



Blue Mountain Audubon Society

# The Magpiper

December, 2014

## Monthly Calendar

**Sunday, December 7**

Field Trip  
9:00 a.m. HJT Parking Lot

**Thursday, December 11**

Board Meeting  
7:00 p.m.

**Sunday, December 14**

Walla Walla CBC  
7:30 a.m.  
Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

**President:** Mike Denny

**Vice President:** Jeff Fredsen

**Secretary:** Paul and Judy Treman

**Treasurer:** Jonathan Webster

**Conservation:** Chris Howard

**Education:** Kathy McConnell and  
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**Membership:** Melissa Webster and  
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**Programs:** Nancy Mitchell

**Publicity:** Jonathan Webster

**Natural Area:** Jack and Jan Gisler

**Bluebird Trails:** Tom Scribner

**Adopt a Highway:** Joanne James,  
Mike James, Jill Gardner

**Webmaster:** George Jameson

**Facebook Admin:** Judy Treman

**Field Trips:** Paul Treman

**Magpiper Editor:** Ginger Shoemake

**Member at Large:** Shirley Muse  
Priscilla Dauble

**Bird Sightings:** Ginger Shoemake

## Website:

<http://www.blumtn.org>

## Bird sightings:

[housewren084@gmail.com](mailto:housewren084@gmail.com)

## Contact BMAS:

[housewren084@gmail.com](mailto:housewren084@gmail.com)

PO Box 1106

Walla Walla, WA 99362

## Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count

**7:30 a.m.** Harper Joy Theatre Parking Lot—Team assignments/Instructions

**5:00 p.m.** 63 Wolf Fork Place, Walla Walla—Supper and Wrap-up

It's time again to grab your binoculars, put on your warm clothes, pack a lunch and join Mike and MerryLynn Denny for the Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count. We will meet at Harper Joy Theatre parking lot where MerryLynn will assign teams for the day's count. In the past we have encountered fog, snow, rain, wind and more—all for fun and a little team competition in the name of bird conservation. Inexperienced birders will be paired with those with higher identification skills so everyone can enjoy the event. The more people who turn out, the more eyes there will be to see what wintering birds are in the 15 mile Walla Walla count circle.

But the fun doesn't end with the count. We will reconvene after a day in the field at Nancy Mitchell's home for a warm bowl of soup and desserts. (Directions will be available in the morning at HJT) After supper we will have a wrap-up of the day's events with each team going over their list of birds. The data will be compiled by George Jameson and sent to National Audubon to be added to the longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations. Results of our count will also be posted on the Blue Mountain Audubon website.

**It is important to let MerryLynn know ahead of time if you want to participate so she can make up the teams. Contact her by email at [m.denny@charter.net](mailto:m.denny@charter.net) or call her at 529-0080**



*A tree of Bohemian waxwings 2012  
Photo by Jim Parrish*

## Field Trip

### PRE-CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

**Sunday, December 7 – 9:00 a.m. to noon**

Mike Denny will lead a field trip the week-end before the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) to acquaint people with the areas within the CBC circle. This will be a driving/birding morning with stops in each area to look and listen for birds. Everyone is encouraged to join Mike on this fun outing. Dress warm and bring your binoculars, field guide, water and a friend. We will meet at 9:00 at the Harper Joy Theater parking lot and return around noon. Please let Mike know if you plan to attend. **[m.denny@charter.net](mailto:m.denny@charter.net) or 529-0080.**



## *On the Road by George Jameson*

### RAMSEY CANYON CBC

One winter we were traveling and stayed in Sierra Vista, Arizona for the month of December. Sierra Vista is where Ramsey Canyon is located along with numerous other great birding locations including the San Pedro River, Fort Huachuca and several canyons in the Huachuacas. It was in December so I contacted the local Audubon Chapter, the Huachuca Audubon Society, found the e-mail address of the Christmas Bird Count Coordinator Ted Mouras, and asked him if I could participate in the CBC. I told him I would go to whatever area he could use me and also mentioned that if they were doing any early morning owl prowls I would be interested in those as well. His response, as with various other CBC coordinators was very positive. "Yes" I could come along and "What did I want to see?" It seems all the coordinators that I have talked with really appreciate any help they can get.



*Ramsey Canyon photo from Nature Conservancy*

The count circle is called the Ramsey Canyon Count Circle. They typically find about 150 species of birds and generally have about 50 participants. The year I participated, they met at the Lone Star Café in Hereford just south of Sierra Vista at 6:30 in the morning for breakfast and coordination of the various teams. Because I was going out owling earlier I met a local owl expert at 5:15AM and we headed out to look for owls. He had an elaborate sound system and was planning on playing various calls to get a response. We drove up Hunter Canyon, the upper parts of which had been partially burned over in a previous forest fire, stopping at different locations to listen for owls. We were specifically listening for Whiskered Screech Owls. Over the next hour and a half we heard 4 different Whiskered Screech Owls and had one of them fly into a tree right above our heads. It was quite fascinating listening to the owls and actually getting to see one fairly close. The Whiskered Screech Owl was a life bird for me.

After chasing the owls I drove over to Fort Huachuca where I met up with another local birder and we went to our count area. It was hunting season on the Fort so we were required to wear an orange vest whenever we got off the road. There were parts of our count area where you could not enter due to unexploded ordinances. For obvious reasons we avoided those areas. Our area had some roads but also large areas of land that we walked. One particularly interesting bird we found was a White-throated Sparrow mixed in with a flock numerous other species. We also had a lot of Abert's Towhees, found a covey of 23 Scaled Quail, and saw several Chihuahuan Raven, Eastern Meadowlark, Pyrrhuloxia, Mexican Jay and many other species.



*Mexican Jay*



*Pyrrhuloxia*

One of the participants in this CBC stayed in his yard to count birds. He had a great feeding station setup and Montezuma Quail, which many of us have trouble finding, came into his feeder every day. There are also a good variety of hummingbirds found in that area even during winter. A total of seven different hummingbird species were found on the count.

The Christmas Bird Count is not just for the United States but includes Canada and many other countries. If you are interested in looking at any of the CBC data you can find it at this Internet Web Site -

<http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/Historical/ResultsByCount.aspx#>

If you are planning on joining a CBC in an unfamiliar area the historical data for that count circle will give you a perspective as to what bird species are found there during winter.

It is a lot of fun participating in Christmas Bird Counts not only here in Walla Walla but elsewhere. Get out and enjoy the birds and the great outdoors.

## Tidbits

### WINTER BIRD FEEDING TIPS

When the ground is frozen and covered with snow and natural food sources are scarce, more birds will be attracted to backyard feeders. It is important to have adequate food available for the birds during these times. To attract the greatest number of species you will need to have different types of feeders. Those with a wide cover over the feeding ports are useful when there is snow. Perches and covered dispensing trays are also helpful. Sparrows, juncos, doves and quail prefer to feed on the ground, so find a protected spot under a tree or shrub to spread seed on the ground for them.

Black-oiled sunflower seeds, white millet, cracked corn suet and niger seed are my winter choices for food. I also put out a few peanuts for the magpies (but this may be a problem if you have squirrels in your area).

Winter birdfeeders should be placed in sheltered locations when possible. Cover such as hedges or a brush pile to offer birds safety from predators. It is important to keep the feeders filled and clean. Proper cleaning will minimize mold and mildew. When cleaning, discard soggy seed or seed incased in ice, and let the feeder dry before refilling if possible.

Here are some more tips for making your backyard bird watching more enjoyable in the winter.

- Clean off feeders, platforms and perches after a storm so seed is easily accessible.
- Leave fruit and berries on trees, hedges and bushes to provide a natural source of food throughout the winter.
- Add a heated bird bath to your backyard or place a safe heating element in a regular birdbath to provide birds with water.
- Stamp or shovel snow around feeders to provide easier access to spilled seed for ground feeding birds.
- Leave nesting boxes and birdhouses up year round to provide winter roosting sites.



Grab a cup of coffee, tea or hot cocoa and find a cozy place in your house on those cold snowy days where you can sit and watch what comes to the feeders you have provided for the birds this winter.



## Bird of the Month

### GREAT HORNED OWL *Bubo virginianus*



**Size:** 22" with 44" wingspan  
**Description:** Large, thick-bodied owl with earlike tufts on head, large yellow eyes, mottled grey/brown and white body and white-throat collar.

*Photo by Rodger Shoemake*

One of the most common owls of North America, the great horned owl is equally at home in deserts, wetlands, forests, grasslands, backyards and almost any other semi-open habitat between the Arctic and the tropics. They are BIG, they are POWERFUL, and they are a FIERCE PREDATOR. They can take down large raptors and other owls, but it more often dine on mice, rabbits and smaller birds.

They don't build their own nest. They use an old nest of a hawk or other species or a cavity (such as the hole in the bank above the parking lot at Bennington Lake). Clutch size is usually 2-3 eggs and the incubation period is about a month. Once the eggs are hatched, the young



remain in the nest at least another month. Even after fledging, young great horned owls depend on their parents for food.

*Photo by Rodger Shoemake*

Great horned owls are monogamous and the pair can be seen and heard together for several months before nesting begins. Their hoot is the quintessential sound of the movies. Even though the female is larger than her mate, the male has a larger voice box with a deeper voice.

They are active mostly during the night—especially at dusk and before dawn. During the day they can be found roosting on a limb sleeping but still alert to possible threats. Two pairs are known to have nested at Bennington Lake for years. We look for them every Tuesday when we walk the lake. They are a large bird, but they are easily camouflaged in the trees. They are often spotted on Field Trips too, so hopefully you will have a chance to see this beautiful bird.

## **More on Christmas Bird Count**

### **NATIONAL AUDUBON NEWS RELEASE**

*New York, NY*

*Published: Oct 29, 2014*

The National Audubon Society invites volunteers across the western hemisphere to participate in the longest-running citizen science survey in the world, the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Between December 14, 2014 and January 5, 2015 tens of thousands of participants will brave inclement weather to help scientists assess and guide significant conservation efforts at a scale they could not accomplish alone.

Each year, Audubon's Christmas Bird Count mobilizes over 70,000 volunteer observers in more than 2,400 locations. It produces the most comprehensive data set depicting the fluctuation, range and movement of bird populations across the continent. Scientists rely on this trend data to better understand how birds and the environment are faring and what needs to be done to protect them. Every local count is part of this vast volunteer network and continues a holiday tradition that stretches back over 100 years.

"The Audubon Christmas Bird Count harnesses volunteer power to gather knowledge that shapes conservation policy at enormous scales in this country. I couldn't be prouder of the volunteers who contribute each year," said Audubon President and CEO David Yarnold. "Christmas Bird Count data is becoming increasingly important not only in documenting current climate change but in predicting the future effects of climate change on North American bird populations. If we know what to expect, we can start taking action now to do something about it."

Such precise documentation is what enabled Audubon scientists to predict how climate change will alter the geographical ranges of North American bird species in a recent groundbreaking study. Chief scientist Gary Langham and other Audubon ornithologists analyzed 30 years of North American climate data and tens of thousands of historical bird observations from the Audubon Christmas Bird Count and U.S. Geological Survey's North American Breeding Bird Survey to understand the links between where birds live and the climatic conditions that support them. Langham and his team have found that 314 of 588 species are at risk of being climate threatened, they face losing more than 50 percent of their range by 2080. CBC data is helping pinpoint priority areas for conservation; the "strongholds" where birds now live that are forecast to remain stable for multiple species in the future.

Many decades of data not only helps identify birds in need of conservation action, it also reveals success stories. The CBC helped document the comeback of the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and significant increases in waterfowl populations, all promising results of conservation efforts.

Last year's count shattered records. A total of 2,408 counts and 71,659 observers tallied over 66 million birds of 2,403 different species. Counts took place in all 50 states, all Canadian provinces and over 100 count circles in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands.

One of the most significant avian incursions recorded during last year's CBC included the record flight of Snowy Owls in the East Coast and Great Lakes. It was the biggest influx ever documented on the CBC and continued through the winter season. Traditional counting of birds together with high-tech modeling and mapping data enabled researchers to make surprising discoveries that would not have been possible in earlier decades.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count began in 1900 when Dr. Frank Chapman, founder of Bird-Lore – which evolved into Audubon magazine – suggested an alternative to the holiday "side hunt," in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds. While the ultimate goal of participating in a count is tallying a representative sample of the birds on a count day, the natural competitive spirit of birders is what drives them to do the most thorough job possible. The CBC has become a treasured holiday tradition, a reunion with birding friends and a way for anyone to play a small part in a big conservation picture. The growing combined pool of contributed sightings helps researchers understand birds in a way that Chapman could never have conceived back in 1900.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is a citizen science project organized by the National Audubon Society. There is no fee to participate and the quarterly report, **American Birds**, will be available online. Audubon Christmas Bird Count information is also available online in Spanish. Counts are open to birders of all skill levels. For more information and to find a count near you visit [www.christmasbirdcount.org](http://www.christmasbirdcount.org).

## *What's Happening*

### NOTES FROM THE BOARD

Two members of Tourism Walla Walla visited the November Board meeting to discuss the possibility of BMAS partnering with Tourism for a one day birding tour to McNary Wildlife Refuge in February. It was the consensus of the group that this be a BMAS fund raising event. After hearing the proposal, the Board voted to proceed. Further details will be discussed and developed at the next Board meeting.

Nancy Mitchell, Program Chair, announced the location for our Membership Meetings will be moved to Olin 157 on the Whitman College campus starting in January. This room is slightly larger than the present location.

Jan and Jack Gisler, Natural Area Co-Chairs, are working with City Parks and Recreation Maintenance Supervisor regarding BMAS and City roles in maintaining the site.

Kathy McConnell, Education Chair, gave an update on our participation in the Carnegie Picture Lab's current school student art project. Here are a couple photos from the first session.



Our Board is now complete. Jeff Fredsen has agreed to be Vice President. Thank you Jeff, and welcome to the Board.

## *Musings by Chris Howard*

### Loss of a Friend

It's hard to say to say goodbye when a friend reaches the end of their life. It's especially hard when the friend is over a hundred years old.

Up until recently I would look to the south across our backyard and the sky would be filled with a crisscross network of leaves and branches soaring at least a hundred feet into the sky. Some of the highest branches were dead and spindly, serving as lookout towers for a Sharp-shinned Hawk that terrorized sparrows on nearby birdfeeders far below. At times, around dusk, the towering dead spires would come alive with the raucous Caw! Caw! Caw! of a murder of crows who would use them as a staging spot before flying off across the neighborhood to their nightly roost. These elevated branches and leaves served as shelter and homes for generations of Screech Owls who would softly call to each other when searching for mates in late winter. Once an owlet fell out of its nest in a hole high in the trunk. We were able to show it to the neighborhood children before hoisting it up into the tree in a padded bucket, where the parents continued to feed it. Occasionally, I would spot a round ball of fur curled into a deep fork of branches far above the grassy lawn below...a raccoon resting after its night of perusing the neighborhood. All year a variety of small birds such as warblers, finches, flickers, robins and sparrows would flutter about in the leafy cover calling to each other, happy to have cool shelter from the heat of the sun. These massive trees breathed out the life sustaining gift of oxygen for us all and inhaled our carbon dioxide for so many years.

Now, looking across the backyard to the south, there is only open sky. A strange unfamiliar sense of emptiness lingers where a short time ago the sky was so full of life. The four giant, ancient, silver maple trees "had reached the end of their life span." It is true that these beautiful trees had become a hazard because they lived in a neighborhood with sidewalks and houses beneath their mighty branches. Had they lived in a forest they would have slowly died one branch at a time or met their final demise toppled by gusty winds when weakened by old age.

The question I ponder is, how do we, in this culture, mourn the loss of our giant friends? Perhaps a ceremony at cutting time, giving thanks for the gifts of these friends, would make the loss more acceptable. There are new small trees planted in the wide circle of dirt where the giants once stood...but there will be empty sky from my view for many years to come.

## *In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake*

MerryLynn had two lesser goldfinches in her yard the afternoon of October 30. Then a merlin came through and scattered all the birds. On October 31 she saw her first Bohemian waxwing of the fall in with a flock of cedar waxwing in her neighborhood. While walking the Rooks Park area later she saw a rough-legged hawk.

We woke up to a steady, long over-due rain on November 1. I had no yard birds....then I looked at the platform feeder and saw a sharp-shinned hawk, with water dripping off its beak, watching the brush pile in earnest, wishing a junco or a house sparrow would make a move. None did, and finally sharpie gave up and moved to a dryer spot in the trees.

Paul and Judy Treman were excited to see pine siskins at their feeders on November 2. There were very few around anywhere in Eastern Washington last winter, so it's nice to know they are back.

The tundra swans are back at McNary NWR. MerryLynn saw four of them on the pond at headquarters on November 3.

MerryLynn found another Walla Walla County first on November 5—a Heerman's gull at the Delta. This is indeed a rare find this far inland.

I birded Jasper Mountain and Lewis Peak roads with MerryLynn on November 6. We found chestnut-backed, mountain and black-backed chickadees, golden crowned and ruby crowned kinglets, northern shrikes, red-breasted nuthatches, winter wrens, brown creepers and the usual robins, cedar waxwings and juncos. We watched three rough-legged hawks riding the wind near the "T" on Jasper Mountain road.

On November 10, Linda Hanson counted 190 bufflehead on Bennington Lake. Wow, that's a lot of them!

MerryLynn found a long-tailed duck at the Port of Wallula on November 10. At Two Rivers HMU she had two very late barn swallows fly by while she was scoping the waterfowl.

The Tuesday walkers found a nice variety of waterfowl on Bennington Lake on November 11. Besides buffleheads, we saw common goldeneyes, coots, green-winged teals, canada geese, a ruddy duck and a hooded merganser. Other highlights were a northern shrike, Townsend's solitaires and a great horned owl.



Bufflehead on Bennington—*photo by Judy Treman*

MerryLynn found three common redpolls at Madam Dorian Park on November 12. Other interesting birds seen were yellow-rumped warblers, spotted towhees, orange-crowned warblers, and golden-crowned sparrows. She saw a large number of snow geese and about 50 tundra swans on McNary NWR.

We had our first snow on November 13, and our yard was full of birds. I counted 17 species and 175 individual birds for Project Feeder Watch over several hours. There were 41 cedar waxwings devouring the flowering crab apple tree crop and the juniper berries. Two sharp-shinned hawks and an adult Cooper's hawk kept the birds on the alert.

Susan Albee watched over 100 killdeer looking for food in the snowy road near her house on November 14.

I walked Mill Creek on November 14. There were the usual mallards, canada geese and American wigeons along with 33 hooded mergansers, four great blue herons, 7 killdeer and two belted kingfishers. Rooks Park was very quiet, but there were juncos and song sparrows along the trail. As I was fixing dinner that evening, a great blue heron flew over the house and perched on top of a power pole in the neighbor's back yard. That seemed like an odd spot for such a large bird.

During the snow Pam Fisher had lots of pine siskins, juncos, chickadees and yellow-rumped warblers and the neighborhood's wild turkeys in her yard.



Wild turkeys in the snow—*photo by Pam Fisher*

On November 16 there were over 75 **wood ducks** and about 50 **mallards** as well as several **ring-necked ducks** on South Wilbur Ponds. The pond is one of few around that wasn't frozen, and the wood ducks seem to gather there in the winter. A **belted kingfisher** was watching over the pond and two **ruby-crowned kinglets** darted in and out of the brush.



While walking the dogs at Murr Park on November 16, George Jameson watched a juvenile **black-crowned night heron** fly up out of the creek and land in a tree.

*Photo by George Jameson*

Sue and Jim Parrish took a short walk at Bennington Lake on November 17 (it was cold!) but saw some nice birds including a hooting **great horned owl**, a **varied thrush**, two **spotted towhees** and the regulars—**juncos**, **white-crowned sparrows** and tons of **robins**.

MerryLynn and Linda Hanson were the only Tuesday walkers to brave the cold and fog on November 18 at Bennington Lake. They were rewarded with a fly over of a **golden eagle** on the east side of the canal. It was being harassed by a **red-tailed hawk**.

Mealtime in our backyard on November 19. This adult **merlin** was feasting on a cedar waxwing.

*Photo by  
Rodger Shoemake*



The next day there were over 75 **cedar waxwings** in the yard and one **Bohemian waxwing**. They were stripping the berries from the juniper tree.

Thirteen people joined Tom Scribner on November 22 for the Annual Turkey Trot. The day started out bright and sunny and ended up pouring rain. There were no **wild turkeys** found in Walla Walla County, but we able to find 93 of them in Columbia County, mostly on Wolf Fork Road south of Dayton. Interestingly, we almost saw more **deer** than turkeys, the final count for deer was

85. We saw or heard a total of 27 species including **northern shrike**, **great horned owl**, **downy woodpecker**, **hairy woodpecker**, **varied thrush** and **hermit thrush**. It was a fun day despite the afternoon rain. Thanks to Tom for another successful outing.



**Wild turkeys** on the move and **hairy woodpecker**

*Photos by  
George Jameson*



While we were looking for turkeys, Mike and MerryLynn were looking for wintering birds north of Walla Walla. They found three **rough-legged hawks**, three **northern shrikes** and 2 **Thayer's gulls**.

**Don't forget the Christmas Count on December 14!!** If you can't make it to the count, you can still participate by counting the birds in your yard. Email your numbers to MerryLynn [m.denny@charter.net](mailto:m.denny@charter.net) or leave a message on her phone **529-0080**.

The January newsletter will have results from the Christmas Count, and you will also be able to find them on our website [www.blumtn.org](http://www.blumtn.org)

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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](http://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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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