

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

October 2024

Fall Birding Down Under

Tuesday, October 8, 2024 – Program begins 7:00PM
Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Ave.
Free – All Are Welcome

Join Dan Ellison for a virtual birding tour of Nelson, New Zealand and Sydney, Australia. In late February 2024 Dan and his spouse, Jane Fournier, traveled “down under” to visit Jane’s family. In both locations Dan was able to find days to visit birding hotspots with local experts. His primary interests in Nelson were endemic species in the Brook Waimarama Sanctuary, and the mud flats on Boulder Bank favored by wintering terns, waterfowl, and shorebirds such as the Bar-tailed Godwit. Across the Tasman Sea in the greater Sydney area, he visited national parks on three sides of the city offering diverse habitats for both resident and migratory bird species. New Zealand and Australia provided Dan with birding experiences far from Montana. In addition, he found photo opportunities with unusual wildlife such as bats, marsupials, and reptiles.



Rainbow Lorikeet - Photo by Dan Ellison

Dan grew up in the Bitterroot Valley, graduated from the Naval Academy, and served on active duty for 26 years as a Navy pilot and staff officer. He returned to Montana in 1999 and settled in Helena where he worked for several years in State Government including as Chief Financial Officer for Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. In 2009 he was elected to the Helena City Commission and was re-elected in 2013. He divides personal time between managing the family ranch near Stevensville, bird watching, wildlife photography, fly fishing, and other outdoor pursuits with his botanical artist and spouse Jane Fournier.



What You Can Do to Help!

October 1, 2024

Greetings! We are all aware that birds are threatened by the interference of humans. Of the 1,093 species protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, 89 bird species are listed as either threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. An additional 342 species are listed as Birds of Conservation Concern.

Loss or degradation of habitat, collisions with man-made structures and landscape changes resulting from climate change are all contributing factors to the decline in bird populations. We know you are concerned and that is why you are a member of Last Chance Audubon. We can put our dollars into conservation projects, support groups such as Audubon, and make our concerns heard when voting.

There are things we can each do on a much smaller scale that will help, too.

- By providing birds with a safe place to refuel and rest, you will help them manage their migration.
- Plant your garden with native plants.
- Provide a safe place for birds to be, such as shrubs or trees (Shane Sater recommends Chokecherry as a great example of a native “thicket”).
- Provide available water in your yard. Limit it to about 1.5” deep, provide a rock or branch for birds to light on, and place the water feature near one of those safe hiding places.
- Limit the lights in your garden or around your house. Join up with neighbors or encourage your community to “turn out the lights” to aid birds in migration.

These and other ideas can really help birds survive and thrive in the environment we all share!

Leslie
LCAS Board President



*Veery in Migration -
Photo by Bob Martinka*

October Big Day –October 12, 2024

October is right around the corner, and that means it's time to mark your calendars for [October Big Day—12 Oct 2024!](#)

Like Global Big Day, October Big Day is an opportunity to unite around our shared love of birds. Last October, nearly 36,332 people from 191 countries submitted 83,735 checklists with eBird, demonstrating the power of birds to bring people together. Each year more and more participants join in this global celebration. How many people will contribute this year?

Wherever you are on 12 October, take a few minutes to join in this global celebration. Participate from anywhere—even from home! By taking part in October Big Day you're also celebrating [Global Bird Weekend](#) and [World Migratory Bird Day](#). Be a part of the global team and help set a new record for October birding.



Plan for your October Big Day

Whether you're a seasoned birder or just starting out, October Big Day is the perfect opportunity to contribute to participatory science, enjoy nature, and connect with a global community of bird lovers. With less than a month left to the big day, here's how you can prepare for the celebration:

- **Take the free [eBird Essentials course](#)** for an introduction to eBird or learn how to make your checklists more valuable for science and conservation,
- **Use [eBird Mobile Explore](#)** to plan your route by locating nearby places to go birding and recently reported species,
- **Explore [Birds of the World](#)** to discover new things about your favorite species —**FREE ACCESS** starting 8am ET Friday, October 11th through 9am ET Monday, October 14th,
- **Download the free [Merlin Bird ID app](#)** to help you to identify the birds you see and hear on October Big Day. [Upload your recordings](#) to your eBird checklists to help Merlin identify more birds by sound.

How to Participate

Get an eBird account: eBird is a worldwide bird checklist program used by millions of birders. It's what allows us to compile everyone's contributions into a single massive October Big Day list—while at the same time gathering data to help scientists better understand birds. [Sign up here](#). It's 100% free from start to finish.

Watch birds on 12 Oct: It's that simple. You don't need to be a bird expert or go out all day long. Even 10 minutes of birding from home counts. October Big Day runs from midnight to midnight in your local time zone. You can report what you find from anywhere in the world.

Enter what you see and hear in eBird: You can enter your observations [via our website](#) or download the [free eBird Mobile app](#) to make submitting lists even easier. Please enter your checklists no later than 15 Oct to be included in the results announcement.

Watch the results roll in: During the day, follow along with bird reports from more than 180 countries in real-time on our [October Big Day page](#).

BIRDING BOOKS - Oct 2024

***Birding to Change the World*, by Trish O’Kane**



This is the memoir of a woman who lost her Louisiana home in Hurricane Katrina and then uprooted and moved to Madison, WI. She talks about the devastation of losing everything and the long-term emotional challenges that this caused. She also discovers early on, that being in nature and “be-friending” birds gave her great solace and helped her heal.

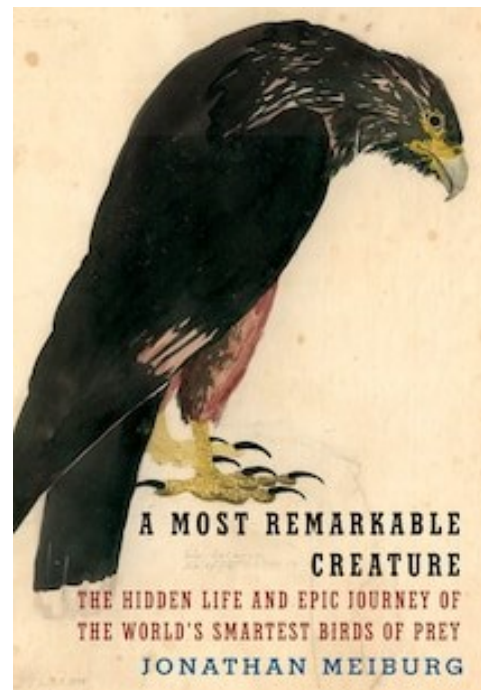
In her new home, she led a fight for conservation of a local park with open space, which both benefitted the local and migratory wildlife and also served as a sanctuary for marginalized members of the community who had no gardens of their own.

Her story is inspiring, uplifting and sometimes humorous. It’s a great read. This book is available at Lewis and Clark Library.

***A Most Remarkable Creature: The Hidden Life of the World's Smartest Birds of Prey*, by Jonathan Meiburg**

Our September speaker, Lou Bruno, mentioned a book about caracaras. Some of the book documents the time William Henry Hudson, a 19th century naturalist, spent in the Pampas of Argentina and his interest in caracaras in that region. There are nine species of caracaras, birds that belong to the same family as the peregrine falcon, and are known as the "clowns of the raptor world." Meiburg presents the history and evolution of two species, the Striated Caracara living in Patagonia and the Red-throated Caracara living in the jungles of Guyana. These birds are curious, social, scrappy, smart, fun-loving, thieving, raucous, gregarious, and adaptable. Reading about their antics and abilities is fascinating and comical.

Note: A Crested Caracara was seen in southwestern Montana (Bannack area) this past spring, far from its more common range along the Mexican-American border from Baja California to Eastern Texas, with an isolated population in Central Florida.



LAST CHANCE AUDUBON FALL FUNDRAISER 2024

This fall, we are raising funds for “landscape maintenance” at K-Mart Wetlands. What this really means is cutting back Russian Olive and Cottonwood that has flourished to the point of making birding difficult. We will work with the City of Helena and Montana Conservation Corps to do this work, probably in the Spring.

However, we are starting to raise funds now. To make it more exciting, Last Chance Audubon is willing to match funds donated to this project. To donate, write a check to LAST CHANCE AUDUBON, and note that it is specifically for the 2024 Fall Fundraiser on the memo line. Checks can be mailed to:

Last Chance Audubon
P.O. Box 924
Helena, MT 59624-0001



Ruby-crowned Kinglet at K-Mart Wetlands - Photo by Bob Martinka

Or go to our website, www.lastchanceaudubon.org and click on the **DONATE NOW** button on the Home Page. Again, please reference the 2024 Fall Fundraiser in the comment section.

Thank you in advance for making this worthwhile project possible!

September LCAS Board Meeting Summary

- The Board voted to donate \$500 to the Montana Conservation Elders group in support of their conservation outreach activities for kids and families.
- The Education Committee is working with Carroll College on the next round of LCAS scholarships for student conservation projects and subsequent presentation opportunities. The committee is also working with Helena school teachers and counselors to provide grant funding for student conservation projects.
- The Board will conduct a fall fundraiser to raise funds for vegetation management and clean-up at the “K-Mart” ponds. LCAS will match any fund contributed from our fundraising efforts.
- LCAS will be installing infrastructure “arms” on the new Spring Meadow osprey nesting platform to support an eventual webcam at the new pole site located in the NE section of the park. Purchase of the new webcam is on hold until Ospreys occupy the new site.

Fall Raptor Migration is Under Way!

As the leaves slowly begin to lose their summer green and fade into autumn gold, much of the avian community is preparing for the journey of a lifetime. Their focus? Migrating *home*. Birds of all sizes and shapes will soon leave their summer range and drift south – a potentially dangerous journey that may be a “short” hop to the plains of Wyoming, or a marathon flight to the southern tip of South America. While many small passerines pass overhead during the overnight hours, the giants of the sky look for the opportunity to move while the daytime winds are favorable. These amazing birds are right out our back door. Look up! Don’t miss this incredible event!

On a relatively warm, sunny and calm October day, snow touches the higher peaks that surround the Helena Valley. Among the nearby mountain ranges that we recognize are the Big Belt Mountains. We appreciate them for their incredible views, their host of wildlife, and their ability to hold snowpack for Spring runoff. Migrating raptors may find benefit in the Big Belts for these reasons as well, but a distinct meteorological feature caused by this huge outcropping, occurs here. And this feature may provide the biggest benefit of all.



GEMS Site in the Big Belt Mountains—Photo by Stephen Turner

As raptors from the north work their way south, they often utilize the Rocky Mountains and the variable mountain winds to assist with flight. The winds become the raptor’s ally and allow the birds to move through the mountains on outstretched wings. As the birds approach the Helena Valley, the Big Belts loom tall to the east of Canyon Ferry Reservoir. Here, the raptors find their element on the strong southwesterly winds. [The 2019 Golden Eagle Migration Survey Report](#) explains.

Strong southwesterly winds typically prevail across the crest of the Big Belts. These consistent winds, combined with the Big Belts’ steep west-facing slopes, generate powerful orographic lift, thus providing ideal flying conditions for migrating raptors. The ‘lake-effect’ of Canyon Ferry Reservoir may enhance the consistency and speed of these westerly winds over the Big Belts. These factors, along with the prominent “leading line” created by the Rocky Mountain Front (which extends to the north well into Canada) make the southern end of the Big Belts a profoundly significant concentration point for migrating raptors in autumn.

- Fall 2019 Golden Eagle Migration Survey
Big Belt Mountains, Montana

Con’t

As migrating raptors encounter these incredible updrafts, they simply tilt their wings to maximize lift, and sail along the west slopes of the mountains at cruising speeds of 40mph (or faster). As they reach the southern end of the Big Belts near Townsend, the birds are concentrated in huge numbers. In a survey conducted in the fall of 2016 by Last Chance Audubon Society and Montana Audubon, 2630 Golden Eagles made their way through the Big Belt Mountains*! An incredible 4,389 total raptors, of 17 species were counted during this period!



Golden Eagle in migration—Photo by Stephen Turner

Eagles, Buteos, Accipiters, Falcons, Ospreys, and Turkey Vultures have all found this remarkable route where the burden of migration is eased, and we are able to bear witness to this amazing spectacle each fall. If you would like to spend a day in October soaring with the raptors, migrate south to [Duck Creek Pass](#) in the Big Belt Mountains**, turn your attention to the north and scan the skies. Who knows? Maybe you too will have the opportunity to witness over 300 Golden Eagles soaring by in a single day. Additional information is available by contacting turnstonest@gmail.com.

*Last Chance Audubon Society surveyed this migration route for three seasons (2015-2017). Results from the surveys were consistent year to year indicating that this route likely hosts the largest concentration of Golden Eagles in the lower 48 states. However, accessibility issues and safety challenges proved insurmountable, and the Board made the difficult decision to withdraw from the project. Montana Audubon and others tried to continue the survey but found similar difficulties. The project was discontinued after the 2019 season.

**Duck Creek Pass Road often requires a high clearance 4WD vehicle. If the road is passable, it is likely that snow may be a secondary issue. Snows arrive early in the season and drifts accumulate on the roads quickly. Cell service is sketchy at best. Plan your trip accordingly.

A Thank You Note from our Scholarship Awardee

Last Chance Audubon Society,

Settling into my first week of classes I am so grateful for this opportunity. All of your help financially and the inspirational insight you have offered is helping me grow into my place in the world. My goals of becoming an active local and global citizen are continually becoming more attainable because of your help. Thank you so much.

Morgan Schweyen

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Tanner Baird

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** William Snider, Jo Lace, and Brian Shovers

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Bryan Fox, James Fradette, Barrie Heinecke, Dennis Miller, and Joe Willis.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Ivelone Hodges, Susan Holton, Peter Petek, Mark Nigon, and Marlyn Atkins.

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.

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS ONLY: We no longer send hardcopies. The dollars saved 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 www.customerservice@audubon.org or contact them directly by phone at 1-844-428-3826. We are unable to forward memberships to National Audubon.

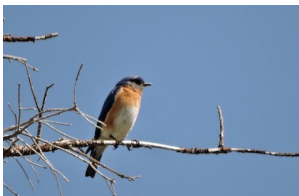
Sharon Dewart-Hansen

Membership Chair

smdewarthansen@charter.net

Helena (and surrounding area) Highlights!

Birding in Helena and Lewis and Clark County has been fantastic this year. So far 423 birders have reported to eBird a total of 271 species in the county. This list includes some very rare species, and one that has never been seen before. An Eastern Bluebird was seen in early June on Stemple Pass! The last observation of this species was back in 2007! On Sept. 2nd, a Red Knot was found at Lake Helena WMA. This species hasn't been seen since 2001! Lastly, on Sept. 14th, a Purple Martin was observed for the first time ever! Fall migration is happening now. So get out there! You might find something really special!



Eastern Bluebird—Photo by Dan Casey



Red Knot—Photo by Bob Martinka



Purple Martin—Photo by Bob Martinka

Last Chance Audubon Society
PO Box 924
Helena, MT 59624

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Support LCAS through a donation or membership today!

Membership

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Habitat: open

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