

LAHONTAN AUDUBON SOCIETY
A Chapter of National Audubon Society
ANNUAL REPORT to Our Members
July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009

Lahontan Audubon Society (LAS) is guided by our **Mission Statement** within three interrelated elements, **birding, conservation, and education**: *To preserve and improve the remaining habitat of birds and other wildlife, restore historical habitats, and educate the public, with emphasis on children, providing vision to all about our unique Nevada environments.*

Our chapter is comprised of approximately 1,000 member families or individuals. The chapter's territory extends to a 60-mile radius out of Reno and within Nevada. As one of only two chapters in a vast and geologically varied state, however, we feel obligated to represent northern Nevada and, on occasion, the entire state and the adjacent Sierra Nevada.

LAS's fiscal year 2008-2009 activities began July 13, 2008, with our annual Strategy and Planning Retreat for the LAS Board of Trustees, Committee Chairs, and the IBA Director of Bird Conservation. The following report, while not all-inclusive, attempts to present a picture of the chapter's activities and achievements from July 1, 2008, through June 30, 2009.

Conservation

Our **Conservation Committees** consist of general conservation responsibility and advocacy (Ali Chaney), Sage Grouse Conservation Team (Ali Chaney), and our special interest areas Silver Saddle Ranch (Nancy Santos) and Swan Lake NSA (Bob Goodman). Ali Chaney served as Conservation Chairman.

The 2009 session of the Nevada State Legislature consumed the vast majority of Chairman Chaney's time this year. The highlight of the year was the passage, unanimous in both chambers, of **Senate Bill 108**, which calls for the removal of all hollow p.v.c. posts used as mine claim monuments across Nevada. These posts, mostly historical/abandoned markers, represent a serious threat to birds because the birds see them as potential cavities for nesting, get into the posts, and cannot get back out. Our sponsorship, in process for more than two years, led a collaboration with the Nevada Mining Association, the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), and Red Rock Audubon Society (Las Vegas). These posts must be replaced no later than November 2011, at which time anyone may legally knock over remaining posts, eliminating a significant mortal threat to bird life in the state.

Advocacy activities at the State Legislature were conducted in collaboration with other nonprofit environmental organizations which formed the coalition Conservation Priorities for a Sustainable Nevada. The coalition identified or developed four priority bills to support during this session, all of which passed. At the Legislature, we also lent public support to NDOW, specifically the Wildlife Diversity Bureau, through a financial sponsorship and public comment at NDOW's breakfast program for lawmakers.

We engaged in several more localized activities including the following. (1) Continued support of the Bureau of Land Management's management plan for **Porter Springs** (in the vicinity of Lovelock), a critical but neglected resting and refueling habitat for a large variety of migratory birds. (2) Support of **Kiley Ranch** Foundation's obtaining Question 1 Bond funds to assist in the acquisition of wetlands from the Kiley Ranch Communities development. LAS also met with representatives of the development for discussion and a tour of the wetland. (3) Sponsorship of the **Fuji Park Urban Fishing Pond** project in Carson City, which involves rehabilitation and protection of a wetland area under the guidance of the Clear Creek Watershed Council.

Under the leadership of Nancy Santos, President of Friends of **Silver Saddle Ranch** (FOSSR), a multi-year process culminated in the passage of the Carson City Vital Community Act of 2008 within the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 / H.R. 146. The act protects and preserves Silver Saddle Ranch and a significant section of corridor along the Carson River. Management guidelines as developed in a charrette process were adopted by the Carson City Board of Supervisors.

Bob Goodman serves as LAS' representative on the **Swan Lake Nature Study Area** Advisory Board. Bob visits and monitors Swan Lake at least weekly. On May 2, the 10th Anniversary of the official designation of the former Lemmon Valley Marsh as the Swan Lake NSA was observed. Prior to the celebration and presentation of recognition awards, a major cleanup and thistle pull were conducted. Swan Lake NSA is a designated IBA and, thus, is also the subject of guidance and support through that program.

Robin Powell is the Director of Bird Conservation for the **Nevada Important Bird Areas Program** (IBA). Robin reports jointly to National Audubon Society's IBA Program and the LAS Board of Trustees, with the LAS President assisting in administrative oversight including serving as signatory to grant and contract documents. LAS is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit under which the IBA Program operates.

The IBA Program was involved in a great deal of activity this year. Through the securing of several grants and streamlining of operations, the program's activities and accomplishments led to major partnerships with a number of organizations and agencies in the state. In broad terms, the program engaged in the following: (1) Reconvened and added new members to the Technical Advisory Committee to evaluate a second round of IBA nominations. (2) In the first year of a formal IBA Volunteer Program, developed 10 events in which a total of 331 participants focussed on weed removal, habitat restoration and improvement, weed education, scientific tool use for habitat protection/monitoring, and weed surveying, all with the long-term goal of developing citizen stewardship groups for IBAs. (3) Through a NAS TogetherGreen Fellowship, concentrated on the Lahontan Valley Wetlands, one of the highest priority IBAs in the state, in forging a core conservation work group and, through other funding, spearheaded the construction of the Kent Wetlands Trail with signage at the Stillwater NWR. (4) Entered into an agreement with the Flying Wild Bird Education Program to initiate development of curricula for K-12 and the general public tailored to northern Nevada.

Bird habitat conservation, protection, and enhancement are the core goals of the IBA Program. In 2008 - 2009, the program initiated several habitat-based conservation projects, with full funding secured, in partnership with: Santa Maria Park Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Project; Washoe Valley Cooperative Weed Management Area; and Swan Lake Emergent Vegetation Management Plan. All IBA maps and GIS data-sets have now been updated and can now serve as reference material for local entities, companies, and other special interests. Development of conservation action plans for each of the IBAs is in process. The program is collaborating with a group of government and non-governmental agencies in developing an appendix to the statewide Wildlife Action Plan for Climate Change Modeling and Planning.

Education

The **Education Committee**, chaired by Alan Gubanich, continued significant involvement in a program to lead birding field trips at the Washoe Lake Mitigation Wetland in cooperation with Washoe Lake State Park. Six field trips involved about 247 third- through fifth-grade children in classroom groups. Nineteen LAS volunteers plus a park ranger led students on birding walks, most notably John Schulte, Susan Stevenson, and Alan himself, who volunteered for six trips each. LAS developed an application form and procedure for school bus travel grants, which were provided to two of the class groups. All students had access to binoculars and spotting scopes.

Ten LAS volunteers manned a hands-on LAS display at the day long “Tune In To Kids Fair” at Idlewilde Park in Reno. Two classroom visits offered presentations about birds to a total of 110 preschoolers, and a third school program offered a workshop on bird houses for about 30 students from mixed grades. Alan gave a presentation, “How to Attract Bird to Your Yard, and How to Identify Them,” at Moana Nursery in Reno. He also conducted a workshop and field trip on Common Birds of the Area for docents at the Nevada State Museum and offered programs to three fellow club/nonprofit groups. Alan participated in planning and conducting the first Tahoe Rim Trail Association Guide Training. Education about birds was also advanced by the popular “Learn-a-Bird” and “Bit of Biology” sessions presented by Alan at each General Meeting.

Bob Goodman coordinated LAS’s annual spring course of **Birding Classes**, “Birds of the Truckee Meadows.” Five two-hour classes were taught by experienced instructors and skilled birders David Jickling, Larry Neel, Alan Gubanich, Jim Eidel, and Bob Goodman. The classes continue to represent an effective outreach for LAS and birding in general. Also, the fees of \$10 per session or \$40 for all five raised over \$500 for LAS.

Activities for Members

Field Trips Chair Christiane Omer organized 30 field trips throughout the area including adjacent areas in California, an increase of three trips over last year. A total of 420 people participated in the trips. The offerings ranged from short local walks to weekend trips. Twenty leaders, some working in teams, volunteered as trip leaders, three of whom were new to the program. We also provided a number of leaders for events mentioned later in this report.

LAS members participated in the 2008 Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Compilers were Dave McNinch for Truckee Meadows (Reno and Sparks); Greg Scyphers for Carson City, Carson Valley, and Washoe Valley; Amy Leist for Fallon; Becca and Dennis Serdehely for Pyramid Lake; and Will Richardson for South Lake Tahoe. Count information is submitted to a huge database that serves as a barometer of distribution and numbers of North American birds.

General Meetings (Alan Gubanich, Activity/Program Chair), with programs spanning topics from international birding to wind turbine issues were offered from September to May (excluding December) to members and the general public. Attendance ranged from 24 to 85. Again this year, a “Bird Identification Panel and Challenge – How Do They Know?” drew the highest attendance of the year.

The preliminary social half-hour portions of General Meetings were enhanced by the **Hospitality Committee** (Linda Badzioch) organizing beverages and snacks. The Communications Committee set out a “For Your Information” table. The “Budget Bird Book Raffle,” coordinated by Jane Burnham, served as an icebreaker and small fundraiser at each meeting.

The **Birds & Books Reading Group**, coordinated by Kenn Rohrs, met September through May for organized discussions of books about birds and their place in nature. A group eight to 12 regular readers met at Sundance Bookstore in Reno, while additional members read the selected titles without attending the meetings. Kenn also posts reviews of other bird-related books within the Birds & Books Reading Group section on the web site.

A **Volunteer Coordination Program**, chaired by Gene Hansel, was initiated this year with a planning meeting drawing on input from various committee chairs. Initial work has been done to launch a new volunteer web page, and research has begun into developing an interactive volunteer database. The Education Committee hosted a **Volunteer Appreciation Afternoon** at Bartley Ranch County Park in September 2008 to thank all who volunteered for the chapter during the preceding year. Alan Gubanich presented a powerpoint show highlighting many volunteer activities. Volunteers were recognized individually and presented with small Audubon Plush Birds tagged with “LAS ♡ Volunteers.”

Supporting Committees

Membership Committee Chair Kathy Oakes processes and maintains both our local and national membership lists and mailing label list for *The Pelican* newsletter. As of the end of the fiscal year, NAS plus local-only memberships totaled 1,081, an net increase of 35 over last year. Donations made during the course of the year are acknowledged with a letter of thanks and a listing in the donation column of *The Pelican*. Membership was presented with two processing challenges this year that demanded considerable time and detailed work by Kathy. National Audubon's transition to a new database required detailed review and reconciliation; approximately three months were spent in processing reinstatement of current NAS members to proper assignment to our chapter rolls. The U.S. Post Office also changed bulk mailing requirements to require that all addresses be verified every 45 days. Following two months of coordination with the post office and establishment of a return postage due account for our newsletters, LAS is in compliance. However, the new requirement has also added extra duties for our membership chair to update NAS's roster.

The **Communications Committee**, chaired by Karen Kish, continued as an umbrella for a variety of support activities as follows.

LAS publishes *The Pelican newsletter* bimonthly, under the direction of Editor Jen Martin. Kristin Szabo serves as copy editor, and Kathy Oakes assists with final editing and review. Regular columns include *Birds in Town* by Alan Wallace, *Important Bird Areas Program* by Robin Powell, *Conservation Corner* by Ali Chaney, and *From the President's Perch* by Karen Kish. Field trips, general meetings, and special activities were promoted. A one-year series of columns, *Backyard Habitat* was authored by 14-year-old birding expert Jonathan Heywood. During the year the addition of these three columns brought the newsletter format to 12 pages: *Birds and More* by Kathy Oakes, highlighting a specific species; *The Avid Bird* by Kenn Rohrs, a column reviewing bird-related books; *Ask a Birder*, a birding "Dear Abby" column, by an anonymous contributor. In addition to her regular columns, Robin Powell developed a four-page pull-out synopsis of Nevada's IBAs. Connie Douglas handled **Pelican distribution**, which included picking up the newsletters, attaching labels, completing post office paperwork, sorting, delivery to the main post office, and monitoring the mailing account. Connie also distributed extra copies to local libraries, REI, and Wild Bird Unlimited.

Web Master Steve Ting dealt with a variety of updates and revisions on the **LAS Web Site** in very timely fashion throughout the year. This year Steve added a "Reports: Trips and Event" section, which includes photos and photo galleries. Steve again made sure that the web site met with Worldwide Web Consortium standards. Alan Wallace maintained bimonthly master lists of his *Birds in Town* column cross-referenced by species name in a section of the web site.

Jacque Lowery serves as the manager of the **LAS Info Line**. The line receives from two to seven calls messages per month. The recorded message also provides brief information regarding bird rescue contacts and General Meeting information. Jacque also responds to e-mails via "LAS Info Line On-Line" link on the web site. Subjects of inquiries include identification of a bird, places to bird in the area, baby bird questions, bird feeding questions, and bird behavior. We also changed telephone service to a more economical vendor this year.

The **LAS E-mail List**, maintained by Karen Kish, sends out brief notices to participating members regarding meetings, field trips, reading group, LAS-related events, and local civic forums affecting birds and bird habitat. The list numbers 261 addressees, individuals or families, an increase of 40 over the total at the end of last fiscal year.

The **Nevada Birds List Server**, a part of the National Audubon Society List Server network, has approximately 300 subscribers from throughout Nevada and a few from outside of the state. The most recent postings are also visible on the web site www.birdingonthe.net, making Nevada birds and birding

information accessible to many more people than subscribe to the list. Alan Wallace moderates the list server, making sure that all subscribers adhere to the Nevada birds and birding theme. In conjunction with his role as moderator as well as *Birds in Town* columnist, Alan also fields a number of bird questions not directly related to the list server. A link to the list server appears on the home page of the LAS Web Site.

Karen Kish handles **Publicity**. Press releases are sent via e-mail to as many as seven newspapers and one public access television station. Field trips, general meetings, birding classes, special events, and Christmas Bird Counts are the subject of these releases. IBA Director Robin Powell was featured in several newspaper articles as a result of her receiving an NAS-Toyota TogetherGreen Fellowship for work in the Lahontan Valley Wetlands. Communications also created fliers for the LAS Birding Classes and other activities or events, maintained name tags for General Meetings and public events, and produced several internal administrative reference lists. The committee maintained the LAS display board and table.

Public Outreach Events involving both the general public and fellow organizations included, in addition to those mentioned above in other sections:

- Eagles and Agriculture Weekend, Douglas County, 2/27 & 28/09: Alan Gubanich enlisted seven other LAS members as field trip leaders, Karen Kish coordinated the LAS display, and Robin Powell organized the raffle and door prizes. LAS donated a raffle prize of a copper bird feeder.
- Tune in to Kids Fair, Reno, 4/25/09: [Please see the Education section above for this and other education-specific events.]
- Spring Wings Birding Festival, Fallon, 5/9 & 10/09: LAS, a major sponsor, supplied 13 of the field trip and workshop leaders, as coordinated by Alan Gubanich. Alan also served as master of ceremonies for the two evening programs and was the main speaker at the Saturday night program.
- Walker Lake Education Day, 4/25/09: Bob Goodman manned a bird-spotting station near lakeshore, which also contained LAS information. Robin Powell maintained an IBA booth.
- Recognition of Retiring Nevada Wildlife Commissioner Dave McNinch, 5/15/09: Ali Chaney delivered formal remarks recounting the projects and activities of LAS member Dave McNinch in his nine-year tenure as commissioner. Karen Kish presented a plaque in recognition of his "... steadfast dedication and service to the conservation and enhancement of Nevada's wildlife resources"
- Bob Goodman delivered talks to several groups in the community, with audiences totaling approximately 350 people.

Administration

The administrative elements of our chapter provide the framework and momentum through which LAS's substantive activities are formulated and executed.

Board Meetings including officers, trustees, the IBA Director, and certain committee chairmen were held on the first Tuesday of the month September through June. An all-day Planning and Strategy Retreat on July 13, 2008, also involved this group of people. The officers and trustees serve as the principal decision-making body of LAS and also shoulder a number of additional duties. Officers, in addition to the writer, were Alan Gubanich, Vice President; Jane Burnham, Treasurer; and Bonnie Wagner, Recording Secretary. Board Trustees were Dave Straley, Gene Hansel, Ali Chaney, Kathy Oakes, Jacque Lowery, Linda Badzioch, and Kenn Rohrs. **Elections** for the forthcoming year were organized by the **Election Committee** (Alan Gubanich and Jacque Lowery) and publicized for the May General Meeting.

At its June 2nd meeting, the Board of Trustees adopted an extensive revision of the *Lahontan Audubon Society Bylaws*, last revised in 2001, following a careful research and review process conducted over several months.e-mail

Our **Treasurer** (Jane Burnham) filed all legal financial documents, our federal tax return, and required Nevada Secretary of State documents. We retain our 501(c)(3) status and our Nevada sales tax exemption.

Jane issued checks and invoices for both LAS and the IBA program and presented financial statements at Board meetings as well as preparing our annual financial statement. Jane also administered the financial aspects of the Nevada Important Bird Areas Program in consultation with IBA Director Robin Powell and President Karen Kish. Jacque Lowery and Gene Hansel served on the **Audit Committee**. Dave Straley donated his professional-level **Accounting Services** and financial oversight to the chapter.

Connie Douglas serves as our chapter's representative to the Audubon **Whittell Fund Committee** and, in that capacity, facilitates grant proposals to this fund, designated for Nevada projects, from within or channeled through the two Nevada Audubon chapters.

Jane Burnham handles **LAS Sales**, selling and filling individual mail orders and wholesale transactions for the LAS publications *A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond—Second Edition* (\$10), *Nevada Birding Map—Second Edition* (\$4), and *Important Bird Areas of Nevada* (\$19.95). Three local and two out-of-area and/or out-of-state outlets handle the publications. At the national level, the American Birding Association carries all three publications. *IBAs of Nevada* is carried through Amazon.com and Baker Taylor book distributors, both of which produce sales at very low volume.

Recording Secretary Bonnie Wagner recorded and published the Minutes of the Board Meetings, seeking corrections or clarifications via e-mail prior to their formal approval at the following meeting. Bonnie compiled the Minutes on an annual CD for an additional permanent record.

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 administers.

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, the position is 100% self-funded through grants awarded for proposals submitted by Director Robin Powell. Proceeds from sales of the IBA book are directed back into the program as well.

For administrative and operational costs, including production and distribution of *The Pelican* newsletter, we have made a generous estimate that the chapter will need approximately \$18,000 for the forthcoming year. As of June 30, 2009, we estimated that we would be funded for these expenses. During fiscal year 2008-2008, we expended \$12,750, coming in well under our budget of \$16,165 and our operational income of \$13,453.69 (excluding investment loss) for that time period. Last summer we submitted our 2007-2008 Annual Report on time, enabling us to receive a baseline payment from National Audubon Society in October 2008 of \$3,002.75. Our Autumn 2008 Fund Drive received donations from 108 families or individuals (about 11% of membership) totaling \$4,965, down only \$430 from the prior year and a very respectable total given the financial climate at that point. Additional member donations throughout the year totaled \$1,894.10. Other income is derived from local memberships, sale of publications, and birding class fees. Income in excess of the amounts needed for any current year's operations are set aside for present and future projects.

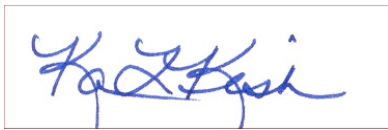
An **Investment Portfolio** of approximately \$47,000 of chapter funds is invested in a moderate to conservative style appropriate to a nonprofit organization of our size, based on guidelines set out in an Investment Policy approved by the Board in 2005. The portfolio is managed pro bono by Dave Straley, C.P.A. and Registered Investment Advisor, through Third Creek Investments, Inc. Dave delivers quarterly portfolio performance reports to the Board, in compliance with communications requirements incumbent upon a Registered Investment Advisor. Funds under investment are intended for larger, long-range purposes.

The details of our finances are set out in our finalized **Financial Statements** available after September 30, 2009, upon request.

In Conclusion

Based on our annual report for year 2007-2008, our chapter status was re-certified by National Audubon Society in October 2008. The current 2008-2009 report along with other supporting documents has been submitted to National Audubon Society to substantiate this year's re-certification. This report is also posted in the "Chapter Info" section of the LAS Web Site along with four prior LAS Annual Reports. This report is based on reports prepared by committee chairs and project representatives, our Board Minutes, and a variety of other records. However, any errors, omissions, or oversights are strictly the responsibility of this writer.

We are grateful for the quality and generosity of the individuals who participate actively in our chapter and thus forward our mission and help us meet the responsibilities we have assumed. The moral and financial support from our broader membership is also an essential element in any success LAS achieves. It is an honor and a pleasure to be associated with this chapter and to serve it and our northern Nevada/ adjacent California community.



Karen L. Kish, President
Lahontan Audubon Society
August 2009