

The Magpiper

May, 2014

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Monthly Calendar

Thursday—May 8

Board Meeting
7:00 p.m.

Thursday—May 15

Membership Meeting
7:00 p.m.
Whitman College

Saturday, May 31

Field Trip
Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

Saturday, June 21

Field Trip
Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

President: Mike Denny

Vice President: Jim Parrish

Secretary: Paul and Judy Treman

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Education: Priscilla Dauble

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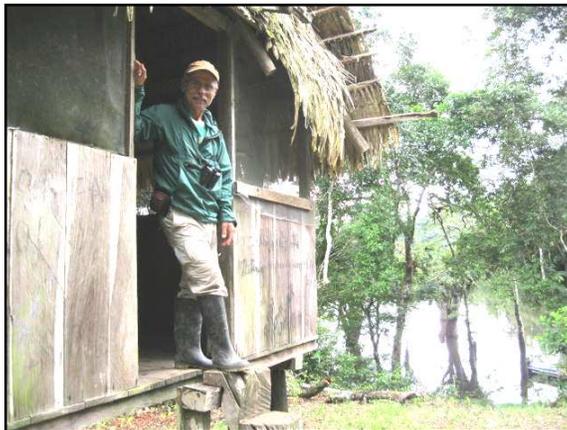
Meeting

Membership Meeting: May 15, 7:00 p.m.

Room 151 Hall of Science, Whitman College

PROGRAM: TOUCANS, TANAGERS AND ANACONDAS:

Further Adventures of Condor Man in South America.



Chris Howard once again returned to South America in the fall of 2014. His presentation will offer an insider's view of living with an indigenous family high in the Andes Mountains. There will be stories of exploration and plentiful photos of birds and wildlife from the mountains, cloud-forest and Amazon basin. Be ready for fun and adventure.

Field Trips

SUMMER BIRDS

Saturday, May 31—7:30 a.m.

Join Rodger and Ginger Shoemake as they take a leisurely walk along Foster Road and South Fork Russell Creek Road looking and listening for summer migrants. By the end of May all the summer nesting birds should be back. We will be looking for warblers, flycatchers, hummingbirds, vireos, Bullock's orioles, black-headed grosbeaks, house wrens and more. Early morning is the best time to see and hear and see the birds.



Black-headed grosbeak

This will be a half-day trip and will involve some walking so dress accordingly. Bring water, a snack and a friend or two. Meet at Harper Joy Theatre

Email Ginger if you plan to attend. housewren084@gmail.com



Field Trips Cont....

WILDFLOWERS IN THE BLUES

Saturday, June 21—8:00 a.m.



June is time to join Priscilla Dauble for a trip to the Tollgate area of the Blue Mountains to look for wildflowers (and birds and butterflies). In the past we have seen as many as 80 different species of wildflowers. This will be an all-day trip and we will be doing quite a bit of walking so bring plenty of food and water. Check the weather forecast and dress accordingly. Don't forget your binoculars and field guides if you have them.

We will meet at the Harper Joy Theater parking lot and car pool. Please call Priscilla at [529-7939](tel:529-7939) if you plan to attend.

I regret to inform the members of the BMAS that recently Barbara Miller passed away from cancer. Barbara was the push behind the "Walla Walla is a Bird Sanctuary".



She worked with the City of Walla Walla and Jim Dumont of the parks Department to get the signs designed and installed. It is with deep sympathy to her husband Jack Taylor and her daughter and two sons. Rest in peace Barbara.

Mike Denny BMAS President.

Bird of the Month

YELLOW BREASTED CHAT

Icteria virens



Size: 7 inches

Description: Medium sized songbird with a bright yellow chest and throat, heavy bill, white spectacles, white belly and undertail and a long tail.

Photo by Rodger Shoemake

This year I have focused on birds that are special because of their beautiful or unusual songs and calls. Of course the yellow-breasted chat has to be including in this list. Its song is "a collection of whistles, cackles, mews, catcalls, caw notes, chuckles, rattles, squawks, gurgles and pops" according to Cornell's All About Birds webpage.

Yellow-breasted chats have been considered the most atypical member of the New World warbler family, although there is a long-standing suspicion that they don't actually belong there. They are found throughout the United States and winter in Central America. They are insectivores but also eat berries, including wild blackberries.

Their nest is a bulky cup made of grasses, leaves, strips of bark, and weed stems that is built in dense riparian thickets and brush, often only a few feet above the ground. Average clutch size is 3-5 and the incubation period is only about 12 days. Both parents tend to the young until they fledge about 10 days later. However, chats are not always monogamous. One study in Kentucky showed that 17% of the 29 nestlings were not sired by the male of the social pair, and 33% of nine broods contained at least 1 extra-pair nestling.

Yellow-breasted chat are a boldly colored, loud bird. And in spite of this, they are hard to locate because they skulk in the dense shrubbery. You can hear them from far away laughing at you and daring you to try to find them. Chats nest in many places in Walla Walla County, including the west side of the canal at Bennington Lake. Luckily the male likes to sit up on a branch to broadcast its presence during mating season, so with patience you will probably see one. And even if you aren't successful in seeing the chat, I promise you it's vocalizations will make you smile!

Tom's Tales by Tom Scribner

WE GET NO RESPECT

I have decided that we birders are the Rodney Dangerfields of the subculture world. As in: we can't get no respect. This disappointing point of view was confirmed, three times!, on Saturday, April 19, thanks to me being late for the BMAS field trip to Palouse Falls. This is what happened.

First, I decided at the last moment I would go. Last moment being Saturday morning at about 9:20. The field trip was scheduled to leave from the Harper Joy parking lot at 9. Still, I figured if I exceeded the speed limit by just a little, and the field trip participants got a late start or slowed to look at some interesting birds, and if the route I assumed they would take was the route they did take, I should be able to rendezvous with them before they got to the Falls.

Second, although I guessed right about their route, my encounters with non-birders along the way slowed me down such that I never caught up with the field trippers. Worse, my encounters with the aforementioned non-birders confirmed, oh so vividly, that while among ourselves we think we are normal, to the rest of the world we are a pretty silly bunch.

I figured the route taken would go first to Waitsburg. From there the BMAS day trippers could either go Cannery Road to Alto McKay Road to Starbuck or to Dayton, with a stop at Lewis and Clark State Park, then Smith Hollow Road to Starbuck.

So I stopped at the small gas station/convenience store in Waitsburg where US 12 makes its 90° turn to the east. There were two guys standing out front of the store. I jumped out of my car and asked if they had seen some birders at the park across the street.

"See what?," the fatter of the two guys asked.

"Some people with binoculars in the park looking for birds," I said.

"So that's what they were doin'," the fat guy said. "You mean bird watchers. Yup, there was a bunch of 'em, running around lookin' up in the air. Actin' stupid."

At this point, his erudite buddy joined in. "They was yellin' about some creep they seen."

"That's right," the fat guy said. "A brown creep. Or maybe they wanted to drown a creep. I don't know. But pretty soon they jumped in their cars and flew outta here." And he laughed. "Flew, like birds, get it?" A real comic this guy.

"Which way did they go?," I asked.

"That way," said Mr. Erudite, pointing his Pepsi can toward Dayton, "the whole flock of 'em." And they both started to laugh. "Yup, the whole flock flew that way." In the words of Monty Python, what followed were howls of derisive laughter.

So, off I drove toward Dayton, going 70, maybe a little faster, okay, lots faster, on the straight stretches. I stopped at the State Park thinking that maybe they were at the Park looking for spring warblers. They weren't; but there were two young guys working on a riding lawn mower near

the stone bathrooms. I asked if some birders had recently stopped to look at birds.

"If you call looking at birds walking around with binoculars staring at the sky, then, yeah, I guess they did," said the guy with the t-shirt that said "Been there, done that. Ain't doing it again."

"They weren't starrin' at the sky," his buddy corrected. "They had to be lookin' for birds. Ain't you never seen bird watchers before? They get all excited and jump around when they see somethin' special."

"You lookin' for birds, mister?," the t-shirt guy asked. "Cuz there's lot'sa birds around here. In fact, now I remember, when them other bird watchers were here they were yellin' about something yellow or a yellow something. Like a yellow bird is a big deal."

"That's right," added his buddy. "And, get this, they really got off on a, what was it?, a wooden beegee or teehee or somethin' like that."

At which point the two young studs couldn't contain themselves and started snorting and laughing and carrying on about wooden beegees in the trees or how a yellow birdie got all dirty. One guy even slapped the other on his back. I left, heading for Starbuck via Smith Hollow Road.

No BMAS birders in Starbuck. Hard to miss a bunch of people with binoculars walking around looking at the sky in Starbuck. Best to check in, though, to find out if they had been seen. So I stopped and went into the small store (the only store) on what I guess is Main Street Starbuck. Two people in the place, a woman behind the counter and a middle-aged guy with a Mariners ball cap. They were talking, yes, baseball. Something about some pitcher's NRA.

I interrupted and asked if they had seen some birders.

"Some what?," asked the woman behind the counter.

Before I could explain, the guy jumped in. "If you mean little old ladies with big binocs lookin' at trees and bushes and pointing, then I saw some, whaddya call 'em, birders?"

"Thanks," I said. "How long ago?"

"Maybe a half hour," he said. "They used the toilet across the street and looked at whatever they were lookin' at. Kinda funny, seein' a bunch of old people runnin' around talking about - - there was somethin' got 'em excited. A sapsmucker or a red sucker or somethin'. You sure you want to hook up with them?"

I told him I did and left the store. Last thing I heard was the woman laughingly say to her baseball capped friend: "Sapsmucker or red sucker. What are you talkin' about?"

That, dear reader, is the impression we have on the general public, at least those who are not watchers of birds. And we wouldn't have it any other way, would we? Give us our sapsmuckers, or drowned creeps and our yellow somethings and we are happy. Just don't be late for the start of the field trip.

And not that any of us care, but just what is a pitcher's NRA? Does that mean he has a rifle for an arm or his pitches are like bullets? And some people think birders have a strange vocabulary.

Summer Birding

Now that the summer birds are returning, it's time to get out and see them. There are many places where you can go, but here are some of my favorites:

Bennington Lake

Just east of Walla Walla is a spot teeming with birds in the summer. *Yellow warblers, house wrens, western wood peewees, yellow-breasted chats, Bullock's orioles, black-headed grosbeaks, gray catbirds, swallows* all nest around the lake as well as the year-round birds like *black-capped chickadees, Bewick's wrens, downy woodpeckers* and *song sparrows*. The trails are alive with the sounds of these birds from May until August. The lower trail is my favorite because it has more riparian habitat. Near the water *killdeer* and *spotted sandpipers* nest and you can watch the *osprey* fishing. A word of caution—watch for ticks until the temperatures get hot. If you don't like them (and I don't!) stay on the trail and don't go bushwhacking.

Project Office to Rooks Park

If you are looking for a quick outing check out the park, especially on week days when it isn't so busy. The trees and shrubs are great places to find *passerines*, and there are always *waterfowl* of some kind on Mill Creek. If you have time, make the loop on Mill Creek from the Project Office to Rooks Park and back looking for *waterfowl*. Take the loop from the restroom on the south side to look for more birds. If you are lucky you may even see a *mink* or an *otter* scurrying in and out of the rocks on the water's edge. *Great blue herons, spotted sandpipers* and *kingfishers* are sure to be around.

South Fork Coppei Creek

Walking the stretch of road along the creek from the end of Walker Road in the early morning in June is a bonanza for birds. Many of the birds like *veery, grey catbirds, fox sparrows, and black-headed grosbeaks* are on the road eating insects that are still on the ground before it warms up enough for them to fly. It can be tricky to find the many of the birds, but patience usually rewards you with some nice looks. To get to this spot, turn at the elevator on Minnick hill just east of Dixie and turn left again at Walker Road. Follow Walker Road until it ends at South Fork Coppei Creek Road. Park here and walk in both directions in your search for birds.

Foster Road

Join us on the May field trip to learn about this fun place to bird. To get there go east on Reser Road, winding through the wheat fields, until you reach Foster Road. Turn right and continue across Cottonwood Road into Oregon.

Mountain Birding

There are many places to go mountain birding and they are not that far away. Some of the birds you may encounter are *hermit and Swainson's thrushes, mountain chickadees, red-naped sapsuckers, pileated woodpeckers, MacGillivray's warblers, lazuli buntings, Cassin's vireos, Townsend's warblers, dusky flycatchers* and *hairy woodpeckers*. Not only will you see and hear birds, there are *wildflowers, butterflies, dragonflies* and *spectacular scenery* to enjoy. And I guarantee the serenity of being in the woods will melt away the stress of your busy lives. I always find a walk in the mountains to be therapeutic and I am very thankful we have the Blue Mountains so close at hand. Here are my favorite places to go:

Biscuit Ridge

Turn right at the Dixie school and follow the road all the way to the end of the pavement. Stop along the creek where there aren't houses to look for *warblers* and *flycatchers*, and listen for *veerys*. At the end of the pavement turn left and continue up the steep hill that curves around until reaching the forest. I recommend a high-clearance vehicle for this road because it can be rutted. Once in the trees look for *great gray owls* (they have been seen here in previous years). Take time to get out and walk the road in this area. You will hear and see many of the mountain birds here. Soon you will come to a clearing that overlooks the Walla Walla Valley. Look for *green-tailed towhees* here just before you re-enter the trees. This spot is also a wonderful place to enjoy the sunset. You can continue on from here but the road can be pretty rough. Skirting the Walla Walla Watershed, the reward is breathtaking views of the Blues.

Lewis Peak/Jasper Mountain Loop

This is a fun drive and can be very birdy. As with all mountain birding, it's important to get out of the car and walk stretches of the road looking and listening for the birds. *Great gray owls* have been seen on Lewis Peak Road as well as *pygmy owls*. The road circles around to become Dent Road and then Jasper Mountain Road. At the "T" where Jasper Mountain Road heads back toward the valley, stop and walk again, looking for *pileated woodpeckers, red-naped sapsuckers, MacGillivray's warblers* and the other mountain birds. Be sure to check out the bluebird boxes on the drive down the road. You should see *western bluebirds, tree swallows* and a *house wren* or two at the nest sites.

I hope you all will enjoy summer birding as much as I do. There are many places to explore and many birds to be found.

Events

BIRDS TO LOOK FOR IN MAY

By the end of May, all of the summer birds should be back and getting ready to nest. Here is the list of birds to look for this month:

Western wood peewee	Dusky flycatcher
Warbling vireo	MacGillivray's warbler
Wilson's warbler	Yellow-breasted chat
Western tanager	Lark sparrow
Black-headed grosbeak	Lazuli bunting
Bullock's oriole	Common nighthawk
Olive-sided flycatcher	Willow flycatcher
Eastern kingbird	Veery
Swainson's thrush	Gray catbird
Green-tailed towhee	

Many other species may be seen passing through our valley on their way to nesting sites including:

Wilson's phalarope	Forster's tern
Franklin's gull	Lewis's woodpecker
Long-billed dowitcher	Semi-palmated plover

Although more shorebirds come through in the fall on their way south, a good place to check for them in the spring is at the Millet Ponds on Northshore Road.

Enjoy Spring Birding!

LADD MARSH BIRD FESTIVAL

May 16- 18, 2014 La Grande, Oregon.

The festival opens Friday night with music by the Odd Strings followed by "The State of the Birds" by Terrell D. Rich of Partners in Flight. Beginning Saturday morning and through weekend, the wildlife area is open to birding and exploration. From 6:00 am until noon on Saturday, 6 stations will be staffed by local birders to assist visitors with finding and identifying birds. At the birding stations, artists sponsored by Kid's activities and the Junior Birder program will be available from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. Also on Saturday, take in an afternoon bird walk, a live raptor presentation by Blue Mountain Wildlife and information on native plants for birds. On and off-site field trips Sunday wrap up the weekend.

Registration for the Bird Festival is free but is required in order to receive your permit to be on portions of the wildlife area normally closed to entry.

For more information check the "Bird Festival" tab at www.friendsofladdmarsh.org

Musings by Chris Howard

Spring continues to reveal itself day by day, yet this year there seems to be somewhat of an urgency about it...almost as if the sun was missing us and is glad to re-establish its residency in the north land. Every morning there are fresh new signs to behold as I walk the dog around the block or ride my bike around town. The trees are taking turns coming into bloom, painting the curb sides with pastel brilliance, building to a spring crescendo of warmth and light.

One sure sign of spring at my house, besides the putter of neighborhood lawnmowers, is the sound of the tiny frogs croaking at full volume from the small pond in our back yard. These frogs remind me of Pacific Wrens who also are capable of making an amazingly long and loud song for their size. Every spring these frogs begin their chorus in early March having emerged from their winter hibernation hideaways beneath the leaf litter or in holes beneath the rocks surrounding the pond. Typically, one begins the rough, guttural croaking, soon to be followed by two or three courting competitors each varying their song in hope of finding just the right notes to win the hearts of the listening females. These guys are not shy... you can literally hear their croaking from the other end of the block!

Recently, after the first backyard mowing of the year, I was using some clippers to trim some clumps of grass that were hanging into the pond. As I starting lifting the clump out of the water I noticed a clear jelly like sack full of black dots hanging from the bottom of grass. It was the eggs from the croaker family! Clearly, one or more of the serenaders had been successful in attracting a mate. I carefully lowered the grass back into its position on the side of the pond using some nails to re-secure it to the surrounding soil. Along with the joy of finding the eggs, I also wondered just how many of my well-intended actions have a detrimental effect on my fellow earthly inhabitants. I don't use the fertilizers or pesticides on the lawn which I know are not necessary or environmentally friendly, but I suspect that mowing the lawn itself does not benefit many of the little tiny critters. This evening, under the soft white moonlight, I will be pondering how to live in balance on this beautiful earth while my amorous friends give their nightly concert.

In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake

Spring is definitely here and birds are moving in and moving out. The osprey is here, the junco is gone.

Melissa Cummins had a golden-crowned kinglet and a spotted towhee join her regular yard birds on March 29. The kinglet was a new yard bird for her.

While on a walk around the trail at Murr Park on March 30, Pam Fisher saw a black-crowned night heron roosting in a tree along the creek.

On April 1, the Tuesday Bennington Lake walkers were greeted by a returning osprey. The air above the lake was teeming with violet-green swallows plus a few cliff and tree swallows, all skimming across the water getting a new hatch of some tasty insect. There was a breeding plumage double-crested cormorant on a snag. Now we know why they are called "double-crested" That plumage is only apparent when they are breeding. A western meadowlark was chirping from a tree high up on the east side and there were still a few Townsend's solitaires around.



Melissa Cummins found a loggerhead shrike on Nine Mile Canyon Road on April 2 and was able to get this photo. She also saw many cliff swallows gathering mud for their nests on Byrnes Road. They build their nest under the bridge where the pavement ends.

MerryLynn Denny, Judy Treman, Linda Hanson and I went to looking for spring birds on April 4. We found some nice species including Wilson's snipe, Caspian tern, dunlin, white-throated swift, great horned owls, Say's phoebe, tri-colored blackbirds, ferruginous hawk, and loggerhead shrike.

On April 5, a pair of Cassin's finches showed up in our yard. Don Grosse had a early arriving black-headed grosbeak in his yard the same day, and Andy Stepniewski saw 40 evening grosbeaks and a pygmy owl on Biscuit Ridge. I love this time of year because you never know what might turn up!

Mike and MerryLynn were out on April 5 searching for spring birds—and of course they had some interesting ones including a common teal which is a subspecies of the green winged teal and is rare here. Other noteworthy species at the Walla Walla River Delta were

a sanderling, dunlins, American avocets, a black-necked stilt and several immature bald eagles keeping the birds on the move. There were yellow-headed blackbirds and tri-colored blackbirds mixed in with the Brewer's blackbirds at the poop piles, and at Mile Post 300 along Highway 12 they found a Ross's goose a snow goose and many white-fronted geese.

On April 6, thirteen people turned out to pick up litter along Highway 12. In just a little over an hour, the sides of the roads were clean of debris. Many thanks to Carolyn Corvino for coordinating this project and to everyone who showed up to help.

After picking up litter along Highway 12, Paul and Judy Treman spent a little time birding with me. The highlight was watching Wilson's snipe displaying and making their wonderful winnowing sounds on the Lowden/Gardena Road.



Photo by Judy Treman

A Swainson's hawk was first spotted on April 8 by MerryLynn in the distance at Bennington Lake. About the same time George Jameson and Rodger Shoemake found two of them on Detour Road.

Northern rough-winged swallows were seen in several locations by April 10 including Bennington Lake, Detour Road, and over our house (they nest under a bridge on South Wilbur).

MerryLynn found 7 cinnamon teal at the Northshore Road Millet Pond on April 12 along with 28 black-necked stilts, 2 American avocets, 46 dunlin and tons of ducks. Later in the day she and Mike drove up S. Fork Coppei Creek Road and found a Nashville warbler and a pygmy owl being harassed by 7 chestnut backed chickadees.

On April 13 Rodger and I watched a pair of black-capped chickadees building a nest in one of the boxes in our yard. The male would bring in a mouth full of grass. The female would then go in and work it into the nest but take most of the grass back out. After two days of putting in and taking out material, they seem to have just the right amount.

Jack Taylor saw a eastern blue jay on Chestnut Street on April 17. Wonder where it was hiding this winter?

On April 19, Pam Fisher reported 300 Vaux's swifts going into the chimney at the Youth Center in College Place at dusk. The next day there were over 300. The swifts use this chimney in the spring and again in the fall for roosting. However, there are plans to remove the chimney this spring. How sad for the swifts who have lost most of their roosting chimneys here in the past few years. If anyone in Audubon knows who to contact to try to save this chimney, please make the call!!

Don Grosse saw a pair of blue-winged teal and a male cinnamon teal on April 19 along Mill Creek behind K-Mart.

Joe and Carolyn Corvino led a Field Trip to Palouse Falls on April 19. They were joined by 13 people who enjoyed seeing the target birds for the trip—peregrine falcons and white-throated swifts at the falls.



They also saw Swainson's hawks, ferruginous hawks, great horned owlets, western kingbirds along the way. In Dayton, MerryLynn found five purple finches, which are rare for Columbia County.

Mike and MerryLynn checked for spring birds at the Millet Pond on Northshore Road on April 20. They found house wrens, a long billed dowitcher, least sandpipers and a greater yellowlegs. Other noteworthy birds included great egrets, black-necked stilts, American avocets, dunlins, a sanderling and their first goslings of the year. At the Walla Walla River Delta they found 2 common terns (rare in the spring here) and 94 Caspian terns. Later in the day they drove up Lewis Peak Road and found a pair of red-naped sapsuckers.

On April 20, we had our first rufous hummingbird of the spring in our yard.

MerryLynn and Linda Hanson walked Bennington Lake on April 21. They found several new arrivals including a Hammond's flycatcher, western kingbirds, and house wrens.

After the downpour on April 24, MerryLynn checked her yard for birds and found over a dozen evening grosbeaks.

On April 25 I noticed our visiting Harris's sparrow is now in full breeding plumage, and it was singing. It has been in the yard since mid-January. I will miss it when it leaves. We also had several singing Cassin's finches. Add singing white-crowned sparrows, gold finches house finches and red-winged blackbirds to the mix, and we have a cacophony of sound in our back yard.

MerryLynn braved the wind on April 26 to check the Millet Pond and other spots for shorebirds. There were waves on the pond making it very difficult to see the birds, but at the blood pond on Dodd Road she did see a Baird's sandpiper and a western sandpiper. She also noted that there are young barn owls peering out from the nest holes on Dodd Road.

MerryLynn saw a snowy egret at Peninsula HMU on April 28. Kevin Black searched for it later and didn't find it, but he did find 2 American bitterns near Casey Pond in the reeds.

Bennington Lake was full of singing birds on April 29 as our group walked on Tuesday morning. Yellow warblers, house wrens, a Townsend's warbler, yellow-rumped warblers, a Cassin's vireo, chipping sparrows just to mention a few. The lake was full of bufflehead, northern shovelers, mallards, a few coots and a couple horned grebes. Swallows were everywhere.

This is the last Magpiper until September, but you can find out what is being seen during the summer months by checking the Blue Mountain Audubon Facebook page, the Birding Blog on our webpage, and the Inland Northwest Birder Links on our webpage.

Have a wonderful summer and enjoy the birds!

BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
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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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