

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.

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A Study of Butterflies of Priest Pass

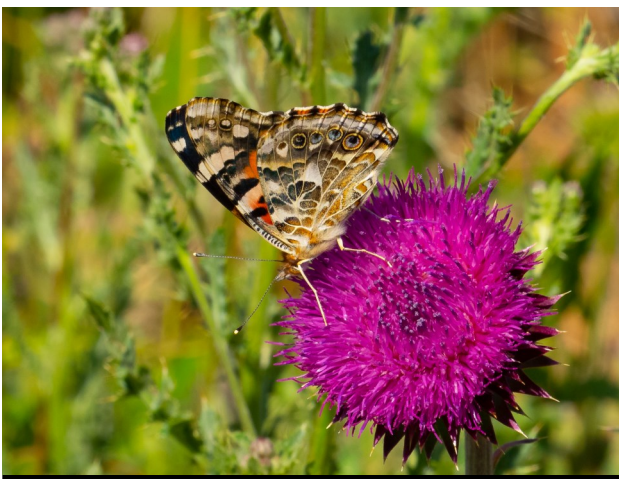
Tuesday December 10, 2024 – Program Begins 7:00PM

Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

In 2013, while Curt Serviss was birding in Texas, he became interested in butterflies and the challenge of working with these species. Returning to Montana, he researched the available literature concerning the State's butterfly population/distribution and determined that studies were rather limited and outdated. Based on this and his love of being in the Rocky Mountains, he decided to evaluate the butterfly species on the Continental Divide in the Priest Pass area, 15 miles west of Helena. The first five years of the study, which had identified a diverse population of 61 species, was published in *American Butterflies* in 2018. In that same year, a colleague with similar interest in photography and butterflies, initiated a study 6 miles to the west on MacDonald Pass. To date, the Priest Pass and MacDonald Pass butterfly studies have identified 76 and 68 species, respectively. This presentation will address the study methodology, present outstanding photographs of selected species to illustrate the diversity of the

butterfly population, and give an overview of the results.



Painted Lady - Photo by Curt Serviss

Curt Serviss is a retired geologist who lives in Helena, Montana. He holds an MS degree in Geology and Geophysics from the University of Missouri-Rolla. During his travels as a regional exploration geologist, he became interested in birding, documenting sightings on a life list and photographing birds. Since his retirement in 2008, he has traveled extensively in North America photographing wildlife.

Teacher Training Brings Wildlife into Classrooms

Tuesday, January 11, 2025 – Program Begins 7:00PM

Montana WILD, 2668 Broadwater Ave.

Free – All Are Welcome

Ryan Schmaltz will describe the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks teacher training sessions that are conducted all over the state. The focus of this training is to get Project Wild and other fish and wildlife curriculum into the hands of as many teachers as possible. The curriculum aims to get fish and wildlife in all subjects in school. Hundreds of educators have taken advantage of this training which gets educators' hands dirty learning about fish and wildlife and how to teach about it in schools. Each training session is typically a half day curriculum instruction and a half day of field experience with local Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Biologists. Join us for this fun program to learn more about the incredible things teachers are doing around the state to teach young Montanans about protecting wildlife.



Teacher Training – Photo by Ryan Schmaltz

Ryan Schmaltz is an Education Specialist for MT FWP where he has worked for 12 years. He is the State Project Wild Coordinator and also trains about 200-300 teachers a year in that curriculum effort. He coordinates the NASP National Archery in the Schools Program. He also leads education programs here at Montana WILD. Ryan was a Game Warden in South Dakota, Fisheries Tech in Utah and Idaho, and worked for the Wildlife and Fisheries division in North Dakota. He is a South Dakota State Wildlife and Fisheries graduate and has a degree in Range Science from MSU.

LCAS October Board Meeting Summary

LCAS' Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be on December 14, with participants invited to meet at the Crooked Frog restaurant (formerly Jorgensen's) between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. The Board will sponsor a social gathering after the CBC from 4:30-6:30 p.m. at the Lewis & Clark Brewery and will purchase a limited number of pizzas. Attendees will be able to purchase beverages and additional food items.

In coordination with Prickly Pear Land Trust, the Board will identify new locations for bird nesting boxes that are being built by LCAS members and invite volunteers to help with cleaning out existing boxes prior to the 2025 nesting season.

In response to a request from the Helena Outdoor Club (HOC), the Board will identify a LCAS speaker to attend a HOC meeting to discuss LCAS' mission and activities.

The next LCAS Board meeting is scheduled for December 3, but it may be cancelled if there are no agenda items requiring immediate attention. Regular monthly membership meetings with scheduled speakers will be held in December and January, but the December newsletter will cover both months.

From Montana Audubon!

Montana Audubon's Fall 2024 newsletter is here!

In this issue we share updates on our latest work, including:

- Celebrating permanent protection for the Owen Sowerwine Property
- A banner year for Black Swift monitoring
- 2025 Legislative Preview
- The Montana Audubon Center's partnership with Indian Education For All

And more!

Read the PDF version on the [Montana Audubon website!](https://www.mtaudubon.org/publications)



Save the date for the 2025 Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival



Though next summer seems far away, we're already hard at work planning the next Wings Across the Big Sky Birding Festival!

The festival will be held in Missoula, May 30 – June 1 2025. Montana Audubon is partnering with local chapter Five Valleys Audubon Society to host the festival, which will feature local field trips, a riveting keynote speaker, and engaging presentations. We're excited to share more details as soon as they're finalized!

More information coming soon, and keep an eye out for registration brochures in March 2025.

Wildlife Grant Application Period Now Open

Since 1996, Montana Audubon has awarded grants to organizations in support of research, education projects, and other activities that focus on the conservation, enhancement, and public appreciation of Montana's wildlife and natural communities.

More information, guidelines, and the application form can be found [on our website](https://www.mtaudubon.org/wildlifegrants).





All about the Christmas Bird Count and why we should participate — December 1, 2024

There's a lot of good that comes from the Christmas Bird Count. The first and most obvious is that in 1900, this Christmas day event changed from being a bird hunt to a bird count. The bird count was immediately successful and has grown from the original 25 locations in the U.S. and Canada to an event that takes place annually in over 20 countries.

The Christmas Bird Count is the ultimate and oldest organized Citizen Scientist event in the world. By gathering information from all counts, by recording the information and comparing it year to year, decade to decade and now, century to century, the stability of bird populations and bird habitat can be accurately measured.



*Redpoll - Photo by Sharon
Dewart-Hansen*

We are now able to track the impact of climate change on birds and make predictions as to their health and viability in years to come. The Audubon Climate Change Report, new in 2014, predicted the impact on the range of North American birds. Not surprisingly, current models show that 389 species will lose more than 50% of their current climatic range by 2080, if trends continue. Click on the link below to see more: [Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink](#).

The more data we can provide through the bird count each year, the more we are able to strategize towards the goal of protecting habitat. Our participation in the Christmas Bird Count is a powerful way to keep the information coming in.

In order to keep the information standardized, or comparable from year to year, each bird count is done in a specific location, or a "circle." The circle has a limitation of a 15 mile diameter around a given point. The circle aims to cover as many "birding hot spots" as possible in the area. The circle Last Chance Audubon covers each year has 9 sections, the same each time. If you lead or join a count, you will be working in an assigned section. The information you provide will be compared to data received in past years for the same circle, same section.

Be sure to read the article in this newsletter about how to participate in this year's Christmas Bird Count. You do not have to be an expert birder. If you are new to it, you might just become hooked! That would be excellent for the birds!

Helena Birders WhatsApp Group

Frustration is - finding out about a local rare bird sighting at an Audubon meeting almost a month after the bird was originally seen. Even more frustrating – going out to find the bird only to be told that the bird disappeared the day before you got out there! Aaaaargh! Well, as the saying goes, there’s an app for that! Introducing **Helena Birders WhatsApp Group!**



Over the past few years, a number of Helena birders have been using the WhatsApp messaging platform, to alert one another when a “first of year”, unusual, or vagrant bird species is seen in the area. The app can be utilized for real-time reporting, which allows those with messaging alerts set up on their mobile device, to “hear” about an unusual sighting almost immediately. In addition, those that post their observations to WhatsApp are able to provide detailed explanations of what they saw, where it was located, and even a map or photo (if they’re lucky enough to get one)! Did you hear about the Chestnut-sided Warbler found at K-Mart ponds? Or the Magnolia and Nashville Warblers seen at the Helena Regulating Reservoir? How about the Yellow-billed Loon frequenting the Reservoir for nearly three weeks? Did you know a Greater White-fronted Goose passed through the valley this fall? All were reported by birders who are using Helena Birders WhatsApp!

Ready to get started finding those rarities in the Helena Valley? Ready to share your own find with others? Join us today on WhatsApp!

Here’s how to sign up: You’ll need a mobile device that can accept messages through the WhatsApp platform (most Android and iOS smartphones will work). First download WhatsApp to your phone. Open a chat and message the administrator (406-521-0000) with a request to join the Helena Birders group. You will receive a notification back within a day or two accepting you as a member of the group. You will also be provided with a document that provides some direction regarding posting to the group. Please make sure you read these guidelines.

That’s it! You’re in! Welcome, and we look forward to hearing about your rare bird finds in the Helena Valley. Questions can be directed to Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com.



Magnolia Warbler - Photo by Stephen Turner



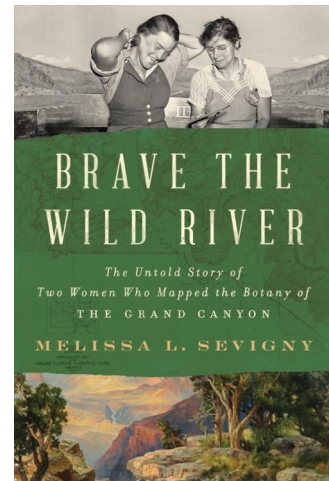
Chestnut-sided Warbler - Photo by Sharon Dewart-Hansen

BIRDING BOOKS — December

***Brave the Wild River* by Melissa L. Sevigny**

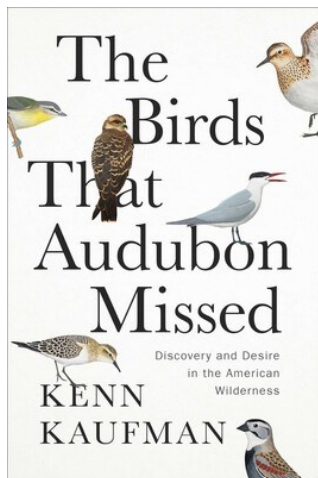
This memoir of two women botanists is a gripping adventure tale, sobering prediction of the impact of humans on the natural world, and a maddening but sometimes humorous description of what it was like to be a female scientist in the 1930's. The book is well researched from letters and diaries of the two women, along with their scientific cataloging of plants found along the way.

This running of the Colorado River occurred before dams were in place, at a time when the rivers truly ran wild...and dangerous. The crew was less than expert and in fact, very few people had attempted to run the river at all. The boats were built according to the specifications of the trip leader, an entrepreneur more than an experienced riverman.



All of this led to an exciting, unpredictable and daunting adventure. I could barely put the book down. The Lewis and Clark Library has this book. -- Leslie Smith

***The Birds That Audubon Missed - Discovery and Desire in the American Wilderness* by Kenn Kaufman**



With a provocative title, I read this book with great anticipation, and was not disappointed. On one level, it could be called “The life and Times of John James Audubon,” as it describes his entire life, his travels, his family, and his professional rivals and collaborators. It also does a nice job placing his life in historical context. This book, however, is much more than a biography. Authored by noted birder and author Kenn Kaufman, it is written from the perspective of a naturalist who labors hard to see things through the great artist’s eyes.

Much time is devoted to Audubon’s evolution as a painter, how he obtained and hunted birds for his paintings, his painting techniques, and the processes used to reproduce his paintings. His most famous publication was *Birds of America* -- 435 color plates of hundreds of bird species--originally published on large format paper that presented life-size versions of the birds in dramatic poses. It established him as the best-known bird artist of his time, a title that continues to this day.

Throughout his career, Audubon was fixated on discovering and painting species new to science. One of the most fascinating aspects of this book was to ask the question why Audubon didn’t describe and paint numerous species of birds that he undoubtedly heard or ob-

served on his collecting expeditions or around places he lived. The answer in part is that Audubon lived during a period when many bird species in America remained undescribed, and there was a tendency to shoehorn all sightings into the existing list of species, even if the bird observed was different than anything seen before. It didn't help that in Audubon's time, there was also uncertainty about what physical characteristics were considered adequate to define a unique species, and the lack of knowledge regarding variation in plumage with season or age also hindered correct taxonomic determinations. Although this topic can get a bit dry and technical, Kaufman does a wonderful job keeping the discussion lively and at a level even beginning birders will appreciate.

On the darker side, Kauffman delves into some of Audubon's less stellar moments, such as being a slaveowner and selling two of them while on a trip to New Orleans, when he could have simply set them free. Audubon was also prone to embellishing his own accomplishments, frequently attributing collections and observations of others to himself. Probably the most egregious episode was when he used portions of someone else's painting of a Golden Eagle and modified it and gave it the name "Bird of Washington," a new species of eagle 25% larger than the Bald Eagle. This ploy apparently was a way of building enthusiasm for subscribers to a pending publication, even though he knew this was false.

Of special interest to Montanans is the description of Audubon's trip up the Missouri River in 1843 to Fort Union at the Montana-North Dakota border. This was at a time when very few birds had been described by Europeans in Montana since the travels of Lewis and Clark. He ended up describing five new birds to science—including Sprague's Pipit and Baird's Sparrow, core grasslands species of the northern plains. He also found lots of Chestnut-collared Longspurs, but no Thick-billed Longspurs, which Kaufman believes was an oversight as they probably bred in the area.

The travels to Montana to discover new birds at a time when almost nothing was known of bird life in the northern plains, points to the "sense of discovery" theme that is woven throughout the book. Audubon was always trying to discover new species for science, but Kauffmann suggests that the magic of discovery is that it happens on a personal level. "Discovering" a species new to him (but not new to science) has provided fulfillment for him his entire life. Kauffmann keeps it personal and doesn't try to claim that this is what drives others to be nature lovers, but it resonated with me.

The book is an easy read, and because it ranges over so many topics, I think will be enjoyed by everyone from the casual birder to the serious lister, and from the historian to the bird taxonomist.

--Don Skaar



*Yellow-rumped Warbler
(Audubon's) — Photo by Bob
Martinka*

Don't Pick It Up!

What should you do with an injured bird? Ali Pons, Helena Wildlife Center Program Director, says your best response is protect the bird without stressing it. Your voice, your shadow, your touch will scare the bird, will send the bird's heartbeat off the charts.

For starters, it's best to wait a bit to see if the bird will recover and fly away. If the bird is in a safe place, leave it there. If cats are around, or it is in the hot sun you can put the bird in a container and keep it outside in a place where it can fly off. It does not need food or water. Be careful not to talk and, if possible, don't let the bird see you.

There is a narrow window of time for recovery of an injured bird, about 72 hours. If you decide to take a bird to the Wildlife Center for rehab, the staff will put it in isolation, watch and treat it, then release it if possible. The Center will accept all birds except nonnatives like House Sparrows, European Starlings, and Eurasian Collared-Doves.

Pons says that the first choice for the rehab center is to release birds but some of the seriously injured live, but wouldn't survive in the wild. The Center keeps some of these birds for their education program, calling them ambassador birds. Volunteers walk with ambassador birds Monday through Friday, around 9:30 am on the grounds at Montana Wild, 2668 Broadwater Avenue. School children come to see the birds and the public is welcome too.

In 2020, MT FWP announced that a new raptor rehabilitation facility would be built at Montana Wild. That project ran into a series of delays including the pandemic, cost increases, changes in personnel, etc. Now, it's exciting to let everyone know that the new center is back on track with secured funding, new architects, and the bidding process scheduled to begin in January. Construction could start as early as spring 2025. Watch for updates in future newsletters.



One way to keep birds from flying into windows is Acopian Bird Savers— Photo by Sue Newell

Nesting Box Volunteer Opportunities

Last Chance Audubon has made an effort to keep our local cavity nesters (think bluebirds, chickadees, and swallows) well supplied with nesting boxes for breeding season. There are boxes, literally, all over the Helena Valley. Spring Meadow State Park alone has 50 nesting boxes around the park. Lake Helena WMA, K-Mart Wetlands, and the Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir host dozens more, and these are only a few locations where boxes can be found. Cavity nesting structures provide a welcome place for our summer resident species to call home, if even for a short while. But like most homes, they often require a little TLC to ensure that the structure is able to host a family of birds for the season.



*Tree Swallow at nest box — Photo by
Bob Martinka*

LCAS is fortunate to have a small group of folks that work to make sure the spring chores are done and that the nesting boxes are move-in ready. Over the past few years **Joyce and Greg Bateman** have worked with local business, **FenceCrafters**, to secure donated cedar planks needed for building boxes. Joyce and Greg have, in turn, donated many of these boards to LCAS for bird boxes. These planks do not come cheap, and we are very fortunate to have a local business willing to make this donation! Thank you FenceCrafters! And thank you Joyce and Greg!

Many of these donated boards have ended up in the capable hands of sisters, **Berta and Rita Nason**. Berta and Rita have built dozens of boxes to replace structures that have been vandalized, removed or simply haven't held up to the Montana elements. While installing or making repairs to existing boxes, Rita and Berta have tidied up and cleaned out many of the other nesting boxes in anticipation of our spring arrivals. It is a big job and we are deeply indebted to Rita and Berta for keeping these boxes in top shape. Thank you for your ongoing efforts for our feathered friends!

Rounding out our nest box volunteers is LCAS board member **Sue Jackson**. Sue has dedicated time over the last two nesting seasons to survey boxes on Prickly Pear Land Trust's Sevenmile Creek property. She has arranged for maintenance on the nesting box route for the 2023 and 2024 nesting seasons, and provided a survey report to LCAS each year. It is amazing to see how use of the boxes has changed from one year to the next. 2024 was a banner year for Mountain Bluebirds at Sevenmile! Thank you, Sue! Your willingness and dedication of time is sincerely appreciated.

It's a small but mighty crew, and we are always looking for additional folks to help out with some of the duties to ensure safe and successful breeding seasons for our local cavity nesters. Are you able to help clean out boxes in the late fall or early spring? Want to help with building or box maintenance? How about taking on a survey route and visiting boxes a few times during the breeding season to see what's going on? No previous experience is needed - just a desire to help out the birds. Please contact Stephen Turner at turnstonest@gmail.com for additional information or to volunteer.



*Mountain Bluebird — Photo by Bob
Martinka*

Membership Report

Please welcome **Last Chance Audubon Society new members:** Julie Avina, Kimberley Crowley, and Meghan Bahn.

Sincere thanks to **Last Chance renewing members:** LeRoy Schramm, John Moore, Barry Hood and Eliza Frazer, Susan Near, Sue and Bruce Newell, Shawn Watts, Cliff and Catherine Sheets, Margaret Schaefer, Slim and Sharon Miller, Georgie Rehbein, and Rich Wirak.

Please also welcome **National Audubon Society new members:** Wendy Fox, Debbie Gabse, Penny Harrison, Debbie Nevins, Catherine Ockey, and Richard Swanson.

Sincere thanks to **National Audubon Society renewing members:** Sally Angove, Holly Franz, Linda Galloway, Kimberly Schaefer, Margaret Schaefer, and Donna Uken.

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

How to Make Home-made Suet!

With this vegetarian version of suet (traditionally it's made from rendered animal fat) you can provide the perfect winter substitute for birds that normally feast on insects. This lipid-rich treat can help prepare year-round residents for the long winter and is quite the draw for birds such as woodpeckers, wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice.

This recipe comes from the National Audubon website and was inspired by "The Misfit Baker" blog.

INGREDIENTS AND MATERIALS

- ~ 1 1/2 cups shortening (look for palm oil free options)
- ~ 3/4 cups nut butter (any kind)
- ~ 3 1/2 cups wild bird seed
- ~ 1 cup quick oats
- ~ 1/2 cup corn meal
- ~ Ice cube tray
- ~ Wire suet feeder



STEPS:

1. Mix the dry ingredients of bird seed, oats, and corn meal together and set aside.
2. Combine the shortening and nut butter in a separate bowl and melt. Stir until completely combined.
3. Pour the melted mixture into the dry ingredients and stir until combined.
4. Spoon mixture into the ice cube tray.
5. Freeze for one to two hours and place in your suet feeder!

Note: Not recommended for outdoor temperatures above 50 degrees.

Last Chance Audubon Society
PO Box 924
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