise a little money. If you have items you'd like to donate, please call Sandy Shull, 449-0904, or Jo Lace, 443-6640, or take your items to Birds & Beasleys. And come to the November meeting ready to do some bidding!

## DECEMBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Last Chance Audubon will meet on Tuesday, December 9, same time and place as the November meeting.

The meeting date has been moved up in order to plan and organize the 2008 Christmas Bird Count, which will be held on Sunday, December 14. (*See page 3 for details.*)

The December program -- *The Winter Birds of Helena* – will be presented by LCAS member Bob Martinka, and will feature a PowerPoint presentation with new and updated images of Helena's birds.

Bob Martinka worked for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks from 1970 through 1998 in various field and administrative positions. He became an avid birder after his retirement in 1998 and has subsequently become involved in bird photography.

**Come and enjoy Bob's photos, participate in planning the 2008 Bird Count, and place your final Silent Auction bids.**

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

## ♪ BIRDNOTE: MISIDENTIFY BIRDS LIKE AN EXPERT by Don Freiday

*Wildbird, May/June 2007*

One Thanksgiving Day, a northeaster raged on the Atlantic coast, and I birded with a new friend who happened to be both female and a serious birder ... and whom I wanted to impress. We scanned a pond through sheets of horizontal rain when 40 or so ducks emerged from the gray murk of raindrops on lenses and passed in a wavy, fast-beating flock low over the water.

They seemed small. They seemed all dark. They seemed stubby. The mental computer clicked and chugged along, adding location (freshwater pond near coast), season and probability (the only other species that they could be is Bufflehead and I didn't see any white). I said, "Ruddy Ducks."

Imagine my surprise when the Ruddy Ducks suddenly ascended and lighted on some telephone wires across the pond, hanging on nimbly as the wires swayed in the storm. Being an expert, I quickly realized that perching on wires was unusual behavior for Ruddy Ducks.

They were European Starlings. Truly, a beginner could not have made that mistake.

Beginners and experts misidentify birds differently because they identify birds differently. Most "expert" birders don't identify birds by looking them over carefully, noting all the field marks and checking the field guide.

In fact, expert birders often don't *identify* birds at all. Experts *recognize* birds, the way that you recognize a familiar friend or relative. This is an important distinction.

Roger Tory Peterson wrote about how experts identify birds in *Birds Over America* (Dodd, Mead, 1983 revised): "The mind of a good field observer works just like a kaleidoscope, wherein loose fragments of glass fall quickly into symmetrical patterns. We see a bird. With an instinctive movement we center it in our glass. All the thousands of fragments we know about birds, locality, season, habitat, voice, actions, field marks, and likelihood of occurrence flash across the mirrors of the mind and fall into place—and we have the name of the bird."

It all sounds very magical, this bit about fragments of knowledge and kaleidoscopes. It's sort of a Zen thing. You know, "Be the bird." It's a lot of fun, a lot more fun than having to study the bird.



There's a problem, however, with this business of recognizing birds instantaneously rather than identifying them. It's called "premature closure," one definition of which is "the failure to continue considering reasonable alternatives after an initial diagnosis is reached."

Basically, you see one or two field marks, or maybe even none you are conscious of, and your brain fills in all the details for you, details that may or may not be there—hence turning starlings into ducks. It gets worse.

A rather famous misidentification involved two expert tour leaders in Alaska. On the first day of the tour, leader A called out "Gyr Falcon!"

Of course, everyone was excited, and everyone took turns at leader A's scope, with handshakes and backslaps all around. After everyone on the tour had their turn and confirmed the identification, leader B looked through the scope and was silent for a while.

*By the way, I know that I'm in trouble when I call out a bird and a co-leader looks... but doesn't say anything.*

Finally, stepping away from the scope, leader B said simply, "I don't see it."

Leader A jumped into the scope. "It's right there, on top of the rock in the center of the field!"

Leader B looked again. "I still don't see it."

*Danger, danger; Will Robinson.*

Again, leader A looked and said in exasperation, "It's right there, same place, on the rock in the center of the scope. It's a white morph, for goodness sake, I don't understand why you can't see it!"

Leader B looked a third time and finally said, "Where is it in relation to the Snow Bunting?"

It gets even worse than that. One thing I've learned over the years is that any bird identification should begin with a fundamental question: Is it even a bird? I once called a light plane a Bald Eagle and even saw it flap... but don't think that I'm the only birder who ever called a plane a bird.

One example: A well-known birder and field guide author was leading a walk in Arizona when he called out a Black-chinned Hummingbird in its aerial display flight. The "hummingbird" was, in fact, a jumbo jet. That is an expert *misidentification*, calling an object 250 feet long and weighing 400,000 pounds a hummingbird.

Experts enjoy challenging identifications (or they say they do), but something I learned long ago is that some birds cannot be identified easily. Some birds cannot be identified at all.

*(continued on page 4)*

## THE LAST CHANCE AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DECEMBER 14, 2008

Please join Last Chance Audubon for the chapter's 54<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>. This year's CBC is being held on a Sunday because National Audubon requires that counts be held within a specific date "window," and the 14<sup>th</sup> is the earliest allowable date. The earliest allowable Saturday is December 20, the weekend just before Christmas when many counters will not be available because of travel plans.

All members and friends of LCAS are invited to participate. You need not be an expert birder to take part in this event. The Bird Count is an excellent learning opportunity for beginners, who will be matched up with more experienced birders.

Bird counters will meet at Jorgenson's Restaurant on 11<sup>th</sup> Ave. Please be there by 6:45 if you plan on having breakfast, or show up no later than 7:15 if you don't plan on eating at the restaurant. Groups like to depart by 7:30 in order to reach their counting areas by sun-up. Please bring \$5 cash or a check made out to Last Chance Audubon, **NOT** National Audubon Society. Students under 18 are free and welcome.

**To sign up for the CBC, contact Loreene Reid at Montana Audubon, 443-3949 / lreid @mtaudubon.org.** Early registration is encouraged.

Wear your warmest gear and bring binoculars, field guides, and a spotting scope if you have one. Pack a lunch and drinks as most parties stay out all day. If you want to be out for only a half day please specify this when you sign up. Also indicate if you want to be in an area that mostly birds by car or on foot.

Drivers and 4-wheel vehicles, especially those that hold four or more counters, are always in demand. Drivers need not be experienced birders. Contributions of gas money from riders would be much appreciated.

There will be a post-Count potluck dinner for participants, friends, and family at 6:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall of St. Paul's Methodist Church. To access Fellowship Hall use the downstairs door adjacent to the corner of Lawrence and Cruse Ave. Bring your own place settings and food to share. Please remember that no alcohol is allowed at St. Paul's. The post-Count potluck dinner is a great time to share information on all the rare and interesting birds seen during the day.



### ANNUAL BIRDSEED SALE

There's still time to participate in Last Chance Audubon Society's birdseed sale.



- 25# black oil sunflower seed - \$23.00
- 25# medium chips - \$40.00
- 10# nyjer thistle - \$19.50
- 20# nyjer thistle - \$37.00
- 25# millet - \$17.00

To order call Sue Jackson, 443-4486, or Sandy Shull, 449-0904. Pick up birdseed at Birds & Beasleys, 70 S. Park Ave., by Thanksgiving.



*photo by Bob Martinka*

**MISIDENTIFY BIRDS LIKE AN EXPERT by Don Freiday ... continued from page 2**

Sometimes this is because the bird is too far away, the look too brief, or the sound too obscured or not heard at all. Sometimes this is because the bird is so similar to another species that you simply can't tell the two apart without testing their DNA.

Speaking of which, I ran across an interesting Internet post from the United Kingdom, which noted, "It may also be worth collecting any droppings, as it is now possible to extract DNA from these (cells slough off the wall of the intestine)... Collecting droppings adds a new dimension to any difficult field identification!"

The bottom line is that you need to take your time, make careful observations, note all possible field marks, even collect droppings (find me a birder who enjoys that challenge). In other words, suspend for a while the magic of being an expert who names all birds instantly. You are not going to identify some birds correctly. If you think otherwise, you are deluding yourself.

Perhaps thought should be given to proper conduct when someone in your company misidentifies a bird. Let's suppose that I'm birding with a few friends and someone calls a bird a Bald Eagle when it is obviously an Osprey.

What do I do? Well, fully knowing that I could make a mistake in the next five minutes, what I don't do is say, "That's no eagle, mister raptor expert! Clearly it's an Osprey!"

No, instead, we should be more gentle. "The bird I have has more the look of an Osprey. Could that be your bird?" Even better, just wait a minute, and give the observer time to correct the mistake.

What should we do after misidentifying a bird? Simple. Admit the error, try to figure out why it was made, and move on. Except when we are conducting serious research, an occasional goofed I.D. is instructional and not such a big deal—at least if we can stand the embarrassment.

Besides, that which we call an eagle when it is, in fact, a vulture still has bad breath, does it not? Is not the swooping and plummeting Merlin magnificent, whether we miscalled it a Tree Swallow or not?

When we finally correctly identify a bird, we know only its human-given name—perhaps the least important thing to know about it. We've only just begun. We don't know where or how it lives, what it is doing, where it is going or why. When we know all these things, then we truly will be experts.

Editor's note: *Thanks to Jo Lace and Jim Greene, who both sent me this article.*

**WINTER AND THE NUTHATCH by Mary Oliver**

Once or twice and maybe again, who knows,  
the timid nuthatch will come to me  
if I stand still, with something good to eat in my  
hand.

The first time he did it  
he landed smack on his belly, as though  
the legs wouldn't cooperate. The next time  
he was bolder. Then he became absolutely  
wild about those walnuts.

But there was a morning I came late, and guess  
what,  
the nuthatch was flying into a stranger's hand.  
To speak plainly, I felt betrayed.  
I wanted to say: Mister,  
that nuthatch and I have a relationship.  
It took hours of standing in the snow  
before he would drop from the tree and trust my  
fingers.  
But I didn't say anything.



Nobody owns the sky or the trees.  
Nobody owns the hearts of birds.  
Still, being human and partial therefore to my own  
successes—  
though not resentful of others fashioning theirs—

I'll come tomorrow, I believe, quite early.  
--from Mary Oliver's most recent book, *Red Bird*

**PROJECT FEEDERWATCH:** The 22<sup>nd</sup> season of Cornell Labs' Project FeederWatch begins Nov. 8 and runs through Apr. 3. Participants count numbers and kinds of birds at their feeders every week or every two weeks and send the results to Cornell Labs. The program welcomes participants of all ages and skill levels. To learn more and to sign up, visit [www.feederwatch.org](http://www.feederwatch.org) or call the Lab toll-free at 800-843-2473. In return for a \$15 fee (\$12 for Lab members) participants receive the *Feeder Watcher's Handbook*, an identification poster of common feeder birds in their area, a calendar, complete instructions, and the FeederWatch annual report, *Winter Bird Highlights*.

**LCAS MEMBERSHIP:** Last Chance Audubon membership renewals are due in January. (If you joined the chapter this fall, you need not renew until Jan. 2010.) LCAS membership assures your receipt of the newsletter, which keeps you posted on monthly membership meetings and chapter events. LCAS membership is good from January through December and should be renewed each January. Joining LCAS does not preclude membership in National Audubon. (An LCAS membership form is on the back page of the newsletter; please mail it and a check to the address provided.)

**-- ANNOUNCEMENTS AND  
COMING EVENTS --**

**Montanans for Corporate Accountability: On Monday, Nov. 10 at 7 pm at the Neighborhood Center, 200 S Cruse Ave in Helena, MCA will present a short film and talk on coal-bed methane development and attempts to privatize Montana's groundwater resources.** Contact: Cedron Jones, 406-442-5506x18 / 406-442-1271 (h).

**WANTED: Bird Monitoring and Banding Station Volunteers in Ecuador – Dec. 2008.** Life Net, a non-profit conservation organization ([www.lifenetnature.org](http://www.lifenetnature.org)) needs 5 more volunteers to help with constant-effort bird banding and monitoring, hummingbird research, community-based conservation, and environmental education at Reserva Loma Alta in Ecuador this Dec. Life Net volunteers contribute a tax-deductible donation of \$1,200 and two weeks of work to help study and save rare forest birds. Your donation pays Ecuadorian staff, and covers meals, lodging, and transportation within Ecuador during the project (Dec. 7-20, 2008). To join this expedition you must apply soon. See [www.lifenetnature.org/volunteer.htm](http://www.lifenetnature.org/volunteer.htm); send completed application to Dr. Dusti Becker, [dbecker@lifenetnature.org](mailto:dbecker@lifenetnature.org), or 2465 Olinda Rd, Makawao, HI 96768.

**January Newsletter Deadline: Please submit Jan. newsletter items by Friday, Jan. 2, 2009.**

**Great Backyard Birdcount: The GBBC will be held on Feb. 13-16, 2009.** See the Jan. newsletter for details.

**2009 Warbler Weeks on Pelee Island, Canada— May 3-9, 10-16, 17-23, & 24-30.** These tours will feature hundreds of warblers, of 25-30 different species. See such beauties as Bay-breasted, Palm Blue-winged, Cerulean, Chestnut-sided, Kentucky, Blackburnian, Canada, Black-throated Blue, and many more. plus numerous orioles, buntings, grosbeaks, and vireos. Stay at a charming B&B while enjoying non-stop birding on this vibrant island, situated in Lake Erie, just north of Ohio. Limited to 6 participants. Fees are \$1,695 from Detroit, and include a \$200 contribution to Montana Audubon. View complete tour itinerary at [www.KingfisherBirdTours.com](http://www.KingfisherBirdTours.com). For additional information, call John Shipley, 406-465-8247.

**Upcoming 2009 Montana Audubon birding tours include 3 tours to Ecuador.** Complete details available at [www.kingfisherbirdtours.com](http://www.kingfisherbirdtours.com). Participants will be able to count \$500 of their tour fees as a tax-deductible contribution to Montana Audubon. About 400 bird species may be seen, including Andean Condor, Torrent Duck, Giant Antpitta, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Andean Cock-of-the-rock, Toucan Barbet, Beautiful Jay, Golden Tanager, and many more, plus a procession of dazzling hummingbirds and flashy tanagers. Tours begin in Quito, and participants will visit habitats on the east and west slopes of the Andes. For additional information on Ecuador birding trips, please call John Shipley, 406-465-8247.

Birds have their love-and-mating song,  
Their warning cry, their hating song;  
Some have a night song, some a day song,  
A lilt, a tilt, a come-what-may song;  
Birds have their careless bough and teeter song,  
And, of course, their Roger Tory Peter song.  
--E. B. White, *The New Yorker*, 1959, quoted by Scott Weidensaul in *Of a Feather*



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**Last Chance Audubon Society  
Membership Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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**

Secretary	<b>Officers:</b> Brian Shovers 443-6640	Christmas Count	Sue Newell-442-8142/Cedron Jones 442-1271
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Birdseed Sale	Sue Jackson-443-4486/Sandy Shull-449-0904	Program	Sara Toubman 442-1271
LCAS Website: <a href="http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org">www.lastchanceaudubon.org</a> .		Publicity	Jim Greene 495-9270 - <a href="mailto:greenevogt@imt.net">greenevogt@imt.net</a>
Contacts: Birdseed – Birds & Beasleys, 449-0904; Montana Audubon – 443-3949 / <a href="http://www.mtaudubon.org">www.mtaudubon.org</a> .		Silent Auction	Sandy Shull-449-0904/Jo Lace-443-6640
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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photo by Bob Martinka

