

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

March 2019

Owls of Montana

Tuesday, March 12, 2019

Program begins 7:00 p.m.

Cookies and Conversation 6:30 – 7:00

**Montana WILD
2668 Broadwater Ave.**

FREE - All Are Welcome

Join Tom Forwood, an avid naturalist, as he shares what he has learned about how and why Montana truly excels in owl diversity. Montana contains a wide variety of habitats and landscapes which provide our great state with excellent bird diversity. Montana features 15 species of owl, and 14 of those are known to breed here. Only the state of Washington has as many. Tom will show how our owls are also quite diverse, how they live in different habitats and feature different habits. Come out and learn who goes 'hoo'.

Tom Forwood, Jr. works in park management for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. He spent 10 years as an interpretive ranger teaching



Burrowing Owl by Tom Forwood.

numerous visitors of all ages about the birds, wildlife, and plants of Montana. Tom is a diehard birder and a regional eBird reviewer. He leads regular field trips for Sacagawea Audubon, compiles two Christmas Bird Counts, and is on the Montana Bird Records Committee.



President's Perch

“If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

-- Isaac Newton, 1675

George Holton, 1920-2019: Was on the first LCAS Board of Directors in 1971. They pledged to do many things, including “educating the public on the need to protect wild birds, animals, trees and other plants, and to promote a better public understanding of the inter-dependence of these natural resources.” George was a naturalist and a meticulous field scientist. He compiled a 44,382-record database of the sightings and activity of Helena-area birds, way before eBird was created, an unparalleled feat. George led the way in recognizing the value of documenting bird sightings for scientific study.

Jean Smith, 1932-2015: Was chosen as Montana Audubon’s 1998 Environmental Educator of the Year: In her recognition speech, Janet Ellis spoke to Dr. Smith’s service (paraphrased here):

As an ornithology professor at Carroll College, Dr. Jean Smith also taught a two-week summer workshop on the identification and natural history of the birds of Montana. Geared toward the general public, the goal for the class was to excite people about birds so that they shared her passion, marveled at their beauty and behavior, and became aware of the critical habitat needs of these remarkable animals. This helped create knowledgeable advocates for birds and their conservation.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks recently received a generous donation from the Jean Smith Estate that provided funding for the development of birding trunks to be distributed statewide. Each trunk will include at least 20 pairs of binoculars, some birding guides, and a spotting scope to enhance bird conservation education across the state.

Science and education. George and Jean are two of the giants of LCAS. They have laid a foundation for us to build upon, “through education, habitat protection, and environmental advocacy.”

What can we see? What can we do as we move forward? What will we establish for the next generation?

*Janice Miller
President, LCAS*

March Natural History Lecture Series

LCAS will not offer its *Natural History Lecture Series* this year and we would like to hear from members regarding its continued life in the future. Please contact Brian Shovers at sholace0848@gmail.com or 443-6640.



Female American Kestrel carries food to juveniles in a cottonwood cavity. Photo by Dan Ellison.

Wild Wings in Choteau, Montana

Choteau, Montana invites you to a weekend of birding and dining, March 22-24 (Friday through Sunday), in celebration of the Snow Goose migration through Montana.

Friday: 7:00 p.m., *Winged Migration* (film) at Stage Stop Inn

Saturday:

- 6:30-10:30 a.m.: Free guided tour of Freezout Lake WMA with local guides including Mike Schwitters
- 1:00 p.m.: presentation by Mike Schwitters “White Geese over Montana” at Stage Stop Inn
- 5:30 p.m.: “Old Trail Museum’s Wild Game Feed” at Stage Stop Inn

Sunday: 6:30am, guided tour of Freezout Lake WMA (may take own vehicle or van for tours)

For reservations at Stage Stop Inn call 1-406-466-5900 or visit www.stagestopinn.com
For Snow Geese Tour Van Reservations: 406-461-2114 or maggie@dropstoneoutfitting.com
For general info on the Old Trail Museum, contact Julie, 406-899-6000.



Further Afield: A Birding Opportunity

The Montana Bird Advocacy (MBA) will lead birding tours to the highlands of central Peru in July and to Senegal north of the River Gambia in December. All proceeds help support their work in Montana, and a portion of the tour fee will be a tax-deductible donation to the MBA. Both trips are half full as of 14 February.

Please contact Jeff Marks for more information: jmarks17@gmail.com, 406-396-3331.



MT Audubon Legislative Season: An Amy Seaman Update

We made it! The first month and a half of the 2019 legislative session just flew by! We have been in the halls of the capital every day talking to legislators, and our efforts reflect this: we have testified on 44 bills (supporting 23 and opposing 21), hosted an MSU class for a small lobby day, worked with legislators to amend a few bills, and contributed to the public lands rally. And what a turnout this year! The capital facility staff estimated it to be over 1,600 public land advocates.

This session has been no different than past years, and unfortunately that means we have been playing a lot of defense. There are continued attacks on state water quality, predators (especially wolves), clean energy advances, and climate change action. On top of that, most of the

proactive legislation and sensible solutions we have supported have been tabled: reducing styrofoam, single-use plastic straws, and plastic bags; re-siting of pipelines; and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Fortunately, attacks on the Greater Sage-Grouse Stewardship Act have not been realized. Here are a few of the worst bills we have been fighting:

HB 265, introduced by Kerry White (R-Bozeman), inserts politics into Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park’s process of deciding to purchase conservation easements. It requires state Land Board approval for conservation easements under the widely supported Habitat Montana program if such easements are larger than 100 acres or valued over \$100,000. This directly conflicts with a 2018 state Supreme Court ruling, which found that easements were not intended to require Land Board involvement and are final once approved by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission.

HB 279, introduced by Bob Brown (R-Thompson Falls), would allow licensed, “ethical” trappers to trap wolves and then be reimbursed with private funds for costs incurred during harvest. This bill amounts to a bounty on wolves, commercializes wildlife, and won’t solve elk or wolf management challenges. Unfortunately this bill did pass the committee and so we will have to take our lobbying efforts to the floor.

HB 332, sponsored by Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), would give county commissioners authority over the transport of wild bison within the state. Granting this power erodes MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks’ authority over wildlife, and the bill is written in such a way that a county growth policy could be employed to have regulatory authority over bison relocation. This would be the only instance when a growth policy has regulatory power. The bill also requires transferred bison to be certified as brucellosis free, which is already required of any bison transports.

Those are just a few. There is much more to come, and as we push ahead we will stay focused on our *top* priorities:

- Protecting our most important resource: water
- Fighting anti-wolf and predator regulations
- Securing funding for better wildlife and habitat management
- Fighting against legislation that would negatively impact Habitat Montana



Sharp-tailed Grouse. Photo by Bob Martinka.

We will continue sending “Action Alerts” asking you to contact your Representative or Senator on key bills. Thanks for your support! Have your friends join too.

Just visit <http://mtaudubon.org/>, scroll to the bottom and share your email address! And, as always, you are welcome in Helena any time. We have a day designed especially for you: March 8 is Conservation Lobby Day, starting at 9:00 am! Location TBD.

I hope to see you in Helena! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me, Amy Seaman, (aseaman@mtaudubon.org) or Wyatt Smith (wsmith@mtaudubon.org). You are welcome to join us any day!

-- Amy Seaman

LCAS February 19 Board Meeting Highlights

Membership: As of Feb 19, 2019, there are 173 LCAS members. However, there are 120 folks from the last two years who have not yet renewed their LCAS memberships. Postcards will be sent asking for their support.

Carroll College Grants for the 2018-2019 academic year: this was the first year of the LCAS effort to encourage and support Carroll College student research projects or reports that address the mission of LCAS. There were seven submissions. A review committee made recommendations based on the proposed topic, its relevance to the LCAS mission and geographic area, the project description, and a reference letter from a faculty member. The Board voted to award two \$1000 grants:



Sandhill Crane with colt. Photo by Bob Martinka.

Tessa Groves is studying Environmental Policy, Project Management and Business Administration. She proposes dividing the Helena area into 10 sub-regions and analyzing the costs and benefits of managing and conserving wild bird habitats in each of these sub-areas. This will show where the benefits of conservation and management are higher than the costs (and vice versa), and this information can be used to identify locations where conserving and managing habitats makes the most sense from an economic perspective.

Shane Sater is studying Environmental Science. Since 2017 he has led LCAS efforts to document changes occurring along Sevenmile Creek associated with PPLT's restoration efforts. Eighty bird surveys in all seasons have documented 129 bird species. He proposes to summarize all of this data, both quantitatively and qualitatively, into an "accessible, engaging" report. He will prepare and present the results at a Carroll College public event to showcase the dynamic stories of birds and habitat in this area, as restoration efforts proceed and the habitat improves.

Regulating Reservoir Bird Blind Proposal:

Continued discussion included FWP support for the project, a maintenance MOU with FWP, identification of a site, accessibility, and different design options. A mini-grant application to Montana Audubon has been submitted to request assistance with funding the project.

LCAS 2019 Field Trips: The LCAS Board members will work together to lead our 2019 field trip season and recruit volunteer leaders. The board discussed suggestions for field trip destinations. Stay tuned for dates!



Juvenile Western Kingbirds line a fence at the Helena Regulating Reservoir. Photo by Dan Ellison.

The View from Sevenmile Creek: February

Note: The surveys on Sevenmile Creek are a collaboration between LCAS and Prickly Pear Land Trust (PPLT). PPLT acquired the Sevenmile property in 2016 for open space and habitat purposes. Stream restoration activities in the area are ongoing, and public access is not permitted at this time. PPLT provides access to LCAS volunteers specifically to conduct these bird surveys. Questions? Contact Nate Kopp, nate@pricklypearlt.org.

Do you remember early February, when there was barely any snow yet and the temperatures were balmy? At Sevenmile Creek, a large flock of American Tree Sparrows – at least 18 of them – foraged for hardy insects along ice shelves and dead vegetation near the stream. A Song Sparrow brightened the alders with its lively song, and I even heard a few song renditions from one of the tree sparrows. The landscape reminded me of spring. In fact, I wondered if I might see an early Western Meadowlark or Mountain Bluebird.

As I write this now, a north wind is carrying a constant stream of snowflakes past the window, the spruces at Carroll College are bending their branches underneath the accumulation, and the thermometer at the airport is reading two degrees below zero Fahrenheit. But in spite of three weeks (and counting) of intense winter weather, the tree sparrows have hung on.

Mid-February found them moving through the riparian shrubs in the early afternoon, making lively “tip!” and “switl” calls. I wondered how far they were moving, and if they would continue to use this snowy landscape. This Saturday, Kadie Gullickson (botany technician, Helena National Forest) joined me on a cross-country ski survey which proved largely devoid of birds. An hour and a half in, the wind had picked up out of the north and the snow swirled up in wintry vortices. Then we heard it over the hiss of skis on frigid snow: a “tip” call, then another, from the edge of the streamside shrubs.

As I hunker down inside and dream of meadowlarks, alder catkins, and green grass, I think of those tree sparrows, braving the cold every day and night. Do they, too, dream of spring?

The story of that tree sparrow out there in the swirling snow sticks with me. They *are* arctic birds, and I’m sure they’re at least better able to cope with this weather than I am. As the polar air grips Montana and the snow keeps piling up, I’ll be hoping they find enough food and cover to make it. And I’ll keep supporting projects like Sevenmile Creek, and wondering at the tree sparrows and their incredible lives. They, and so many other birds, need places like this. Places which give them the space, food, and cover they need. Places which we, together, can preserve.

-- Shane Sater, writing on a snowy February 25



American Tree Sparrow by Shane Sater.



The wind picks up fresh snow in a local ground blizzard. Photo by Shane Sater.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Jennifer Baker, Dave Dalthorp, Marlys Forbes, Pam & Jason Fruh, Angie Leprohon & David Nimck, Nancy Lunday and Peter Mathes.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** John Mott, Gregg & Wendy Wheeler, Michele Marsh, Joan Bishop, Bruce Desonia, Don & Donna Eisenmenger, Neal & Mary Ruedisili, Bill Bucher, Connie Herzig, Joe & Laurie Lamson, Debrah & John Fosket, Helen & Mike Murray, Sandra & Len Wheeler, Lorna Milne & Jon Motl, Gail Moser, Lisa Bay, Bill Rainey, Carol & Rodney Bischoff, Gail Kuntz & Terry Wheeling and Janet Sperry.



Song Sparrow endures a January snowstorm. Photo by Janice Miller.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Linda Michael and Dee Anna & Andre Eckerson.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Brad Willcockson, Gerald Wozniak, Carolyn Jensen, Berma Saxton, Bill Cook, Heidi Youmans, Gary Grzebielski, Diana Herrick and Robert Shepard.

LCAS MEMBERSHIP: A new membership or renewal is \$15 per household and is current for one year, January 1 through December 31. Please be sure we receive all your correct contact information by filling out a registration form located either in this newsletter or printed from www.lastchanceaudubon.org. Please send completed registration form and your \$15 check to: LCAS, PO Box 924, Helena, MT 59624.

PRINTED and ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS: We want all our members to stay informed about chapter news and happenings. If you do not have access to email, staying current with your chapter membership to Last Chance Audubon Society guarantees that you will continue to receive a printed version of our newsletter. If you do have email access, please help us keep printing costs to a minimum and opt to receive our newsletter electronically. Those dollars we save will be spent for important bird habitat, education and outreach. Thank you.

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

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<https://www.facebook.com/lastchanceaudubon>
Website: <http://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/>

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PO Box 924, Helena MT
59624 with check for
\$15.
All contributions are tax
deductible.

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