

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

September 2024

An Epic Journey to the Antarctic

Tuesday, Sept. 10, 2024 - Program begins 7:00 PM
Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.
Free – All Are Welcome

Join Lou Bruno on an incredible epic journey aboard the National Geographic Explorer to the Antarctic, South Georgia, and the Falkland Islands. This is the world of snow-capped peaks, icebergs, pristine endless seas, and an unbelievable diversity of marine mammals and pelagic birds. Lou will offer a naturalist's perspective on the life histories of these creatures and the fascinating adaptations that make them able to thrive and deal with the changing conditions affecting their existence. Lou's presentation is illustrated with exceptional photographs of the wildlife and stunning landscapes found on this expedition. He will also trace the heroic 1915 journey of Ernest Shackleton and his crew of 27 men from Antarctica across hundreds of miles of open ocean to the Stromness Whaling Station at South Georgia.



King Penguins - Photo by Lou Bruno

Lou Bruno is a retired educator and professional naturalist who resides in East Glacier Park Montana. He grew up in Brooklyn and Queens, New York where he started birding as a twelve-year-old. His passion for all things natural led him to pursue a biology degree at the University of Montana, which he received in 1971. He taught in Browning, Montana for 20 years until he retired in 1995. Lou also spent many years guiding in Glacier, Yellowstone, Alaska and Mexico. He is a past president of the Montana Wilderness Association and the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance, a local group that is working to protect Glacier National Park, the northern Rocky Mountain Front and the Continental Divide Ecosystem. He is currently the Vice-president of the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance and was one of its founders.



What's NEW with LCAS!

September 1, 2024

Greetings Birders! Did you know that the word "birding" originally referred to hunting birds? It wasn't until 1896 that "birding" came to mean watching birds. Florence Merriam's Book, "A-Birding on a Bronco," introduced the concept of birdwatching in the late 19th century.

But that's not what I really want to talk about. We are at the beginning of our 53rd season of Last Chance Audubon. Pretty amazing. We have some great programs planned, as well as the Christmas Bird Count and the Birdathon in the spring.

It's not too early to start planning for the Birdathon. First of all, you need a snappy name, like "Brother, Can you Sparrow a Dime" or "Chick Magnets." We'd love for you to create your own team. For the last Birdathon (May 2024) we had six birding teams, which was more than ever before. You raised over \$5000 from the Birdathon. Thank you!

As the Birdathon is a fundraiser for Last Chance Audubon, our rules are not too strict. After all, the point of it is to get out there and see birds while raising money for a worthwhile cause. So, while the guidelines say to record as many birds as possible in a 24 hour period, some creative birdathoners (new word!) divided that 24 hours into 3 eight hour segments. That sounds more doable, doesn't it?

The results of the May 2024 Birdathon are posted on our website lastchanceaudubon.org, including a video of one team's birding adventures. Check it out! You will be interested to know that two teams recorded seeing a bear, and even though bears do not get counted as birds for the purposes of raising money, I'm sure it was exciting!

We are sorry to announce that Brian Shovers and Jo Lace are "retiring" from board duties. Be sure to read Nan Breuninger's article in this issue about their contributions over many years.

You will notice a new regular feature in the newsletter: BIRDING BOOKS. This doesn't mean birdwatching guides, although it could. It is intended to get us reading about birds, the environment, and the natural world in general. Fiction or Non-fiction. Adult reading or children's books. If you have a book you'd like to recommend to other birders, please contact me: Leslie Smith at 406-431-4995 or leslie_smi@yahoo.com

See you at the first fall meeting, Tues Sept 10 at 7 pm. Bring a friend!

Leslie,
LCAS Board President

Thank You Brian Shovers for Your Dedication!



Brian Shovers, longtime secretary of Last Chance Audubon, stepped down from the board and his job as secretary this June. He joined LCAS in 1994, thirty years ago. Brian says, "It is gratifying to see how the organization has grown and how vital and alive it is now."

In the late 1990's LCAS ran into a rough spot. Membership dwindled and at times there were few officers. Brian and his wife, Jo Lace, and other dedicated members stepped in. "We felt we had the time, if expectations weren't too high. We kept going." Brian and Jo did the banking, continued the Birdathon, and Jo organized some birding classes. After some years membership increased, and Janice Miller took over the job of president.

At the 2015 Bird Festival Brian and Jo received the *Lifetime Achievement Award* "for their decades of serving as the 'glue' that holds LCAS together."

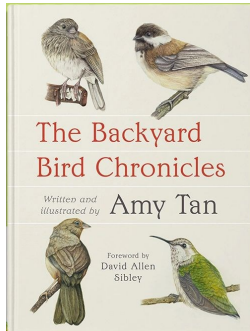
LCAS Announces Scholarship Awards

The Last Chance Audubon Society has announced the Spring 2024 awards of two \$1,000 scholarships made available to students to support their continuing studies in fields related to the LCAS mission.

Morgan Schweyen is the first East Helena High School student to receive an LCAS Scholarship. She has been accepted at Montana State University and plans to pursue a career in Architecture and Environmental Design. Morgan is a member of the National Honor Society and has been an active volunteer in community activities, including child care and food security. She has also been a varsity tennis player during her time at East Helena High.

Arianah Sargent, a Carroll College Junior, receives this award in support of her research activities as part of a project initiated by professor Patricia Heiser. The goal of the study is to determine whether the paleoecologic, hydrologic, and climate history of this part of central Montana can be determined by evaluating core sites including the Big Belts and Lake Helena. Prior to the formation of Lake Helena, about 100 years ago, the area was likely made up of wetlands, ponds, streams and beaver complexes. Studies of core sediments will help complete the picture of the pre-Lake Helena area and how climate and landscapes have changed over time. This award will help Arianah continue her participation in this project, and allow her to focus on her personal research on how charcoal sediments found in the core samples can help tell the fire history of this area.

Congratulations to the award winners!



BIRDING BOOKS — *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*, by Amy Tan

If you have read any other books by Amy Tan (*The Joy Luck Club*, *The Kitchen God's Wife*), you know you're in for a treat. Tan's writing is easy, natural and feels almost like she's talking to you. This is not a technical book. Instead, it's the published version of Tan's personal birding journal, in her own backyard, during the pandemic.

When she begins, she has some basic skills and knowledge, but two years on, through diligent and patient observation, she has deepened her understanding of the birds in her area and their behaviors. The location is in Marin County, Calif and as such, is limited to the birds that live or migrate there.

The book is illustrated with her own drawings, some “cartoonish” (her own word) and some beautifully created. Interspersed with her observations and drawings are her musings on natural selection, humans' interaction with birds, anthropomorphism, and *cats!* Entertaining and charming!

This book is available at Lewis & Clark Library

Backyard Invasion

A couple of days ago, I looked out back and noticed black birds all over the yard. Until I looked more closely, I assumed it was a flock of starlings pecking through the grass. But no, we had an invasion of Common Grackles. Related to black birds, they have longer tails and heavier beaks. Though not the most beautiful birds, in the sun their heads and necks shine with a lustrous iridescence.

Though mostly staying on the ground, a few tried the bird feeder. They barely fit on the dish of the tube-shaped feeder, but one or two at a time managed to dominate it until a buddy fluttered up and pushed them off. I could even hear the oil seeds cracking in their beaks. The usual denizens of our feeder—finches, chickadees, and sparrows— didn't have a chance.

Earlier in the season, we hadn't seen more than a couple grackles in our yard, so perhaps they are flocking up and thinking about a trip to warmer climates. A noisy bunch, with raucous calls that are hardly songs, they often sound like high-pitched squeaky door hinges.

They visited again the next day, remembering the cheap meal. I wonder who will visit next? I'm hoping for an invasion of waxwings.



Common Grackle - Photo by Bob Martinka

World Shorebird Day – September 8, 2024

On Sunday, September 8th, Last Chance Audubon Society (LCAS) members and friends will participate in World Shorebird Day. This field trip is an effort to census shorebirds as they move through our area. The survey provides a snapshot of the species that occur here, and the relative abundance of these birds. The field trip will take place on the Canyon Ferry Lake WMA and is *free to all members* of LCAS. Non-members are welcome to join the outing for \$15. The fee includes a membership to LCAS for the remainder of the calendar year.

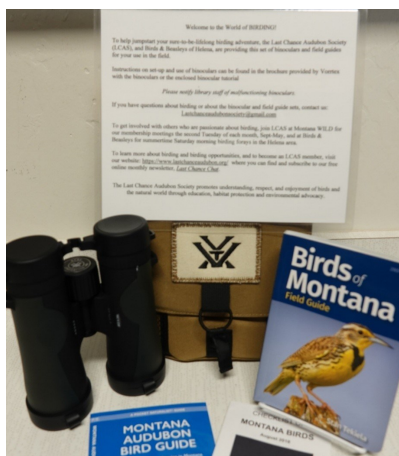


Baird's Sandpiper - Photo by Stephen Turner

Shorebird identification can be daunting especially as the birds molt into their off-season (winter) plumage. Several experts will be on hand to assist with ID'ing these challenging birds. In addition to shorebirds, we will be surveying for other migrating species that are beginning their journey south. Several species of warblers and other migrants should be on tap for the day.

We will meet at the northeast end of the Costco parking lot for a 7:00 am departure (please arrive a few minutes early), and return to Helena no later than 1:00 pm. This trip has limited space and is nearly full. If you would like to join us, please contact Stephen Turner to register: turnstonest@gmail.com. The survey route is approximately 1.5 miles round trip on level ground. Please plan for any type of weather and bring binoculars and a spotting scope (if you have one). Don't miss this incredible outing!

Bird Watching Kits Well Utilized by Public



Introduced in the fall of 2023, Birdwatching kits containing binoculars and field guides have been distributed to 5 area libraries for lending to the public. Last Chance Audubon reports that since late fall of 2023, there has been a total check-out of 34 sets from local libraries. These include: Lewis and Clark Library, Helena – 12 sets; Augusta Library – 7 sets; Bookmobile – 8 sets; East Helena Library – 4 sets; and Lincoln Library – 3 sets. Many thanks to Last Chance Audubon, Lewis and Clark Library, Birds and Beasleys, and all those who helped for a successful first year of providing this birding resource to the community.

Basics of Backyard Birding

Heading out of town with a camera and/or pair of binoculars to explore the world of birds is endlessly fascinating and is a relaxing, low-impact outdoor pursuit that most anyone can do. But, a person need not venture far to see the beauty of birds - you can do so right out your back door. The key to attracting birds to your yard is to offer food, water, and vegetation - all easy to provide and set up, even in a small space. If you're already a vegetable gardener, growing flowers will add beauty to the landscape and nutrients to the soil (and lure bees in to facilitate pollination of your veggies). Birds will be drawn in by the seeds and fruits of flowers, such as sunflowers, Virginia creeper, bee balm, aster, echinacea, borage, milkweed...In addition, trees and bushes, like apple, chokecherry, lilac, and honeysuckle provide a great source of berries, habitat, and protection for birds of all kinds.



If planting isn't an option for you, black-oil sunflower seeds and peanuts are nutritious and appetizing sources of food that can be offered in bird feeders. You can also purchase suet cakes or make your own peanut butter balls loaded with millet and sunflower seeds. To round out your bird 'restaurant', particularly in our dry Montana climate, providing a water source, such as a bird bath or fountain, will have many birds flocking to your yard. Keep it simple to start and add on as you learn more - you'll be amazed at how even a small space with *clean* (important for preventing the spread of diseases) feeders and baths will be enough for birds to stop in to rest and rejuvenate. And, to provide you with backyard birding enjoyment!

Last Chance Audubon FY2024 Budget

At its August meeting, the LCAS Board approved a budget for the chapter's FY 2024 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025). Below is a summary of the new budget.

Revenues for the upcoming year are anticipated from sources and events including membership dues, donations, 2025 Birdathon, fall fundraiser, and a stipend from the National Audubon Society.

Expenses for FY 2024 will include preparation of monthly newsletters, scholarships and other educational activities, special chapter summer event, continued work on the Bill and Marianne Rainey Memorial nest webcam project, donation to Montana Audubon, habitat protection grant award, meeting expenses, liability insurance, website maintenance, post office box rental, Secretary of State registration fee, and a subscription to the National Audubon Society magazine for the local public library.

Starting Off Strong With Successful Black Swift Surveys

At the beginning of July, the Montana Audubon Black Swift research team began surveys in the far northwest corner of Montana, near Troy and Yaak. Three of the four sites surveyed



Black Swift on a nest —Photo by Bo Crees

were occupied by nesting Black Swifts - a great start to the field season! The team was thrilled to get wonderful looks of these elusive birds that nest exclusively in the mossy and wet spray zone of waterfalls.

However, the path to Black Swifts isn't all sunshine and roses... more like pre-dawn darkness and devil's club, with a healthy mix of mountain lions and steep, rocky terrain! In the latest post on the Montana Audubon website, the research team gives us a behind-the-scenes taste of what it's like to be in the field.

And, for a look at some of the photos the team took of nesting Black Swifts, be sure to check out the video at the bottom of the post!

Read the post and watch the video on the [Montana Audubon website](#): Montana Audubon Kicks Off Field Season with Successful Black Swift Surveys.

August 2024 LCAS Board Meeting Summary

- The LCAS board held its first meeting of the new fiscal year on August 6 and approved the FY 2024 budget (see separate budget summary).
- A new pole for the Spring Meadow osprey nest has been installed on the NE side of the State Park. LCAS and MT Wild are discussing installation of a new webcam and an "exclusion" covering to prevent Canada Geese from using the new site before Ospreys return each spring.
- The LCAS education outreach team is exploring ways to make LCAS materials available to more diverse audiences.
- Future fall membership meeting presentations include Lou Bruno's birding experiences in Antarctica, MT Audubon/Americorp's bird migration activities, and Dan Ellison's birding trip to Australia/New Zealand.
- The board will decide whether to hold a Fall Fundraiser in September, with uses of resulting funds to possibly include clean-up and vegetation management at the K-Mart ponds, new signage/kiosks at one or more local birding "hot spots", and/or installing a new bench at the Regulating Reservoir.
- The board will be exploring a new LCAS outreach and member recruitment effort focused on diverse segments of Helena area residents.
- The "Birding Guide of the Helena Valley" brochure will be updated/reprinted in Spring 2025.

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Kenda Herman, Kelsey McGlothin, Jacob Lydic, Darlene Davis, and Ann Storrar.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** Dan & Delight Sullivan, Joe & Laurie Lamson, Betsy Griffing, John Grant, Joan Crum, Deloris Tintinger, Robert Turnquist, and Debbie Westfall.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Rebecca Ridenair, Larry Peterman, Linda Peterson, Robert Seaman, Matt & Jeanette Uland, John Hansen, Kathy Gessaman, Thomas Martello, Dolores Smith, Rosana Skelton, Wilma Wheeler, Raymond Hofland, Deborah Butzlaff, Maxine Ferguson, and Sharon Bell.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Nina Barfuss, Jean Bond, David Gans, Pat Grantham, Alice Hinshaw, Wallace Jewell, Billie McDonald, James Perkins, Anne Perkins, Jay Simons, Jean Smith, William Snider, Leslie Smith, Rory Johnson, Heather Zaluski, James Driggers, Norma Tirrell, Alan Nicholson, Joseph Furshong, Carol Shope, Gloria Wels, Irene Erdie, John Anthony, Robin Hall, Fred Larsen, Dallas, Phylis Marshik, Douglas Abbott, Gretchen Bingman, Wendy Clark, Sally Hilander, Curtis Lund, Barbara Schnackel, Raven Smith, Meghan Stuppert, Glen Phillips, Susan Buringrud, Claudia Dirkes, Patricia Farley, Paul Ferry, Susan Jackson, Richard Juhnke, and Judy Murphy.

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
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Support LCAS through a donation or membership today!

Membership

Donate Now

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Website: <https://www.lastchanceaudubon.org/>

LCAS BOARD

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Education: Sumner Sharpe,
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Field Trips: Don Skaar
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Habitat: open

Meeting Set-up: Doug Hansen,
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