



The Magpiper

March, 2014

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Monthly Calendar

Thursday, March 13

Board Meeting

7:00 p.m.

Thursday, March 20

Membership Meeting

7:00 p.m.

Whitman College

Saturday, March 22

Field Trip

Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

President: Mike Denny

Vice President: Jim Parrish

Secretary: Paul and Judy Treman

Treasurer: Jonathan Webster

Conservation: Chris Howard

Education: Priscilla Dauble

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Holly Howard

Programs: Nancy Mitchell

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Bluebird Trails: Tom Scribner

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Field Trips: Paul Treman

Magpiper Editor: Ginger Shoemake

Member at Large: Shirley Muse

Bird Sightings: Ginger Shoemake

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house_wren@charter.net or

PO Box 1106

Walla Walla, WA 99362

Meeting

Membership Meeting: March 20—7:00 p.m.

Room 151 Hall of Science, Whitman College

PROGRAM: FEATHERED ARCHITECTS: THE FASCINATING WORLD OF BIRD NESTS

From eagles to hummingbirds, Idie Ulsh will explore with us how and where birds make nests, and relate interesting facts about their construction. She has photographed the nests of more than 30 species and done an extensive three year perusal of bird nest literature. In addition to her own photos she will include photos from many excellent northwest photographers and University of Puget Sound Slater Museum in this unique program.



Western kingbird nest and chicks

Idie Ulsh is well known for her bird and butterfly programs. She is a past president of Seattle Audubon, founder of the Washington Butterfly Association, Seattle Audubon Master Birder, freelance nature photographer and an independent college counselor.

Field Trip

BENNINGTON LAKE

Saturday, March 22 – 9:00 a.m.

Join Paul and Judy Treman for a leisurely walk around Bennington Lake. We will be looking for winter birds that are still here (Townsend's Solitaire, Northern Shrike, etc.), early arriving summer birds (Violet-green and Tree Swallows, Yellow-rumped Warbler, etc.) and resident birds (Northern Harrier, Great Horned Owl, Downy Woodpecker, Bewick's Wren, etc.). As always, we will be looking for the "surprise" uncommon or rare bird that is waiting to be discovered.

Bring your binoculars, a friend or two and plan to return to the parking lot about 11:30. Please contact Paul and Judy if you have any questions: pjtreman@charter.net or 509-527-0722.

MEET AT THE BENNINGTON LAKE PARKING LOT.



Tom's Tales by Tom Scribner

SHOUT-OUT IN FRENCHGLEN, PART II

Last month I introduced you to baseball cap guy and long-haired guy, two top birders who met under less than ideal circumstances in Frenchglen, Oregon. Dispute over the identification of a Tennessee warbler resulted in the two of them facing off on Frenchglen's main street (such as it is) with a group of less-than expert birders anxiously watching the action. What happened, I am told, is how birding experts settle their disputes. Which means, I guess, that if you ever want to be considered a birding expert you need to brush up on your Latin.

To set the stage then, we have baseball cap guy and long-haired guy standing about ten feet apart, eyes locked, postures stiff, and radiating tension. Long-haired guy was the first to pull the ornithological trigger.

"*Dendroica coronata*," the long-haired guy shouted at baseball cap guy, spittle flying from his mouth.

"*Yellow-rumped warbler*," baseball cap guy calmly and immediately replied. Followed by "*Pica pica*."

"*Black-billed magpie*," the long-haired guy machine-gunned back. "*Is that the best you can do?*" Then spit out "*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*."

"*Williamsons sapsucker*," quickly answered baseball cap guy. Then said, "*Zonotrichia leucophrys*."

"*Easy*," mocked the long-haired guy, "*White-crowned sparrow*. *Lanius ludovicianus*," he then challenged.¹

It went on like this for who knows how long, a rapid fire back-and-forth Latin name challenge and common name response. The entranced onlookers followed the action with head-swiveling, focused intensity. Eventually, they knew, somebody, baseball cap guy or long-haired guy, would stumble. They wanted to see how it would play out.

After maybe 20 challenge and response exchanges, baseball cap guy, in a friendly but authoritative voice, gave a common name response to a challenge from long-haired guy, then asked "How about *Cepphus columba*?"

Here long-haired guy paused, unsure of himself, "*Guillemot*," he questioningly replied. Then more assuredly, "*Pigeon guillemot!*" After a moment of thought to calm himself, "*Chlidonias niger*," he said to baseball cap guy.

"*Black tern*," baseball cap guy immediately and knowingly answered. But now the rout was on. You

could hear it in long-haired guy's voice and see it in how he held himself and in his eyes.

"*Plegadis chihi*," baseball cap guy sweetly challenged, knowing that the tide of combat had swung in his favor.

Here, the long-haired guy was momentarily stumped, at a loss of words. "*Ibis*," he finally and hurriedly guessed. "*Glossy ibis*."

"*Close*," said baseball cap guy. "*White-faced ibis*. *How about Pachyramphus aglaiae?*"

And here long-haired guy was completely lost. No clue. Not even an educated guess. Baseball cap guy let him fidget in his embarrassment for a minute or so. The long-haired guy even reached with his left hand for his field guide, but quickly thought better of this display of ineptitude and let his hand drop back to his side.

"*Rose-throated becard*," baseball cap guy finally said, saving the long-haired guy from further embarrassment. A rare bird along the US-Mexican border and maybe a low blow by baseball cap guy, since before this all the birds used were Northwest regulars. Still, the long-haired guy started it and there was no rule, not that any of the observers knew about, that limited the challenges to Northwest birds.

At this point, it was over. Baseball cap guy knew it. The onlookers knew it. The long-haired guy knew it. He had been beaten, embarrassed, put in his place. With slumped shoulders, he slowly pivoted to his right, shuffled his feet over to the porch of the Frenchglen Hotel, picked up his daypack and dejectedly trudged off, his ponytail between his legs.

Thus ended the Frenchglen shout-out. It will be talked about, I am sure, for many years when birders meet to tell tall tales. Except this one really happened. Or so I am told.

¹ Can you believe this, a footnote! *Lanius ludovicianus*, for those who don't know, is a loggerhead shrike.

Tidbits

THE CASE OF THE MISMATCHED HARES

National Wildlife Federation, Feb/Mar, 2014

Snowshoe hares, found throughout the northern reaches of North America, are famed for their ability to replace warm-season, basic-brown coloration with snow-white winter coats—all the better to blend in with their surroundings and to avoid predators. However, changes in the duration of annual snow cover due to climate change seem to be disrupting the concealing benefits of the white phase, according to a paper published recently in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Climate models suggest that yearly snow-cover duration in hare range could be reduced by as much as 40 days late in this century, making white hares particularly visible to predators. If snowshoe hare populations dwindle, the effects on a species such as the lynx, which specializes in hunting the hares, could be significant. Other species that molt from brown to white in winter could be similarly beset, including the long-tailed weasel, Arctic fox and willow ptarmigan, though evolution may have an as-yet-unknown adaptation up its sleeve. “We have found very little ability of hares to shift molt timing to match snow duration from year to year,” says L. Scott Mills, a biologist at North Carolina State University and a senior author of the paper. “Of course, this does not eliminate the possibility that natural selection might act over time to shift the molt day.”

SAGEBRUSH SONGBIRD SURVEY

The Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society chapter, Audubon Washington and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) are partnering on a pilot project to count sagebrush songbirds on WDFW and DNR lands near the Tri-Cities of Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco in 2014. For this community science project, Sagebrush Sparrow, Brewer’s Sparrow and Sage Thrasher were selected as priority songbird species. Members from other Eastern Washington chapters are invited to participate in the pilot. The hope is to expand the survey to more chapters next year.

Two trainings for volunteers in 2014 will be provided, and point counts will be conducted at approximately 12 sites, three times each this spring.

For more information, schedules, and signup: Please email Christi Norman at Audubon Washington, cnorman@audubon.org or Kevin Black at the Lower Columbia Basin chapter at kevblack787@gmail.com.

Bird of the Month

WESTERN SCREECH OWL

Megascops kennicottii



Size: 8.5 inches

Description: Small grey owl with a large round head, short ear tufts, yellow eyes, white spots on back and wings, and a streaked breast that has the appearance of tree bark.

Photo by George Jameson

Male western screech owls begin vocalizing in late winter and are most vocal at dusk (particularly later in the breeding season). Their “bouncing ball” call is one you can’t mistake. It consists of a dozen or so short, low whistled toots that begin slow and accelerate falling slightly at the end: “*too too tootootootootootoo*” There is also a “double trill” call that is sung by both sexes. The first note is short and the second prolonged.

Western screech owls are found in all of the western states, Mexico and Central America. Females are larger than males and Northern populations are notably larger than Southern races.

They are mostly nocturnal “sit and wait” predators that become active 15-30 minutes after sunset and normally return to roost half an hour before sunrise. They roost in deciduous trees close to the trunk. Because their body is the color and texture of bark, they can be very hard to locate during daylight hours. Their diet consists mainly of small mammals, birds, crayfish and large insects. However, they are opportunistic predators and have been known to take prey as large as cottontail rabbits and mallards.

They nest in tree cavities in diverse habitats, but associate most frequently with riparian habitats and deciduous trees. They are common in urban and suburban parks and residential areas. They also readily use nest boxes. The average clutch size is 2-4.

When I first started birding, Mike Denny told me there was a screech owl on every street in Walla Walla—all you had to do was go out at dusk and listen for them. I did, and I often heard one. However, urban development has caused habitat loss and now they aren’t as easy to find. But, they are still out there so go out some evening and listen.

The World Around Us

OWL POISONING

Here is a sobering report from Lynn Tompkins, Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton. February 24, 2014

First thing Saturday morning, Bob traveled to the Pilot Truck Stop on I-84 near Stanfield to pick up a **Great Horned Owl** who had been observed crashing into an upright part of the scale that weighs the trucks. The truck driver who witnessed the crash put the owl in a cardboard box for the rest of the night. She noticed that the owl held her left wing in a strange position and assumed the wing was broken.

Back at the center an exam revealed bruising on her left elbow and she squinted her right eye, although there was no sign of injury to the eye. She was in very good flesh, obviously a successful hunter. The owl's blood pressure was very low and it was challenging to get a small blood sample, not usually the case with a large bird. She was given a small amount of anesthesia to facilitate an exam and the administration of IV fluids, but was maintained almost exclusively on pure oxygen when her breathing suddenly became very labored. She recovered from anesthesia fairly quickly, but obviously did not feel well.

The owl's condition was puzzling. Her condition seemed much more serious than the observed trauma, crashing into the scale, should have caused, unless she was already compromised in some way. We suspected some type of anticoagulant poisoning, but there were no visible signs of hemorrhage. She was given a dose of vitamin K, but her condition continued to deteriorate during the day and she died that evening. A necropsy revealed massive internal hemorrhage in all of her internal organs. Tissue samples need to be sent to a lab to confirm the cause of death, but the owl's condition is consistent with anticoagulant poisoning. She very likely ate a rodent that had been poisoned.

Early types of anticoagulant rodenticides (warfarin) killed rodents immediately. Rats learned to avoid those poisons. The newer versions can take two or three weeks to kill an animal, resulting in ample opportunity for rodent predators to catch and eat the dead or dying rodents. Secondary poisoning of raptors (and other predators) has become very widespread. **Please do not use these products.**

To learn more about Blue Mountain Wildlife's recovery and rehabilitation programs visit their website, and check out Lynn's Daily Journal to get current news like the above article. bluemountainwildlife.org

Inland Avian Predation Management Plan

January, 2014

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Walla Walla District has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the Inland Avian Predation Management Plan (IAPMP). District leadership signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on Jan. 23. This completes the Corps' environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The Corps has led a cooperative effort with the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to develop the IAPMP for managing birds that prey on Endangered Species Act-listed fish species in the Columbia and Snake rivers. This effort is in compliance with the Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion from the National Marine Fisheries Service and incorporates the necessary National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis and documentation.

The plan IAPMP describes land-management actions to be taken on federal properties located at Goose Island (Potholes Reservoir, Grant County, Wash., managed by Reclamation) and Crescent Island (McNary Reservoir on the Columbia River, Walla Walla County, Wash., managed by the Corps) to reduce avian predation on juvenile salmonids. Previous research has determined that the greatest benefit would be achieved by managing **Caspian tern** colonies at these islands because of the birds' demonstrated high rates of predation on ESA-listed fish species. Reclamation has adopted the Corps' EA and signed their own FONSI for implementation of this plan at the Goose Island location.

Provisions for monitoring and adaptive management are included to assess outcomes of the implemented actions. The effectiveness of tern-dissuasion actions at Goose and Crescent islands may be enhanced by adaptive management actions to limit terns from forming new colonies and/or expanding existing colonies within the Columbia River Basin. The plan also includes provisions for developing out-of-basin nesting sites to attract the terns to areas where they will not feed on Columbia River ESA-listed fish species.

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ON
FACEBOOK**

Events

MIGRATION BEGINS

Birds to Look for in March

Sandhill crane	Say's phoebe
Caspian tern	Killdeer
Long-billed curlew	Western bluebird
Violet-green swallow	Mountain bluebird
Tree swallow	Hermit thrush
Turkey vulture	Spotted towhee
Black-necked stilt	Savannah sparrow
American avocet	Red-naped sapsucker
Fox sparrow	Yellow-rumped warbler
Northern rough-winged swallow	
Cliff swallow	

OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL

March 28-30, 2014



The festival includes tours for crane viewing and specialty tours: burrowing owl, Columbia National Wildlife Refuge, Missoula Flood and more. Pre-registration for tours is recommended. Festival fee included admission to lectures at Othello High School and educational and vendor displays.

Photo by George Jameson

For more information visit the festival website othellowsandhillcranefestival.org

MIGRATORY BIRD FESTIVAL-BURNS, OR

April 11-13, 2014

Spend an amazing weekend witnessing the spectacular spring migration in the Harney Basin of Southeast Oregon. View thousands of migratory birds as they rest and feed in the wide open spaces of Oregon's high desert. From waterfowl to shorebirds, cranes to raptors, wading birds to songbirds, you'll see them all! The festival offers non-stop birding activities as well as historical and cultural information sure to entertain you and your family. So whether you're a beginner or a life-long wildlife enthusiast, the festival has something for everyone. Don't miss this extraordinary weekend. For more information and registration visit the website migratorybirdfestival.com

Musings by Chris Howard

Winter Wonderland

There is special kind of stillness that comes with being the first one out on a trail of freshly fallen snow. In early February the weather gods were kind enough to offer us a change from the weeks of cold, grey inversion in the form of a light, fluffy snow. The snow covered all the old mud and was deep enough to be perfect for the rare opportunity to x-country ski all around Bennington Lake. I headed out early in the morning and was pleased to find the trails unmarked by other skiers or hikers...but well-marked by deer, coyotes, rabbits, and other four legged inhabitants who were out in the cover of night. I slowly and quietly explored all the nooks and crannies in the woods and fields, the tracks pressed clearly in the untouched snow left stories of their nightly activities. I followed some fox tracks for quite a while, noticing how he searched under the snow for rodents, I paused to examine his fresh scat paired with blood tinged urine...what do animals do if they have a urinary infection?

As silently as possible I skied into a grove of pines which often harbor a roosting owl. I was disappointed to not see the owl but as I continued on a little further there were the tracks of a mouse leading out of the grass. The tracks ended suddenly with the perfect print of an owl's wings pressed into the snow... the perfect screen to reveal nightly dramas. Swishing along I paused to overlook the beaver lodge area. There were clearly marked trails in the snow heading out from their hole in the ice marking their nightly wanderings. Also beside the small stretch of open water were the forked tracks of the Great Blue Heron who had been hoping to find a fish dinner. Looking out over the pure whiteness of the lake I was taken in by the stillness surrounding me. Breathing in I noticed a slight change in the tone of the whiteness as a light cloud moved past the sun. Not moving, breathing slowly, I was completely absorbed into the silent beauty of this winter wonderland. There is only gratitude to answer to this special gift of nature.

In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake

On February 1, Paul and Judy Treman watched an unbelievable spectacle at McNary NWR as about 3000 honking snow geese swirled around over the ponds for several minutes before joining about 2000 more snow geese, canada geese and cackling geese already on the water.

Mike and MerryLynn were also out on the west side of the county on February 1. Besides the geese at McNary they saw red-breasted mergansers, common mergansers, trumpeter swans, a northern shrike, and an Eurasian wigeon at Two Rivers HMU. Along Iverson Road they found 48 western meadowlarks.



Rodger and I went with George and Deanna Jameson to the Finley area on February 2 looking for snowy owls. We were excited to find two of them sitting in a field just waiting to have their photo taken. Here is one of Rodger's photos. We stopped by

McNary NWR on our way to Finley, and saw the huge number of snow geese feeding in the fields along Hanson Loop Road.

It was very cold on February 5 and there were tons of birds in our yard—including a Harris's sparrow which Rodger was able to photograph.



Every year a few yellow-rumped warblers over-winter here. On a snowy February 7, I had reports from two different people—Chris Howard and Pam Fisher— that they saw one trying to find food and water. MerryLynn occasionally sees them on her walks along Stone Creek.

Paul and Judy Treman had lots of birds in their yard during the snowfall on February 8 including downy woodpeckers, black-capped chickadees, a spotted towhee, 11 flickers and 2 varied thrushes.

Nat Drumheller was here for a week in early February and was able to do a little birding. He found a northern goshawk on Lewis Peak Road, American pipits on Reser Road and Savannah sparrows on Dodd Road.

Mike and MerryLynn got out the afternoon of February 10 to see what was stirring in the snow. They found 2 barn owls in the cuts north of Touchet and over 130 wild turkeys roosting in the trees along the river.

On February 11, we had eleven Bohemian waxwings in our yard along with a few cedar waxwings. Later in the week there were over 60 cedar waxwings and 4 Bohemians along with about 30 robins—all in the Winter King hawthorne tree. I guess the berries were ready to be eaten!

Mike and MerryLynn drove north of Walla Walla on February 12 looking for birds. Near Lower Monumental Dam they found a small flock of tree sparrows.

MerryLynn was at Two Rivers HMU on February 13. There was still ice out from shore and she sat in the car and watched 27 bald eagles fighting/playing with 2 duck carcasses and a fish of some kind. They would pick it up, fly around being chased then drop it on the ice and start again. Of course the magpies and gulls were dashing in for bits and pieces. She also found a mew gull on the poop piles in with many ring-billed gulls. You can see MerryLynn's photo showing the difference in the two species on the Blue Mountain Facebook page.

The Dennys and the Shoemakes drove the Umatilla County 100 mile raptor route on February 16. The most notable change was the decline in the number of red-tailed hawks—only 80 seen. Overall counts are down over the past nine years. Fewer northern birds wintering here, loss of habitat, rodent control, wind turbines, climate change—all of these things probably contribute to the decline in raptor numbers in the Walla Walla Valley. However, we still are fortunate to have many raptors here and I never tire of watching them. For example, we watched a merlin fly fast just above the ground in the ditch next to the road trying to flush sparrows (it didn't find any). We had some "non-raptor" surprises on the route too—15 lesser goldfinches and 3 Say's phoebes.

After the raptor route, Mike and MerryLynn walked Rooks Park and were surprised to find two **ruffed grouse** near the restrooms.



February and March is when many **robins** migrate through eastern Washington. We had 92 of them in our yard on February 17. They are fun to watch, especially at the bird bath, but they can be very messy!!

Photo by Rodger Shoemake

Christopher Lindsey had a great day birding on February 17. He saw a **Ross's goose** on Hansen Loop in with the thousands of **snow geese**, 3 **tricolored blackbirds** at Tyson ponds and 3 **Virginia rails** at Peninsula HMU.

On February 18, a Tri-Cities birder saw a dozen **sandhill cranes** flying over the millet pond on Northshore Road.

There were 23 **tundra swans** flying away from Bennington Lake as MerryLynn arrived for our Tuesday walk on February 18. Even though the lake was open, there were only a few **mallards** on the water. It was very quiet walking the trails. We did see 2 **great horned owls** and heard a third one. Near the parking lot we came across a small flock of **black-capped chickadees** and a **golden-crowned kinglet**. There were also many **robins** and several **Townsend's solitaires** including this very cooperative one that Judy Tremann photographed.



George Jameson led a field trip to McNary NWR and other spots along the Columbia River to look for waterfowl on February 22. Highlights were thousands of **snow geese** and **canada geese**, hundreds of **cackling geese** and **greater white-fronted geese**, a **great egret**, **redheads**, **ruddy ducks** and more. **Bald eagles** were scattered along the Columbia River. On the way home we drove the roads south of Lowden and Touchet looking for raptors. There were a few **red-tailed hawks**, a good number of **American kestrels** and a couple **northern harriers**. We saw 5 **great horned owls** on or near nests.



Group on Waterfowl Field Trip.

MerryLynn found two **tri-colored blackbirds** and a **rusty blackbird** along the road to Tyson Ponds on February 20. The next day she and Mike were out along the Columbia River and saw two early **violet-green swallows** at the Delta. While birding there they watched 38 **sandhill cranes** fly over. Spring birds!

On February 21, Jim and Sue Parrish saw 5 **western bluebirds** at Bennington Lake. More spring birds!!

What spring birds will you find in March? Let me know so I can share the news with our members. Email me at house_wren@charter.net

BMAS and SYMPHONY PARTNERSHIP

April, 15, 2014, Concert

Blue Mountain Audubon will partner with the Walla Walla Symphony for their April 15 concert, "A Little Summer Night Music." As part of the program, Paul Bannick's award-winning photographs of birds will be projected to illustrate the orchestral composition, *Voyages* by twentieth-century composer, John Corigliano.

You can enjoy the evening of nature-inspired music, and support this effort by purchasing tickets from BMAS board members. Tickets will be on sale at the monthly meetings or by contacting treasurer, Jonathan Webster.

509-529-6023

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Mission Statement:

Blue Mountain Audubon Society (BMAS) was organized in 1971 and chartered by National Audubon Society in 1972. The Chapter's objectives are to serve its membership and the larger communities of Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon with the goals to appreciate, preserve and enjoy birds, wildlife, and the natural environment of the area. Education is a primary objective of Chapter activities. Through volunteer efforts BMAS provides educational opportunities, conservation activities and enjoyment of wildlife and wildlife habitat opportunities to members and to the public. The Chapter meets the third Thursday, (September through May) at 7:00 p.m. in the Whitman College Science Building. A newsletter, **The Magpiper** is published September through May and is free to members. Non-member subscription fees are \$25 annually. BMAS is a non-profit 501c(3) organization. Find us on the internet at www.blumtn.org

Join Blue Mountain Audubon Society – Complete the following information and mail along with a check in the amount of \$25 for your first year's membership to: Blue Mountain Audubon PO Box 1106, Walla Walla, WA 99362

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