

LAHONTAN AUDUBON SOCIETY
A Chapter of National Audubon Society
ANNUAL REPORT to Our Members
July 1, 2004, to June 30, 2005

Lahontan Audubon Society's fiscal year 2004 - 2005 activities began in earnest in August 2004, when Board members, our Important Bird Areas Director, and certain committee representatives gathered for a day-long planning and strategy retreat which was then summarized into a written record of our plans. Throughout the year we have attempted to maintain focus and momentum derived from those plans. Ultimately, the focus of LAS is formed by our **Mission Statement** and this organization's three functions, **birding, conservation, and education**. It is not really possible to tease apart these functions. They are interrelated and reinforce one another, as is reflected in the variety and nature of the activities our all-volunteer organization engages in.

LAS Chapter territory reaches to only a 60-mile radius out of Reno and within Nevada, but as only one of two chapters in a vast and geologically varied state we feel it incumbent upon us to represent certainly all of northern Nevada and, on occasion, matters within the entire state and the adjacent Sierra Nevada, water issues being a prime example. In addition, our Nevada Important Bird Areas Program encompasses the entire state.

The following report of this year's activities reflects the efforts of a relatively small group of energetic and tenacious volunteers encouraged in the knowledge that they represent a chapter membership of nearly 1000 families and individuals.

Conservation

Our mission statement begins, "To preserve and improve the remaining habitat of birds and other wildlife, restore historical habitat, ..." Our **Conservation Committees** are organized along the lines of Advocacy (Ali Chaney), Community Conservation (Nancy Bish), and our special interest area Swan Lake (Bob Goodman).

Advocacy formally voiced concerns on a number of conservation topics that may impact birds or bird habitat through letters of concern addressed to, among others, the House Resource Committee and the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests regarding the Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act of 2004. We submitted scoping comments to the Bureau of Land Management in Elko regarding an Environmental Impact Statement required to evaluate potential effects of grazing on sensitive species including raptors and sage grouse.

The Conservation Committee continued to be active in the conservation community. Representatives attended, for example, a conference held for sage grouse local working group planning, a Washoe County town hall meeting considering a county public lands bill, and a

meeting with a working group designed to reenergize the conservation community in helping save Walker Lake, the latter of which was visited by Senator Harry Reid. Committee representatives also attended meetings of the Nevada Wildlife Commission intermittently to keep abreast of statewide issues impacting birds and bird habitat.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), which is developing a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy to extend over the next 10 years, invited LAS to be a key partner in the development of that strategy. Don McIvor, Director of Bird Conservation for LAS' Nevada Important Bird Areas Program, participated directly in the drafting of the survey-strategy. Conservation Committee representatives Ali Chaney, Nancy Bish, Bob Goodman, Jim Lytle, and chapter President Karen Kish spent an evening with NDOW and The Nature Conservancy reviewing and reacting to the initial project.

LAS representatives Ali Chaney and Jim Lytle also continued their commitment to serving on the state's Sage Grouse Conservation Team.

LAS' long-standing support of **Swan Lake** Nature Study Area, created at Lemmon Valley Marsh, was sustained during the past year, most notably through the involvement of Bob Goodman, who began a tenure as Chairman of the Swan Lake Advisory Committee. LAS also sent a letter to the Nevada Land Conservancy in support of their efforts to obtain funding through the Question 1 bond initiative to purchase property adjacent to the Nature Study Area. LAS participated in regular cleanup days, and this year purchased a set of trash grabbers to assist volunteers.

In **Community Conservation** Nancy Bish concentrated her efforts at another LAS special interest area, 702 acre Silver Saddle Ranch in Carson City, serving as President of the Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch, coordinating bird field trips, supervising cleaning of bluebird and wood duck boxes, monitoring use of the boxes, and mentoring an Eagle Scout project to install new wood duck boxes. Nancy responded to a number of telephone calls and emails regarding community conservation including species identification, bird disease concerns, and nesting bird issues.

The Conservation Committee produced the regular newsletter column, "Conservation Corner," providing members with updates on current conservation initiatives and conservation efforts by the committee on behalf of the chapter membership. In June the committee, through approval of the Board, established a permanent Conservation Fund within LAS' budget to support on-the-ground projects that benefit birds and bird habitat.

Our one salaried position is the **Nevada Important Bird Areas Program** Director of Bird Conservation. During fiscal year 2004 - 2005, Director Don McIvor concluded the extensive, detailed IBA site nomination process and posted all site descriptions on the LAS web site. He completed the draft manuscript for the forthcoming book, *Important Bird Areas of Nevada*, and

arranged for artwork by Ray Nelson. Don entered into a formal relationship with NDOW to produce a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Nevada, an extensive draft of which was completed in late spring. His duties also involved touring the state with an NDOW team to elicit public input. Specific conservation planning for certain IBAs began, including entering into a contract with the U.S. Forest Service to write the plans for locations within its jurisdiction.

We expanded our relationships and visibility with government agencies and non-government organizations through Don's service as LAS' liaison with Nevada Partners in Flight and membership on the Nevada Steering Committee for the Intermountain West Joint Venture. Outreach to membership and the general public continued through Don's writing the regular newsletter column, "Important Bird Areas Program," serving as Moderator for the Nevada Birds List Server (NAS site), participating in public events, leading field trips, and consulting frequently with LAS Conservation committees.

Education

The latter part of our Mission Statement states, "... and educate the public with emphasis on children, providing vision to all about our unique Nevada environments." The **Education Committee** (Ray Nelson) continued significant involvement in a program to lead birding field trips at the Washoe Lake mitigation ponds in cooperation with the Nevada Department of Wildlife and Washoe Lake State Park with the assistance of Ron Conkey, Tom Beard, Cheryl Ferguson, and Sue Stevenson. Eighteen field trips involved about 750 children in classroom groups. The trips were enhanced by LAS' purchasing 10 pairs of sturdy 7 x 35 binoculars, as facilitated by Wild Birds Unlimited of Reno, which donated an additional three pairs.

LAS representatives also gave talks about wetland birds in several Washoe County classrooms. LAS, through the efforts of Ray Nelson, Jane Burnham, Jim Lytle, Ali Chaney, and Diane Wong, manned display booths at community events for school children, Tune in to Kids Fair and Girl Scouts Strength in Sharing in Reno and Dayton Elementary School Family Learning Night (coordinated by Nancy Bish), with student participation totaling more than 2,000 in these three events. LAS provided certain prizes for this year's Junior Duck Stamp Contest, for which Ray Nelson, Jane Burnham, and Jim Lytle served as judges. Ray also observed the Environmental Education Forum, a gathering of area educators.

Adult education continued to be well served through LAS' annual spring course of **Birding Classes**, "Birds of the Truckee Meadows" coordinated by Bob Goodman. Classes, averaging 30 to 34 attendees, were taught by experienced instructors and skilled birders David Jickling, Larry Neel, Alan Gubanich, Jim Eidel, and Bob Goodman. Publicized in the local papers, this introductory course tends to reach members of the public new to the area and / or new to birding. It also qualified for a continuing education unit for teachers.

Bob Goodman gave talks to University of Nevada, Reno's Elder College, Hyatt Classic Residence in Reno, and the National Interpretive Association conference in Reno, as well as at other outreach events, making contact with over 620 people in classes and outreach.

Adult education in bird identification is also furthered by a popular "**Learn-a-Bird**" session presented by Dr. Alan Gubanich at each General Program Meeting.

Birding

Field Trips (Diane Wong) scheduled 12 field trips during the year, five of which were new trips including some distant destinations. Six birding-workdays at Swan Lake Nature Area, Sheldon NWR, and Stillwater NWR were also offered. Shorter field trips at nearer locations such as Swan Lake, Silver Saddle Ranch, Davis Creek Park, Galena Creek Park, and North Lake Tahoe proved most popular. All trips were publicized in *The Pelican* newsletter, the LAS web site, the LAS email list, local media, and the Nevada Birds List Server. Field trip and workday leaders included Diane Wong, Bob Goodman, Richard Carlson, Ray Nelson, Don McIvor, Mike and Cindy Goddard, Susan Stevenson, Sheryl Ferguson, and Jim Lytle. LAS also provided a number of leaders for events mentioned later in this report.

LAS members served as **Christmas Bird Count** compilers and team members in local count areas Truckee Meadows (Reno and Sparks), Carson City, Fallon, Pyramid Lake, and Walker Lake, submitting count information to a huge database that serves as a barometer on distribution and numbers of North American birds. These and more distant counts were publicized through the above-mentioned channels by LAS.

The *Nevada Birding Map* developed by Map Coordinator Ron Conkey with mapping assistance by Tim Herrick and advice by IBA Director of Bird Conservation Don McIvor was completed in the prior fiscal year and published by LAS this fiscal year. The map, setting out descriptions for 87 locations, is the first of its kind for the state of Nevada. It has received very favorable publicity and public response. LAS entered into agreements with the Nevada Department of Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service for financial support in exchange for certain distribution arrangements. The Nevada Commission on Tourism also approved a separate grant for \$4,955 for an additional printing of the *Birding Map* to be distributed routinely with tourism information. The *Map* is sold retail by LAS Sales and through wholesale arrangements with retail outlets.

The Conservation Committee was called upon to assist the Fallon Convention Center and Visitors Authority in the development of a marketing strategy in conjunction with a nature tourism consulting company in order to promote the greater Reno area (Reno, Fallon, and Carson City) as a birding destination.

Bonnie Wagner represented LAS at several meetings of the Outdoor Adventure Steering Committee of the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority.

General Program Meetings (Alan Gubanich) were offered from September to May (excluding December) to members and the general public. Attendance ranged from 27 to 46. Following brief announcements and occasional public information segments (e.g. West Nile Virus), Dr. Gubanich, Associate Professor of Biology at University of Nevada, Reno, presented the popular session, "Learn-a-Bird," employing specimens and vocalization tapes. The formal programs included topics from international birding to citizen-science activities of the Great Basin Bird Observatory to Nevada birding and habitat.

The preliminary social half-hour portions of General Meetings were enhanced by the **Hospitality Committee** (Judy Kretzer) organizing beverages and snacks. Judy and Nancy Bish also greeted people at the door and assured that everyone wore name badges. The Communications Committee set out a "For Your Information" table below a small "Welcome" banner. In November we instituted a "Budget Bird Book Raffle," which served successfully as an icebreaker and a small fundraiser.

Supporting Committees

Through the efforts of the **Membership Committee** (Carol Conkey), total membership remained at about 1,000 households. Membership brochures were placed at retail outlets such REI, Patagonia, and Wild Birds Unlimited and were made available at field trips, public events and talks, and General Meetings. Mail orders for the *Birding Guide* and *Map* also generated memberships. We attempted one coordination of localized activities for Fallon (about an hour's drive from our Reno base) by sending a letter to the 36 members there offering to identify LAS members in that community to one another. Of the 36, six were interested, and names were shared among those six.

The **Volunteer Coordination Committee** (Bonnie Wagner) was created in June 2004 with the intent of creating a central database of all LAS volunteers, tracking volunteer activity including the number of hours, and determining the interest and skills of potential volunteers. Bonnie solicited information on LAS volunteer tracking needs, surveyed several area non-profits, and researched various software programs. A free, non-profit-specific program "E-base" was selected, downloaded, and demonstrated to the Board, which also approved a \$50 per year membership to the expanded help features. A procedure was also instituted for Membership to refer to Volunteer Coordination names of any new or renewing members expressing an interest in volunteering for an initial contact by Bonnie.

The **Communications Committee** (Karen Kish) continued as an umbrella for a variety of support activities as follows.

The Pelican newsletter (Mike Greenan, editor; Connie Douglas, distribution) was published bimonthly in an eight-page format. Mike Greenan assumed the editorship with the March/April 2005 issue. He updated the computer format with the Adobe InDesign program and began transmitting to the printer in PDF, thus facilitating proof approval. Connie continued labeling and processing the newsletter properly for non-profit bulk mailing. Regular columns included "Birds in Town" by Alan Wallace, "Important Bird Areas Program" by Don McIvor, "Conservation Corner" by Ali Chaney and Nancy Bish, and "From the President's Perch" by Karen Kish. Field trips and General Program Meetings were promoted.

Jim Lytle succeeded Tim Herrick as Web Master for the **LAS Web Site** in February, with Nancy Bish standing by as backup, and has begun review and tuning up of the site, as well as keeping the site up to date. Earlier in the year Ron Conkey took on the project of locating and adding public domain and some credited bird species photographs to the *Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond* section. Mike Greenan also submitted several photos.

The **LAS Info Line** is manned by Jim Lytle. The message section received only 32 messages during the year, all of which were returned and resolved immediately or relayed to the appropriate party. We speculate that the web site and the Nevada Birds List Server are fulfilling some of the prior call needs.

Karen Kish handles **Publicity**. Press releases on field trips, general meetings, birding classes, special events, and Christmas Bird Counts were sent via email to as many as seven newspapers, two public access television stations, and one commercial radio station. The **LAS Email List** to notify members of these activities grew last year from 45 to 97 recipients. Field Trip Chair Diane Wong also posted field trip and Christmas Bird Counts on the Nevada Birds List Server. Communications also created handout fliers for the LAS Birding Classes and other events. The LAS brochure was revised slightly and reprinted. The committee also maintained the LAS Display Board and Table as well as the binders, *LAS in Print*, *LAS in Photos*, and *Pelican Archives*.

This year LAS renewed and expanded its efforts in **Public Outreach Events** involving both the general public and certain fellow organizations including:

- American Birding Association Regional Conference for which Jim Lytle and Karen Kish served as field trip coordinators for this first-time-in-Reno event. LAS members provided all field trip leadership, several programs, brochure photographs, and extensive planning support.
- Spring Wings Birding Festival in Fallon, where Jim Lytle again served as festival President. LAS supplied the majority of the field trip leaders and certain workshop leaders.
- Earth Day (Environmental Leadership Event) in Reno where our display booth, table, and onsite volunteers were coordinated by Ali Chaney. Birding classes, field trips, and membership

were promoted as LAS members talked with a large number of visiting members of the public.

- Eagles and Agriculture Weekend in Douglas County for which Jim Lytle enlisted several LAS members as field trip leaders along with volunteers to man the LAS information display.
- Wild Birds Unlimited Grand Opening in Reno at which LAS provided our display board and table and programs by Alan Gubanich, Bob Goodman, and Ray Nelson.
- The Pinecone Ball recognition event, which was attended by two LAS representatives based on our joining the northern Nevada coalition Environmental Leadership.
- Several child-oriented events as detailed in the Education section above.

Administration

The administrative elements of our chapter provide the structural framework by which LAS' substantive activities are formulated and executed.

Board Meetings including officers, trustees, the IBA Director, and certain committee chairmen were held regularly on the first Tuesday of the month September through June. We adapted specific procedures for formal motions, discussion, and voting via email when urgent time frames demanded. Such motions, discussion, and votes were then recorded as an addendum to the Minutes for the following Board Meeting. Through arrangements made by Dave Straley, we held a successful conference call Board Meeting in February when heavy winter snow prohibited a physical meeting.

Elections were organized by the **Election Committee** (Jim Lytle and Alan Gubanich) and appropriately publicized. At the May General Meeting these officers were reelected: President Karen Kish, Vice-President Alan Gubanich, Treasurer Dave Straley. Jasmine Vittori was elected Recording Secretary. Judy Kretzer and Jim Lytle were reelected to Trustee Seats 6 and 7, respectively. Based on the General Election vote, the chapter cast its allocated two votes for Charles R. Kahle (Seattle) as Western Regional Representative to NAS' Board of Directors. Jim Lytle certified the results of the election.

National Audubon realigned the chapter Regions, placing LAS in a smaller, newly defined Northwest Region in 2007, which should provide the chapter proportionately greater representation at the National level.

Our **Treasurer** (Dave Straley, C.P.A.) filed all all legal documents, federal tax return, and Nevada Secretary of State documents as required. We retain our 501(c)(3) status and our Nevada sales tax exemption. Dave issued checks and invoices and presented professional financial statements at each Board meeting as well as preparing our annual financial statement. Dave also administered the chapter financial aspects of the Nevada Important Bird Areas Program in consultation with IBA Director Don McIvor. Dave and President Karen Kish consulted with a pro bono attorney to assure our compliance with stipulations for a charitable remainder trust, a portion of which the

chapter may receive at some point in the future. Over and above his various volunteer hours as an officer, Dave donated his professional-level accounting services to the chapter.

An **Audit Committee** (Jane Burnham and Loa Semrau) conducted the annual review of our accounting practices and deemed them appropriate and acceptable.

Early in the year the LAS Store was reorganized as the more effective **LAS Sales** (Ron Conkey), selling only the LAS publications *A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond* (\$10) and the *Nevada Birding Map* (\$4). Remaining LAS T-shirts were offered in “liquidation sales” at two General Meetings. Order forms appear in *The Pelican* newsletter and the LAS web site. The *Guide* and *Map* were sold at General Meetings, field trips, and special events. LAS Sales also handled wholesale transactions with several retail outlets.

Recording Secretary Jane Burnham recorded and published the Minutes of all Board Meetings, seeking corrections or clarifications via email prior to their formal approval at the next meeting. Jane began planning for best methods of records retention.

Finances

While we derive tremendous benefit from the efforts of chapter volunteers, we also need a financial basis upon which to operate, both in terms of the chapter itself as well as the IBA Program that our chapter supports.

Our sole paid position is the **Nevada Important Bird Areas** Director of Bird Conservation. While the Director’s position is handled as a National Audubon employee, our chapter funds 100% of the position. Salary and benefits as well as projects associated with the IBA program, such as the proposed publication of the book *Important Bird Areas of Nevada*, are funded through a variety of grants. Through the efforts of Director Don McIvor and Treasurer and **Fundraising Chair** Dave Straley, we have achieved a sounder financial basis for the program, pulling from behind a potential shortfall last fiscal year and securing funding through at least September 2006. We improved in assessing funding needs and process more realistically.

In addition, an **Ad Hoc IBA Funding Committee** headed by Alan Gubanich and including Jane Burnham, Jim Lytle, and Bonnie Wagner reviewed certain funding opportunities and began a constructive dialog with Don on the long-range picture for the Nevada IBA Program. The committee also arranged a productive meeting with the Director of the Great Basin Bird Observatory in order to seek an optimal relationship between the IBA Program and GBBO in its monitoring and pure research capacities.

To stabilize our operating costs, including production and distribution of *The Pelican* newsletter, and maintain a basis for chapter projects, LAS conducted an autumn solicitation of members

organized by Fundraising Chair Dave Straley, which resulted in total donations of nearly \$6,000.

The details of our finances are set out in the attached **Financial Statements** prepared by Treasurer Dave Straley, C.P.A.

In Conclusion

This report was derived from reports prepared by committee chairs and project representatives and references to our Board Minutes. However, any errors, omissions, or oversights are strictly the responsibility of this writer.

We are fortunate in the quality and generosity of the individuals who forward our mission and help meet the responsibilities we have taken up. It is an honor and a pleasure to be associated with this group of people and to serve this chapter and our northern Nevada community.

Karen L. Kish, President
Lahontan Audubon Society