

LAHONTAN AUDUBON SOCIETY
A Chapter of National Audubon Society
ANNUAL REPORT to Our Members
July 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006

Lahontan Audubon Society's fiscal year 2005-2006 activities began July 17, 2005, 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.

A review of the "Summary Record" of the planning and strategy retreat reveals that the majority of elements were fulfilled, most notably in our Nevada Important Bird Areas Program. Some objectives were commenced but not completed; some were reconsidered and removed; and several were not addressed and have been reentered into plans for the forthcoming year. Based on our annual report for year 2004-2005, our chapter status was re-certified by National Audubon Society.

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 organization engages in.

LAS chapter territory extends to 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 obligated to represent certainly all of northern Nevada and, on occasion, the entire state and the adjacent Sierra Nevada. For example, the Nevada Important Bird Areas Program, which our chapter administers, 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 who attempt to represent at the highest level a chapter membership of approximately 950 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), Sage Grouse Conservation Team (Ali Chaney), and our special interest area Swan Lake (Bob Goodman). Jim Lytle serves as Conservation Chairman.

Advocacy formally voiced concerns on several conservation topics that affect birds or bird habitat. LAS, through our IBA Program, submitted scoping comments on the Bureau of Land Management's Environmental Impact Statement regarding ground water extraction to be diverted to Las Vegas (southern Nevada) developments, citing the specific impact on several IBAs. LAS also submitted scoping comments on a BLM EIS evaluating grazing allotments in northeastern Nevada, as it impacts sensitive bird populations, especially Great Sage-grouse and various raptors.

We also presented a comment letter to the Reno City Council opposing an amendment to the Master Plan for Butler Ranch North in southeastern Reno stressing the adverse impact of high-density housing on some of the last remaining wetlands in the Truckee Meadows. Ray Nelson, Ali Chaney, and Don McIvor (IBA) also met representatives of the planned Kiley Ranch Development (northeast Reno) and visited the site. LAS has been involved in recommendations for land use in a 300-acre wetlands area. LAS volunteers Christiane Omer and Nancy Hoffman conducted bird surveys of this area. Advocacy looked into the controversial proposed coal-fired plant at Gerlach; Jon

Wellinghoff of the Nevada Clean Energy Coalition spoke at the September General Meeting. This project was abandoned by Sempra Corporation in Spring 2006.

The Conservation Committee continued to be active in the conservation community. Ali Chaney, serves as LAS' liaison for the Swan Lake Nature Study Advisory Board and is assisting in the update of the Swan Lake NSA Master Plan. Jim Lytle monitored activities relating to the formulation of the Soda Lakes Master Plan (Fallon). Ray Nelson attended initial meetings of the Reno Urban Wildlife Coalition, which seeks to enhance all of Reno's open space areas. Ali Chaney represents LAS on the state-level **Sage Grouse Conservation Team**, serving on the Implementation Subcommittee, which evaluates and seeks avenues for funding sage grouse projects. The new LAS Conservation Fund also provided a \$250 sponsorship to a sage grouse workshop for land managers. The Board approved our entering into the Nevada Coordinated Bird Monitoring Memorandum of Understanding, organized by Great Basin Bird Observatory. LAS also renewed its membership in Environmental Leadership (now Eco-Net), a coalition of local conservation organizations, which sponsors among other things Reno's Earth Day and the *Green Directory*.

In Community Conservation Nancy Bish concentrated her efforts on Silver Saddle Ranch in Carson City, serving as President of the Friends of Silver Saddle Ranch, coordinating bird field trips and maintaining and monitoring bluebird, wood duck, and bat boxes. Nancy is participating in the initial stages of the development of a Cooperative Management Agreement between FOSSR, BLM, and Carson City, with LAS as an interested party. Nancy responded to a number of telephone calls and emails regarding bird-related issues within local communities.

LAS' long-standing support of **Swan Lake Nature Study Area**, formerly Lemmon Valley Marsh, was sustained during the past year, most notably through the involvement of Bob Goodman, Chairman of the Swan Lake Advisory Committee (through December 2005). Through Bob's persistence, LAS was finally able to disburse a restricted donation from members Kirk and Annaliese Odencrantz for the benefit of Swan Lake NSA with the placement of eight benches integrated into the now doubled pontoon-style interpretive boardwalk, a significant enhancement for visitors to the wetland. Bob conducts field trips at Swan Lake and monitors the area on a careful, ongoing basis. Bob was also interviewed for two articles about Swan Lake this year.

The Conservation Committee produced the newsletter column, "Conservation Corner," providing members with updates on current conservation initiatives and conservation efforts by the committee and alerting members to NAS' campaign on behalf of the threat to the Endangered Species Act. LAS sponsored cleanup days at Oxbow and Swan Lake nature study areas (Reno). During the annual Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge Work Weekend, volunteers removed problem fencing and photo-documented the effect of wild-horse roundups on the health of various springs.

This was a momentous year for LAS' **Nevada Important Bird Areas Program**, headed by our one salaried employee, Don McIvor, Director of Bird Conservation. In a culmination of the first five years of the program, Don completed the writing, designing, and publishing of the book *Important Bird Areas of Nevada*, a synthesis of the Nevada IBA Program that formalized the designation of Nevada's Important Bird Areas. Don conducted all the granting activities which funded the book's publication. He also developed distribution plans and marketing materials and gave a number of presentations and interviews about the program and the book.

In a project which originated in the production of the Nevada Department of Wildlife's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Nevada, Don participated in the Wildlife Action Plan Team, resulting in the completion of the *Nevada Wildlife Action Plan*. This plan, developed, in cooperation with the Nevada Natural Heritage Program and The Nature Conservancy, as well as NDOW, will determine the course of wildlife management in Nevada for at least the next decade.

The set of Conservation Plans for the IBAs within U.S. Forest Service jurisdiction were completed. Don coordinated a large IBA interpretive panel for placement at the new observation deck at Stillwater (NWR) Point. Through funding of this panel as well as funding to assist in the publication of the IBA book, the Nevada IBA Program has involved BirdLife International's Rio Tinto Mining Division as a party of interest in Nevada bird conservation. With LAS funding, Don assisted NDOW at the State Wildlife Grants Fly-In trip to Washington, D.C., where he also presented a copy of *Important Bird Areas of Nevada* to each Nevada congressman/woman. A large number of meetings with a variety of government and non-governmental organizations, always within the framework of the IBA Program, enhanced the collaborative nature of bird conservation efforts throughout Nevada.

As Director of the IBA Program, Don reported 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.

Don also continued his 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 newsletter column, "Important Bird Areas Program," serving as Moderator for the Nevada Birds List Serve (NAS site), speaking at a number of public events, leading field trips, and consulting frequently with LAS Conservation committees and the LAS Board.

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**, chaired by Ray Nelson (through January 2006) and Alan Gubanich (February 2006 ff.), continued significant involvement in a program to lead birding field trips at the Washoe Lake Mitigation Wetland in cooperation with Washoe Lake State Park. Seventeen field trips involved about 670 third- through sixth-grade children in classroom groups plus one Cub Scout Troop. Twenty-two LAS volunteers led students on birding walks, most notably Ron Conkey and Susan Stevenson, each of whom volunteered for 13 trips. LAS member Warren Schaul created an aquatic biology segment, helping students collect water samples and identify microscopic in the ponds. Every student was loaned a pair of binoculars and a laminated bird guide, and trip leaders managed spotting scopes for group use.

LAS members Ray Nelson, Alan Gubanich, and Bob Goodman gave class presentations at Cottonwood School in Fernley and Donner Springs Elementary School in Reno. Three volunteers hosted a display table of bird specimens at the Dayton Elementary School Family Night in Dayton. Nine volunteers participated at the all-day "Tune In To Kids Fair" at Idlewild Park in Reno with a display table, bird specimens, and books. Spotting scopes were set up to view birds on the pond. LAS provided certain prizes for this year's Junior Duck Stamp Contest, for which Jane Burnham, and Jim Lytle served as judges.

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 were taught by experienced instructors and skilled birders David Jickling, Larry Neel, Alan Gubanich, Jim Eidel, and Bob Goodman, all of whom revised their presentations this year. 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.

Adult education in bird identification is also furthered by popular "**Learn-a-Bird**" and "**Bit of**

Biology” sessions presented by Dr. Alan Gubanich at each General Program Meeting. Alan also maintains the LAS collection of species slides.

LAS also sought to collaborate on several community- and statewide planning initiatives. Alan Gubanich, Karen Kish, Ray Nelson, and Warren Shaul met with representatives from NDOW to discuss LAS’ involvement in the school field trips at Washoe Lake as well as needs at Oxbow Nature Study Area. Alan met with representatives of the Great Basin Institute and the Great Basin Bird Observatory about ways to coordinate educational outreach for our three organizations. On behalf of LAS Alan also attended the meeting of the Wildlife Focus Group at NDOW to help NDOW plan its educational outreach program for the next five years.

Birding

Field Trips (Nancy Bish, Chair) offered 19 field trips during the year in a variety of habitats that our area offers. Shorter field trips at nearer locations such as The Great Reno Caper, Oxbow NSA, Swan Lake NSA, Riverview Park, Silver Saddle Ranch, and Davis Creek were generally very popular and particularly accessible for potential new birders. All trips were publicized in *The Pelican* newsletter, the LAS web site, the LAS email list, and local media. Chair Nancy Bish re-instituted the publication of field trip reports in *The Pelican* newsletter this year. Field trip leaders included Nancy Bish, Bob Goodman, Dave Jickling, Mike Goddard, Susan Stevenson, Sheryl Ferguson, Dave Arsenault, Jim Eidel, Dennis Serdehely, Alan Gubanich, Jim Lytle, Rose Strickland, Dennis Ghiglieri, and Don McIvor. 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.

General Program Meetings (Alan Gubanich) were offered from September to May (excluding December) to members and the general public. Attendance ranged from 25 to 67. Following brief announcements and occasional public information segments, Dr. Gubanich, UNR Associate Professor of Biology Emeritus, presented the popular sessions, “Learn-a-Bird” and “A Bit of Biology.” The program included wide-ranging topics from the proposed Sempra coal-fired power plant near Gerlach to creating bluebird trails to birding through the eyes of an artist.

The preliminary social half-hour portions of General Meetings were enhanced by the **Hospitality Committee** (Jane Burnham) organizing beverages and snacks. Various Board members greeted people at the door and assured that everyone wore name badges. The Communications Committee set out a “For Your Information” table. The “Budget Bird Book Raffle” served successfully as an icebreaker and a small fundraiser (\$156 this year). The November meeting offered “Secret Pelican” door prizes rather than the raffle.

This year member Kenn Rohrs established a new chapter activity, the **Birds & Books Reading Group** for collaborative discussion of books about birds and their place in nature. A group of about 10 regular readers met in May and June, while additional members read the selected books without attending the meetings. Kenn also posted a substantial list of potential selections on the LAS web site.

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

Supporting Committees

Membership Committee Chair Judy Kretzer processes and maintains both our local and national membership lists and mailing labels for *The Pelican* newsletter. Membership brochures were placed at Wild Birds Unlimited and were made available at field trips, public events and talks, and General Meetings. This year we instituted a local renewal reminder using a highlight on the newsletter mailing label. Judy acknowledges all donations with a letter of thanks and posts names in the donation column of *The Pelican*.

We continue to struggle with an effective way to focus our **Volunteer Coordination Committee**. We have made some progress by revising the sign-in sheet format for General Meetings to, among other things, enhance checkoff boxes for volunteer activities and then relaying expressions of interest to the appropriate committee chairs. At year's end we developed a "Summary of Volunteer Hours" form to better account for all or most volunteers and their hours. In addition, the Education Committee has been particularly effective in involving a number of volunteers, including new volunteers.

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 with circulation to approximately 950 member households plus extra copies for distribution principally at special events. A highlight color, which does not impact the production cost, was introduced with the January/February 2006 issue. This year Judy Kretzer began assisting with proofreading. Connie labeled and processed the newsletter properly for nonprofit bulk mailing. Regular columns included "Birds in Town" by Alan Wallace, "Important Bird Areas Program" (frequently including a photo-illustration) by Don McIvor, "Conservation Corner" by Ali Chaney, and "From the President's Perch" by Karen Kish. Field trips, General Program Meetings, and special activities were publicized.

Throughout the year Web Master Jim Lytle posted many updates to the **LAS Web Site** including field trip schedules, general meeting program speakers, and special announcements. He also performed general maintenance on a regular basis. The site was accessible to the general public more than 95% of the time, with no outages attributable to LAS. Alan Wallace posted compiled data from his "Birds in Town" newsletter column. Ron Conkey renewed his project of adding bird species photographs to the *Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond* section.

The **LAS Info Line**, managed by Jim Lytle, received 171 messages during the course of the year. Jim handled the majority but relayed several calls to various public agencies as appropriate.

Karen Kish handles **Publicity**. Press releases on field trips, general meetings, birding classes, special events, The Great Backyard Bird Count, 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 activities grew last year from 97 to 137 recipients.

Communications also created fliers for the LAS Birding Classes and other events, maintained name tags for key chapter volunteers, and produced several internal administrative reference lists. The committee maintained the LAS Display Board and Table as well as the binders, *LAS in Print*, *LAS in Photos*, and *Pelican Archives*. At General Meetings, the Communications Committee presents a "For Your Information" table display, with varying handouts and page-sized standup posters. Items of general interest received at the LAS P.O. Box were also offered at the display. The committee has also conducted an aggressive effort to reduce inbound junk mail to the P.O. Box.

As LAS President, Karen Kish was interviewed and quoted by freelance writer and LAS member Linda Hiller for an extended advertising section in *Audubon* magazine called "Betting on Birds in Nevada," which contained an extensive quote and reference to LAS, which is now also listed as a resource on the "Bird Nevada First" section of the Nevada Commission on Tourism web site.

Public Outreach Events involving both the general public and certain fellow organizations included:

- Eagle Scout Court of Honor for Doug Lipka, whose bluebird box Eagle project at Silver Saddle Ranch, Carson City, LAS sponsored.
- Fernley Intermediate School Crafts Fair, Fernley, where Jim Lytle provided display table information.
- Eagles and Agriculture Weekend in Douglas County for which Jim Lytle enlisted 20 LAS members as field trip leaders for some 700 participants; and Karen Kish organized the LAS information display, which was also the only authorized display for a pre-event Locals-Only set of tours. We also conducted a "Meet the Author" book signing by Don McIvor, who also presented the featured program. Twenty LAS members volunteered for this event, which hosted 700 participants.
- Earth Day (University of Nevada Cooperative Extension Event) in Carson City with display booth and a Don McIvor book signing. Two new members joined at this new event.
- Earth Day (Environmental Leadership Event) in Reno with display booth and a Don McIvor book signing. Eleven new members joined at this event, and a large number of the public visited the booth throughout the day
- Spring Wings Birding Festival in Fallon, where Jim Lytle continued to serve as Spring Wings President. LAS supplied the majority of the field trip leaders and certain workshop leaders. Don McIvor was the Saturday evening program speaker and conducted further book signing activities with the assistance of Ali Chaney. As a result of a relationship nurtured through the IBA program and publication of the IBA book, Jonathan Stacy of BirdLife International out of London served as Friday keynote speaker. Both Jonathan and Don were also involved in the dedication of the new observation platform at Stillwater (NWR) Point.
- 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. Through arrangements made by Dave Straley, we also held an urgent special Board meeting via conference call on June 18, allowing even out-of-state Board members to participate.

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. Dee Austin was elected Recording Secretary. Jane Burnham and Ali Chaney were reelected to Trustee Seats #1 and #3, respectively. Jacque Lowery was elected to Seat #5, to which she had previously been appointed following Trustee Ray Nelson's move out of state. Jim Lytle certified the results of the election. Shortly after the election, Dee Austin had to resign due to a move out of our area. Board Trustee Bonnie Wagner was appointed Secretary, vacating Seat #7, which has not been filled as of this writing.

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 for both LAS and the IBA program and presented professional reconciled 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. Over and above his various volunteer hours as an officer, Dave donated his professional-level accounting services to the chapter.

An Investment Subcommittee, consisting of Nancy Bish, Jane Burnham, and Karen Kish, was formed to review and finalize a proposed **Investment Policy** govern management of approximately \$20,000 of restricted chapter funds over an investment period of ten years in order to achieve a better return in a moderate to conservative style appropriate to a nonprofit organization of our size. The Board approved and adopted a concise Investment Policy for Lahontan Audubon Society, originated October 3, 2005, which 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 certain communications requirements incumbent upon a Registered Investment Advisor.

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

Jane Burnham took over **LAS Sales** this year, selling and filling individual mail orders and wholesale transactions for the LAS publications *A Birding Guide to Reno and Beyond* (\$10) and the *Nevada Birding Map* (\$4). Order forms appear in *The Pelican* newsletter and on the LAS web site. *Important Bird Areas of Nevada* (\$19.95) published by LAS in December 2005 added a major component to Jane's duties, including not only direct retail and wholesale transactions but also a variety of marketing and distribution activities throughout the state and at designated national-level outlets. These latter activities were coordinated between Jane and IBA Director Don McIvor.

The officer position **Recording Secretary** seemed to inspire incumbents to move out of the area over this year. Jasmine Vittori, elected in May 2005, served June through November, at which time she accepted an opportunity to work and study on the island of Hawaii. In response to an appeal to membership, Dee Austin volunteered and was appointed Recording Secretary in December. Shortly after the May elections, Dee notified the Board that her family was to move out of state. Trustee Bonnie Wagner, who had frequently facilitated and substituted for secretary in the past, volunteered to fill the position. Throughout all of this transition, these volunteers effectively recorded and published the Minutes of all Board Meetings, seeking corrections or clarifications via email prior to their formal approval at the next meeting. We have also begun to retain these records on CD as well as in hard copy.

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 are funded through a variety of grants. Through the efforts of Director Don McIvor with the support of Treasurer and **Fundraising Chair** Dave Straley, we have secured program funding through at least June 2008. Proceeds from sales of the IBA book are directed back into the program as well. The **Ad Hoc IBA**

Funding Committee headed by Alan Gubanich with Jane Burnham and Jim Lytle, stood ready to assist in funding efforts but was eclipsed by Don's funding successes.

For purely administrative and operational costs, including production and distribution of *The Pelican* newsletter, the chapter requires approximately \$5,600 per annum, going forward. As of June 30, 2006, we were funded for these expenses for the forthcoming year. Last summer we submitted our 2004-2005 Annual Report on time, enabling us to receive a baseline payment from National Audubon Society in the autumn of 2005. Our Autumn 2005 Fund Drive had to be scaled back to a solicitation via email to approximately 100 Audubon members on the LAS email List, 16 of whom donated a total of \$1,420.

Birdathon 2006, organized by Conservation Committee member Ali Chaney, raised \$2,285.50 to fund the new Conservation Fund, which is dedicated to on-the-ground habitat projects. Wild Birds Unlimited, owned and operated by member and Trustee Jacque Lowery, conducted an in-store raffle to benefit LAS which added another \$231 to the Conservation Fund. LAS made successful application to National Audubon for two Collaborative Funding Grants: \$500 to purchase one spotting scope and tripod and two pairs of field glasses, especially to enhance the Education Committee's school field trip program and \$200 for materials to construct additional nesting boxes at Silver Saddle Ranch, Carson City. We also continue modest aluminum can recycling efforts.

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, our Board Minutes, and a variety of other records. 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
August 2006