

The Magpiper

February, 2015

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Monthly Calendar

Thursday, February 12

Board Meeting
7:00 p.m.

Thursday, February 19

Membership Meeting
7:00 p.m.
Whitman College

Saturday, February 14

Field Trip—9:00 a.m.
Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

President: Mike Denny
Vice President: Jeff Fredson
Secretary: Paul and Judy Treman
Treasurer: Jonathan Webster
Conservation: Chris Howard
Education: Kathy McConnell
Membership: Melissa Webster and Holly Howard
Programs: Nancy Mitchell
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Facebook Admin: Judy Treman
Field Trips: Paul Treman
Magpiper Editor: Ginger Shoemake
Member at Large: Shirley Muse Priscilla Dauble
Bird Sightings: Ginger Shoemake

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Contact BMAS:

housewren084@gmail.com
PO Box 1106
Walla Walla, WA 99362

Meeting

Membership Meeting: February 19, 7:00 p.m.

Room 157 Olin Hall, Whitman College

PROGRAM: STATUS OF GOLDEN EAGLES IN DISTRICT 3



WA State biologist Mark Vekasy will talk about the current status of golden eagle research in WA, with particular emphasis on golden eagles in the Blue Mountains. Mark will describe some of the recent efforts to determine territory occupancy and breeding success, and also some preliminary work on eagle use of wind power areas, juvenile dispersal, and lead exposure.

Mark Vekasy, the Blue Mountains Assistant District Wildlife Biologist for the WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife, is originally from Ohio. He completed his undergrad in biology at Hiram College, and obtained his Master's Degree in Zoology from Miami (OH) University. He has worked in his current position since Sept, 2011, and previously worked for both the Dept and ID Fish and Game for 4 years as a Bighorn Sheep technician on the Lower Hells Canyon Bighorn Sheep Project. Before coming to Washington, Mark worked for USGS-Biological Resources Division in Hawaii on the Laysan Duck Translocation Project, moving the endangered Laysan Duck from Laysan Island to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. Mark has also spent considerable time working with raptors, including golden eagle and prairie falcon research on the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, migrant raptor research with HawkWatch International, California condor reintroduction to Arizona with The Peregrine Fund, and Hawaiian hawk research with the USFWS.

Field Trip

McNARY WILDLIFE REFUGE OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, February 14, 9:00 a.m.

Plan to make your Valentine's Day special starting with a "Wild Goose Chase" visit to the McNary Wildlife Refuge Education Center Open House at the refuge headquarters in Burbank. (*Read more about the Open House on Page 5*). It is anticipated that hundreds of Snow Geese and Canada Geese, along with numerous Greater White-fronted Geese, Cackling Geese, Tundra Swans and other wintering waterfowl will be waiting for us.

We will meet at the Harper Joy Theater parking lot and car pool. Bring a lunch and don't forget your binoculars. Plan to return early to mid-afternoon leaving plenty of time to make the rest of your Valentine's Day special. Paul and Judy Treman will be leading this field trip. Please let them know if you plan to attend. pjtreman@charter.net or 527-0722



On the Road by George Jameson

THE SPIRAL OF WHITE GEESE

First to clarify the title of this article: Biologists will often refer to the large flocks of Snow and Ross's Geese as White Geese because that is what they typically are in the winter, a combination of the two species. In the spring, before migration, they will separate out into distinct species because they nest and breed in different locations. For the sake of this article I will just refer to them as Snow Geese but they are a combination of the two species.

I was out on a birding tour one morning at Bosque del Apache NWR in Central New Mexico and witnessed the most amazing and awesome thing I have seen in a long time. We were coming along the tour loop almost to the two way road and happened to look way up in the crystal blue sky and saw a few snow geese coming down from a higher altitude. They often travel north and south along the Rio Grande River to feed in the various fields.

At first they were just small white specks and then they spiraled down to land on the pond as if in a whirlwind and then as you continued to look up more and more snow geese started appearing out of the blue sky until there was a huge twirling spiral several thousand feet high. As they would glide downward more geese would

appear higher up to continue the downward cascade. You could not see the geese until they started their spiraling downward. They seemed to just materialize from nowhere as if some magician was creating them from a complex illusion. We watched for a while and then moved over to get a closer look at the geese and looked up again and the spiraling downward had started anew only now we were directly under the geese.

When we first saw the Snow Geese, there were none on the pond in front of us and after they had all landed and we were getting ready to leave, one of the biologists drove by. I stopped him and asked him to estimate the number of geese now on the pond and after some looking and consideration he thought there was approximately 12,000 geese on the pond.

I have seen lots of geese fly in huge flocks but I have never seen such an amazing whirlwind spiral. There were so many snow geese in such a clear blue sky truly an awesome light to move your soul and refresh your spirit.



News from the Board

BMAS PARTNERS WITH TOURISM WALLA WALLA

Blue Mountain Audubon will be partnering with Tourism Walla Walla on two wildlife viewing safaris Saturday, February 21, 2015. The tours will be centered around the many thousands of waterfowl and snow geese that will be at the McNary Wildlife Refuge. Both tours will start from the Reid Center on the Whitman College Campus.

Morning Tour - 8:00-11:30am. Includes a continental breakfast and bus transportation starting from and returning to Reid Center.

Afternoon Tour - 12:00-4:00pm. Includes a boxed lunch and bus transportation starting from and returning to Reid Center.

Cost is \$50 per person. Children 10 and under are \$25.00 each.

Tickets and reservations are available by calling Tourism Walla Walla 509-525-8799, Mon-Fri 9-5 or by stopping by the Visitor Center located at 26 E. Main Street, Thur-Sun 10:00-4:00pm.

* * * * *

Education Chair, Kathy McConnell, worked with the Carnegie Picture Lab to bring artist Todd Telander and Blue Mountain Wildlife to the Public Library for a Bird Drawing Event on January 17. It was a hugely successful event with over 250 children and their families in attendance. Todd Telander drew pictures of the birds for the children, and Blue Mountain Wildlife brought several of their educational birds as live models. Children in attendance had a chance to draw the birds with assistance from the Carnegie Picture Lab staff. The new Blue Mountain Audubon's Education tri-fold of information was on display and will remain at the library for a few weeks. The Picture Lab provided the tri-fold and Kathy provided the information about Blue Mountain Audubon that appears on it along with photos of some of the local birds by George Jameson.



Bird of the Month

GRAY CROWNED ROSY FINCH

Leucosticte tephrocotis



Size: 6.5 inches

Description: Cinnamon brown ground finch with a gray head, yellow bill, black forehead and throat. Pink on belly, rump and in wings.

Photo by MerryLynn Denny

The gray crowned rosy finch is one of the uncommon finches that often winters in our area. They breed far north in alpine areas, usually near snow fields or glaciers, talus, rock piles and cliffs.

The nest of a gray crowned rosy finch is a bulky cup of moss, lichens and grass lined with fine grass, hair, wool and feathers. It is placed in a hidden crack or hole in a cliff or cliff ledge under overhanging rocks. Because of the remoteness of their breeding sites there is little impact from human activity. Clutch size is 2-6 eggs, although few nests have been found. Also, because of their remote breeding sites, they seem almost fearless and can be approached to within 3-6 feet while foraging. Their diet is made up of seeds, insects and some vegetation.

Gray crowned rosy finches sometimes are found in the winter months along road cuts north of Walla Walla, and in canyons along the Snake River. They forage for seeds during the day, but fly to old cliff swallow nests to roost mid to late afternoon, especially on the cliffs along the road just before Little Goose Dam. It's worth a trip up there to see if you can find these winter visitors.

AUCTION RESULTS

At the January meeting, famous auctioneer Tom Scribner entertained the group with his wit and persuasive powers to bring high prices for some very interesting items from the auction table. The total amount earned for the evening was **\$610**.

Thank you Tom for entertaining us all, and thank you to all of you who bought items at the auction (even if you might have been a tiny bit coerced by the smooth talking auctioneer.)

The World Around Us

SONAR SABOTAGE

National Wildlife Feb/Mar 2015

Like other bats, Mexican free-tailed bats use echolocation, or biological sonar, to find insects. The species lives in huge colonies with as many as a million individuals, leading to stiff competition for prey and, according to recent research, unique tactics to gain an advantage.

When a bat detects the ultrasonic signal of a nearby member of the colony that is moving in for a kill, it sends out a counter signal that jams its rival's sonar. "Make the other guy miss, then you go in and take the insect," says Wake Forest University biologist William Conner, who, along with colleague Aaron Corcoran of the University of Maryland, discovered the jamming signal while analyzing recordings and film of the bats in Arizona.

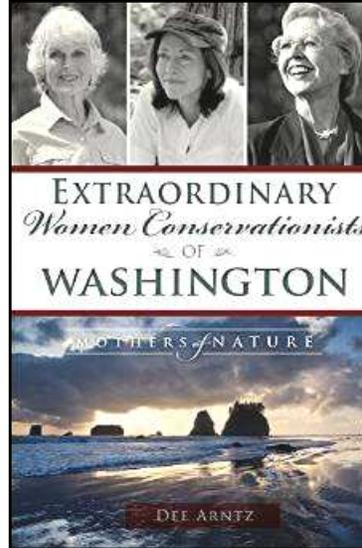
Writing last November in *Science*, the researchers report that the flying mammals often take turns jamming each other until one backs down. "They get into amazing aerial dogfights," says Conner. The discovery increases the number of known functions of bat calls to three: echolocation, communication and acoustic interference.

HOW BIRDS SURVIVE THE COLD

Feathers + Food = Warmth

Here is a 5-step survival guide for birds in the cold as reported on the Cornell Lab Facebook Page.

1. **Get some friends to hang out with.** Having other birds around makes it less likely that something will eat you. Also, other birds are good at letting you know where the food is.
2. **Eat as much as possible.** Fatty foods like black-oil sunflower and suet are higher calorie foods and calorie intake is important in the cold.
3. **When you can't eat more, get puffy and rest.** Fluffy down feathers help complete the food + feathers = warm equation. Food causes your metabolism to generate heat. Feathers trap body heat.
4. **Stay out of the wind.** If the wind is blowing, go to the other side of the tree to avoid it.
5. **Roost in a cavity.** You'll never find a warmer spot to sleep than in your own down feathers, nestled in a nook small enough that you can warm it up with any extra heat that does escape. Old woodpecker cavities, crannies beneath the eaves of houses, even a tunnel in the snow can help.



There is a new book out that weaves the stories of 28 women together with the conservation issues they tackled, and their accomplishments, to summarize the key events in Washington State environmental history.

On the rugged frontier, women participated in outdoor activities such as hiking and climbing, which often stimulated interest in environmental

protection. Fay Fuller, a schoolteacher and social editor of her father's paper (Tacoma's *Every Sunday*), became the first woman to climb Mount Rainier on August 10, 1890. Society women declared her an outrage for immodesty, but many women followed her lead. In 1909, as part of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, a party of women climbers reach Rainier's summit.

Women in Washington soon became a voice for nature and the environment. Here are a few examples of the work they did, and continue to do, for our state.

Polly Dyer and Emily Haig worked to maintain and expand Olympic National Park and later helped found the North Cascades Community Council. They were also instrumental in the establishment of the North Cascades National Park with over 1,000,000 acres of wilderness protected under the Wilderness Acts of 1964 and 1974.

Our ancient forests owe their continued existence to the leadership of Bonnie Phillips, Melanie Rowland, and Helen Engle through their fierce battle over timber cutting that included legal challenges of actions by the U.S. Forest Service.

Jolene Unsoeld, then a State Representative, led the fight against Boeing and other major corporations to pass a state Model Toxics Control Act to pick up where federal authority left off.

Six women, nicknamed the Steel Magnolias, ensured the passage of the Growth Management Acts in 1990 and 1991 that still control growth to protect Washington's natural beauty.

Events

Winter Birds

McNary Environmental Education Center

Refuge Headquarters, Burbank, WA

Saturday February 14

9 AM to 12 Noon

Discover McNary's abundance of ducks, swans, geese and other birds of the Mid-Columbia. Blue Mountain Wildlife of Pendleton will be at McNary with live raptors. Videographer Gaylord Mink will show his wonderful wildlife films. There will be hands-on activities, nature hikes and bird viewing van tours. Beverages will be provided. Watch for updates on the Friends website www.friendsofmcrwr.org

Great Backyard Bird Count! February 13-16, 2015

Give Mother Nature a valentine this year and show how much you care about birds by counting them for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). The 18th annual count is taking place February 13 through 16. Anyone in the world can count birds at any location for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and enter their sightings at www.birdcount.org. The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track changes in bird populations on a massive scale. The GBBC is a joint project of the **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** and the **National Audubon Society** with partner **Bird Studies Canada**.

Bird watchers from 135 countries participated in the 2014 count, documenting nearly 4,300 species on more than 144,000 bird checklists—that's about 43% of all the bird species in the world! In addition to the U.S. and Canada, India, Australia, and Mexico led the way with the greatest number of checklists submitted.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a great way for people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with nature and show some love for the birds this Valentine's Day. Participation is free and easy. To learn more about how to join the count, download instructions, a slide show, web buttons, and other materials, visit www.birdcount.org

Musings by Chris Howard

Winter Doldrums

The cold grey days of January and February are known as the doldrums of bird watching. It is the days when the temperature hovers in the low 30's or even below freezing, and fog obscures the foothills and threatens to make the frozen lake invisible, that separates the discriminating, intelligent, fair weather birders from the marginally (or fully) insane fanatical birders in attendance for the weekly Tuesday bird walk around Bennington Lake. When I pull up to the parking lot on these cold days, usually on my bike which classifies me for an even deeper level of insanity, I take a survey of what water fowl might be floating on any unfrozen sections of the lake and what loons might have showed up for the day's walk. Recently there were 3 of us who were bundled up in thick jackets, stocking caps and gloves with binoculars dangling from neck straps. One of my biggest problems was having the binoculars fog up if I actually found a bird to observe with them. By the time I unfogged them the bird was gone, of course.

We circled around the lake which was solidly frozen on this day and I noticed that even the water around the beaver lodge with its entrance hole up against the bank of the lake was frozen. I wondered how the beavers manage to survive long term cold weather and the frozen lake. In doing a little research I found that in the late fall they cut many small willow, poplar or cottonwood branches and stick them into the mud in front of their hole. Some of this winter food supply is also stored underwater so they can access it when the surface is frozen. I also discovered that the adult beaver pair, who join for life, mate in January or February and have 2 to 4 kits in late Spring. Beavers waterproof their thick fur by coating it with castoreum, an oily secretion from their scent glands

Meanwhile, we three intrepid birders continued our quest searching for winter birds who were smarter than we were, snuggled together somewhere deep under a cover of thick bushes. Realizing that we were never going to set records for the most species sighted, we decided to strive for seeing the least amount of species on a Tuesday bird walk. In searching through the archives we found that 10 species is the lowest recorded for our Tuesday walk. Wish us luck as we hope for a supremely cold and foggy day when birds in a bush are not to be found.

In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake

January 1 was a Walla Walla County Big Day. In the past a few of us have gone out on New Year's Day, but this year Mike and MerryLynn asked people to make a special effort to get out, and to report what they saw. It was a great response from 23 groups, and 112 species were reported to MerryLynn by the end of the day. Highlights were: trumpeter swan, red-breasted merganser, northern goshawk, golden eagle, Thayer's gull, red-breasted sapsucker, American tree sparrow, fox sparrow, white-throated sparrow, pine grosbeak, blue jay, lesser goldfinch and five species of owls—great horned, long-eared, northern pygmy, northern saw-whet and barn.

Here are a couple photos:



**Red-breasted
Sapsucker**

Seen in Dixie, WA

Photo by:
George Jameson



Pine Grosbeak

Seen on Scenic Loop

Photo by:
Nat Drumheller

On January 3, Mike and MerryLynn participated in the Lower Columbia Audubon's Christmas Count. On the way they made a detour to look at and photograph a rare black-headed gull that was being seen below McNary Dam.



Don Grosse had a Cassin's finch and a spotted towhee with the regular birds in his yard on January 5.

On January 7, Melissa Cummins watched about 50 Bohemian waxwings on Biscuit Ridge Road. She also saw a hairy woodpecker and a large flock of black-capped chickadees.

South Wilbur ponds were pretty quiet when I checked on January 7. There were 11 wood ducks hidden under the brush along the edge of the water and a few mallards. (Later in the month there were many more wood ducks). Ruby crowned kinglets and juncos were active along the canal and a varied thrush sat in the top of a tree watching me as I walked by.

MerryLynn drove up Jasper Mountain to escape the fog on January 8. She found a pair of pileated woodpeckers, red crossbills, evening grosbeaks, rough-legged hawks, mountain chickadees and red-breasted nuthatches.

I stopped by Mill Creek behind K-Mart on January 9. There were lots of canada geese, mallards and common mergansers swimming around in the high water.

Mike and MerryLynn were out on the Columbia and Snake Rivers on January 10 looking for year birds. They found a Harris's sparrow at Sun Harbor on the Snake River. Other nice birds seen were glaucous gulls, a flock of American pipits, a peregrine falcon and snow geese.

Paul and Judy Treman enjoyed a varied thrush and six very active black-capped chickadees in their yard on January 12.

Bennington Lake was pretty quiet on January 13. We did find great horned owls, a few Townsend's solitaires, a northern harrier and a kestrel. The lake was partially frozen but there were 3 common mergansers and a couple mallards, plus a great blue heron sitting in the mud.

Jonathan and Melissa Webster had 8 evening grosbeaks visit their sunflower feeder on January 13. When they find a feeder, they can clean it out in short order!

On January 16, Jeff Fredson had evening grosbeaks and brown creepers at his place on Weston Mountain.

Varied thrushes made daily visits to Pricilla Dauble's yard to eat the berries on her native plants all during the month of January. Our native birds do prefer native plants both for their fruit and for the native insects that live on them.

January 17 was the Raptor Field Trip. It was foggy, and then it was rainy, but seven people decided to escape the January blahs and go birding. We were rewarded with 91 red-tailed hawks (with over 70 in the vicinity of Frog Hollow Road and McDonald Road), 23 American kestrels, 5 northern harriers and 2 rough-legged hawks. We also saw 2 northern shrikes and 3 great horned owls. The red-tails came in every color phase, including several rufous morph and dark morph birds. Our total number of species seen for the day was 28.



On January 17, Christopher Lindsey visited McNary National Wildlife Refuge. He saw 550 snow geese, a white-fronted goose, over 100 cackling geese and a few canada geese. He also saw nine species of ducks, a great egret and a bald eagle. There was a flock of 1500 red-winged blackbirds, with 50 yellow-headed blackbirds and 75 Brewer's blackbirds. He saw an additional 325 snow geese on the Railex Road by the poop piles. At the Walla Walla River Delta were 25 dunlin.

George and Deanna Jameson watched a lone swan fly overhead on January 18 as they were walking their dogs near Taumarson Road.

Paul and Judy Treman walked Rooks Park with me on January 19. It was pretty quiet until Judy found a brown creeper. Things picked up a little after that with black-capped chickadees, a Bewick's wren, a flicker, lots of juncos and a flock of 50 or so California quail that I inadvertently flushed. There were hooded mergansers, a common merganser, canada geese and mallards on Mill Creek.

There was a single American white pelican on the lake when we arrived for our Tuesday walk on January 20. Soon it was joined by a ring-billed gull and several canada geese.



Photo by Rich Smith

The only other birds on the water were three common mergansers, a female common goldeneye and a great blue heron. The little birds were pretty quiet with the



exception of this singing Bewick's wren that Rich photographed while it was perched on top of a shrub. We also saw Townsend's solitaires, a screaming red-tailed hawk, several kestrels, downy woodpeckers and two

great horned owls along the trail. However, the best surprise was seeing a flock of about 50 evening grosbeaks fly into a pine tree above the parking lot as we were returning to our cars.

Rodger and I finally made it out to McNary NWR on January 24. We saw many of the same waterfowl that others have been reporting. However, we were surprised to see 102 tundra swans. I don't think we've ever seen that many swans before at the refuge.

A Tri-Cities birder watched thousands of snow geese fly into McNary NWR at dusk on January 24. His account of the fly-in was much like George's description of the "spiral of white geese" on Page 2. There were also thousands of ducks on the ponds—with the highest numbers being mallards and northern pintails.

MerryLynn escaped the fog on January 26 and walked up McKay Grade (which is off South Fork Russell Creek Road). A northern goshawk flew across the road in front of her and she also saw two golden eagles. Many of the mountain birds were also up in the sun including four hermit thrushes and two red crossbills.

While in the parking lot at Bennington Lake before our



Tuesday walk on January 27, Judy Treman took a photo of this Townsend's solitaire. It was not afraid of us at all and sat on the fence post in front of the juniper tree and posed.

Don't forget to let me know what birds you see in February. Email housewren084@gmail.com

LOOK FOR BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
ON
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Ginger Shoemake, Editor, **The Magpiper**
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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

Name: _____

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