



The Magpiper

Monthly Calendar

Thursday, May 21
Membership Meeting
7:00 p.m.
Whitman College

Field Trips
May 30—7:30 a.m.
June 13—8:00 a.m.
June 27—8:00 a.m.

All trips will leave from 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
Publicity: Jonathan Webster
Natural Area: Jack and Jan Gisler
Bluebird Trails: Tom Scriber
Adopt a Highway: Mike James,
Joanne Hesser-James,
Jill Hesser-Gardiner
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
Contact BMAS:
housewren084@gmail.com
PO Box 1106
Walla Walla, WA 99362

Meeting

Membership Meeting: May 21—7:00 p.m.

Room 130 Olin Hall, Whitman College

PROGRAM: MANY WATERS: Natural History of the Walla Walla Valley and Vicinity



Bob Carson, Professor of Geology and Environmental Studies at Whitman College, will discuss his latest book, *Many Waters*. Other contributors for the book are Professor of Geology Patrick Spencer, and Mike Denny, President of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society. During the program, the three contributors will summarize the natural history of the Walla Walla drainage basin from the crest of the Blue Mountains to the Columbia River. Paintings by local artist Leslie Cain along with photographs by Duane Scroggins and others were used in the book and will be shown during the presentation.

Because Bob's programs are always popular, the meeting will be held in Olin 130 which will hold a larger number of people.

Field Trips

SUMMER BIRDS

Saturday, May 30—7:30 a.m.
Leaders: Rodger and Ginger Shoemake

BLUE MOUNTAIN WILDFLOWERS

Saturday, June 13—8:00 a.m.
Leaders: Jeff Fredson and Cheryl Baker

ALL ABOUT BUTTERFLIES

Saturday, June 27—8:00 a.m.
Leader: Mike Denny

See Page 5 for details about these three summer trips.



On the Road by George Jameson

The Legions

One spring during our travels, we volunteered at the Alaska Maritime NWR with headquarters in Homer Alaska. We got there early enough to see the shorebird migration and the following is an attempt to describe what we saw.

Northward they come, wave after undulating wave. Moving with the memory imprinted by the millennium of travel. Stopping in the shelter of the mud flats, pausing on the slopes of the exposed beaches, resting for a day or two then moving on.

Willapa Bay, Sitkine River Delta, Copper River Delta, Kachemak Bay. Northward they come. Here in Homer, in Southwestern Alaska, you see a few in the first days of May. Then as the month slowly progresses the numbers increase as if the gates on the dam are opening and the river is growing larger and larger soon to be a deafening roar.

Whimbrel, Dunlin, Western, Least, Black Bellied Plover, Dowitcher, Yellowlegs, and a Pacific Golden Plover is joining in. It missed the bays coming straight up from the Hawaiian Islands. Semi-Palmated Plover, Red Knot, Surfbird, Bristle-thighed Curlew and the list goes on.

All the families are coming through, all the wanderers are moving. If you watch the tide book, pick the right time of day, and get to the mud flats when the tide has them partially exposed you will see a segment of the legions.

Moving about in the flats, they are probing for food, refilling their fuel tanks, resting their tired bodies. You can see a mixed group of perhaps 65,000 shorebirds, many in number, yet only a small part of the movement north. They appear as small dots, at times just moving blurs. At other times they sit, quietly sleeping, standing on one leg, pausing in their travels before continuing on.

Often they will take flight as if startled by some external force. A flock will lift off and in synchronized movement fly about the exposed bay before settling on a new feeding site. As they fly their wingtips almost touch, seemingly overlap, yet they never collide. They move as if with one mind, one set of wings. As they fly we see their brownish backs and they almost disappear against the exposed bay as they turn we can view their white underbellies and they sparkle bright white.

With the incoming tide, the rising waters will push them closer and closer and then you can see the field marks and identify the travelers, you can name the members of the legion. You can sit and watch them move, see them scurry about, listen to their voices and call notes, you can be a quiet visitor sharing their journey.

They are all heading to their breeding grounds still further north and their biological clocks are ticking. In the fall with their summer's work done they will head south. Some will traverse back along this same route while many will take an entirely different direction to their winter homes.

They will all come back this way next year, they always have, hopefully, they always will.

The legions of shorebirds.



Migration Continues

During the month of May the remainder of the migrating birds will arrive. They will add their beautiful songs and bright colors to the landscape. A few of them are passing through to nest elsewhere, but many of them nest at Bennington Lake and in the riparian areas along the many creeks in the county. Others nest higher up in the Blue Mountains. I can hardly wait to see them!

Blue-winged teal
 Long-billed dowitcher
 Wilson's phalarope
 Franklin's gull
 Forster's tern
 Lewis's woodpecker
 Western wood-pee-wee
 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

MILL CREEK LEVEE GUIDED TOURS

The Walla Walla District of the Corps of Engineers has announced their intention to clear cut all vegetation off both sides the Mill Creek levee extending from just below the Corps office on Mill Creek upstream to Rooks Park. This action, if allowed to take place, will radically change the riparian habitat that is the home to many birds and mammals. Many very large trees as well as smaller trees and shrubs will be cleared in this plan. This levee is also one of the most popular walking, biking and horseback trails serving the Walla Walla community. In addition to Blue Mountain Audubon there are many individuals and groups that are concerned about this action.

The Corps of Engineers is offering guided tours along the levee to explain this project on May 9th at 10am and 2pm. This would be a good chance for those who are interested to view the extent of this project and ask questions directly to Corps of Engineers personnel.

Bird of the Month

WESTERN TANAGER *Piranga ludoviciana*



Size: 7.25 inches

Description: Male is very colorful with a orange-red head, bright yellow front, black back and wings and two wing bars. Female is grayish green above and pale yellow below.

Photo by George Jameson

Western tanagers are stocky birds that are summer residents of open woods all over the West, particularly among coniferous forests, where they often stay hidden in the canopy. However, when they do make an appearance, they are certain to get the attention of everyone nearby. They usually forage in the upper parts of conifers, so watch those treetops carefully. Their song is a hoarse, American robin-like song, short and burry with low, chuckling call notes. You will probably hear them before you see them.

Female western tanagers do all of the nest building, which is made from twigs, branches and roots. The nest is lined with finer fibers such as moss, pine needles and grasses. The final product has a hastily assembled look: a loosely woven, open, flat bowl with a relatively small cup for eggs. Clutch size is 3-5 eggs and incubation period is about 13 days. Nestlings then stay in the nest another 15 days or so.

During breeding season, their diet consists of mostly insects—wasps, ants, termites, stinkbugs, cicadas, beetles, grasshopper, dragonflies, caterpillars and more. They will eat fruit, especially during the fall and winter.

Around the turn of the twentieth century they were thought to pose a significant threat to commercial fruit crops, so many of them were shot. Today it is illegal to shoot native birds so western tanagers are safer than they were a century ago.

Western tanagers are long distance migrants and usually travel at night. They winter in Central America and return to our area in early May. Although they usually nest higher in the Blues, they can be seen locally on their way to their nesting grounds. Look for them in your yard or when you are out walking riparian areas along the many creeks in the County.

Local Audubon at Work

Adopt a Highway Along Highway 12

Joanne Hesser-James, Mike James and Jill Hesser-Gardiner organized a spring clean-up of Blue Mountain Audubon's section of Highway 12 west of Walla Walla on March 28.



Thirteen people showed up and filled 19 bags in one hour!



It was a quick and easy job for all who helped. A special thank you goes to Joanne and Mike and Jill.

**LOOK FOR BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
ON
FACEBOOK**

Natural Area Rempel Trail Work Party

Here are some photos of the work party held on April 12 on the Rempel Trail at the Natural Area. Jack and Jan Gisler, Natural Area Chairs and organizers of the work party, stand in front of the pond near the old barn.



The City crew cleared away some large trees that were in the pond and across the trail, and several of the group cleared the area including the trail leading to the pond.



Take a look at this new bridge! It was paid for and designed by College Place resident and Key Technology vice president, Mike Nichols. He was provided logistical and technical support by his Key Technology associate, Mr. Lou Jausoro. Jack Gisler, Eric Gisler and Dr. Bruce Rieman assisted Dr. Nichols with bridge construction.

The trail and steps leading into the area were cleared and several new railroad ties were installed along the trail to make it easier to maneuver. Jan made sure everyone was well hydrated while we worked.

Many thanks to everyone who helped Now, let's keep it looking good!



Field Trips

Summer Birds

Saturday, May 30—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 yellow-breasted chats and other warblers, flycatchers, hummingbirds, vireos, Bullock's orioles, black-headed grosbeaks, house wrens and more. Early morning is the best time to see and hear the birds.



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.

Blue Mountain Wildflowers

Saturday, June 13 – 8:00 a.m.



It's time again for a trip to the Tollgate area of the Blue Mountains to look for wildflowers. Jeff Fredson and Cheryl Baker will lead this trip taking over from Priscilla Dauble who has led this special trip for many years. 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. If you have questions contact Jeff Fredson **541-215-0532** or Cheryl Baker wallagirl4@gmail.com

All About Butterflies with Mike Denny

June 27—8:00 a.m.

Details about this trip will be available later on the Blue Mountain Webpage and on our Facebook page. Mark the date now—this is a trip you won't want to miss. Mike is passionate about butterflies and is a wonderful teacher!

Musings by Chris Howard

Spring Musings

Right now could not be a more beautiful time of year for the Walla Walla valley. The flowers are up and the trees are blooming in full color. Of course this means that the birds are flying in to this inviting Spring destination.

This week I went to the Tuesday weekly bird walk at Bennington Lake and since I was late, I was walking alone. Pulling on my binoculars in the parking lot I turned to look up at the Great Horned Owl nest hole in the cliff. There was the mother snuggled up to her E-T looking owlet. She was obviously aware of my gaze upon them as she leaned over and gave the baby a kiss on the cheek. Heading down to the trail in the trees, I relished the clear mating song of the Black Capped Chickadee... "fee beee"... then stopped to search out a Spotted Towhee singing nonstop from a clearly exposed perch. There was no doubt about it being Spring and time to find a mate. There was a certain tone of bravado from the Towhee singing out in the open. A little further down the trail there was the upbeat and insistent trill of the House Wren. I stopped and watched as the wren crept about on a half-dead Cottonwood tree, peering under loose panels of wrinkled bark, searching for bugs and possible nesting holes. In the same general area of this high density bird neighborhood, was the loudest and most persistent of the avian suitors, the Red Shafted Flicker. This flicker was definitely desperate to find a mate, and I mean now! "Wick! Wick! Wick! Wick!"....his call echoed through the woods from a bare, upward pointing dead branch. After calling and calling, he started drumming loudly on the resonant dead wood sending out an irresistible message. He lifted up his wing to show off his bright orange feathers then tucked it in and plunged into a hole in the branch, pivoted around inside and stuck just his head out of the hole and began the loud Wick! Wick! Wick! again. He was still going at it as I meandered down the trail and soon caught a glimpse of a Nashville Warbler flitting about in a leafy green tree.

Even with all this activity, it was still early Spring. The Yellow Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, Black-headed Grosbeak and my favorite, the Yellow-Breasted Chat, are still in transit to this avian destination spot. I thought I had seen all there was to offer when I reached the shore of the lake and spied an unusually diverse gathering of ducks bobbing on the waves. There was the Green Winged Teal couple, a slew of Buffleheads and Shovelers, a Gadwald, a Common Merganser, a Redhead, Mallards, an American Wigeon and a Cormorant and an old Coot thrown in for good measure.

Have a happy Spring & Summer!

In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake

MerryLynn found a pair of cinnamon teal at Bennington Lake on March 30. She also saw the first great horned owl chicks of the season.

I walked around Rooks Park on March 30 and spent about 15 minutes watching a male pileated woodpecker attacking the bark on a large snag. There must have been some tasty treats in there.

MerryLynn birded some of her usual stops in the west side of the County on April 2. Highlights were northern rough-winged swallows, wood ducks and orange crowned warblers at Burbank Heights HMU. Near Casey Pond were around 2000 greater white-fronted geese, and a small flock of snow geese. Yellow-headed blackbirds, cliff swallows and a large flock of cedar waxwings were the notable sightings in the Tyson Ponds area.

On April 2, Nat Drumheller walked Bennington Lake. There was a horned grebe on the water, two osprey, a Say's phoebe and cliff swallows plus many more birds. He stopped briefly to check Mill Creek at Lions Park and found 2 Caspian terns with the gulls.

George and Deanna Jameson found a Swainson's hawk on the road leading into Whitman Mission on April 4. Rodger and I were out looking for them on the same day, but didn't find any. We did find two greater yellowlegs in some flooded fields on Detour Road and a pair of courting Wilson's snipe on McDonald Road.

More summer birds were at Bennington Lake on April 7 including cliff swallows, northern rough-winged swallows and bank swallows. A house wren was singing at the snag where it has nested for several years on the east side of the canal. Bewick's wrens and song sparrows were singing everywhere. On the water were northern pintails, American wigeons, mallards, northern shovelers, ring-necked ducks, common goldeneyes, coots and green-winged teals. And there were two young great horned owls in the parking lot hole.

I joined Mike and MerryLynn and Jim and Sue Parrish at the Delta on April 10. There were several American avocets, three black-necked stilts, a couple hundred Caspian terns and hundreds of gulls and ducks.

On April 11, Rodger and I did a little birding with Paul and Judy Treman. We saw several Swainson's hawks on Detour Road and Judy has posted photos on Facebook. We also saw a cinnamon teal, three greater

yellowlegs, and watched a Wilson's snipe flying overhead on Lowden-Gardena Road doing its display call.



We had our first hummingbird of the spring on April 11—a male calliope. Rodger took several photos including this one of it at the feeder.

Bennington Lake was full of returning birds on our April 14 walk. We saw Nashville warblers, orange-crowned warblers, yellow-rumped warblers, chipping sparrows, a Brewer's sparrow a Lincoln's sparrow and a western kingbird. There are three young great horned owls in the bank at the parking lot, although one was out of the hole and on the side of the bank. It's hard to know if it fell out or was kicked out by its bigger siblings.

Nancy Mitchell noted on April 15 that the bank swallows that nest in the bank by her house on Cottonwood are back.

On April 17 we had over 50 evening grosbeaks, a dozen or so white-crowned sparrows, four Cassin's finches and both red-winged and Brewer's blackbirds join our regular yard birds. They quickly cleaned out the sunflower seed platform feeders! We also watched three baby robins being fed in the juniper tree.

On April 18, Rodger and I looked for bluebirds on Jasper Mountain Road with George and Deanna Jameson. We counted 15 western bluebirds near the boxes (mostly at the first ones along the open hillside, but a few up further). We also saw two mountain bluebirds. There were several tree swallows checking out the bluebird boxes and a Savannah sparrow singing on a fencepost. Sue and Jim Parrish were up the same road and also saw the bluebirds. In addition, they found a vesper sparrow.

Pam Fisher reported the Vaux's swifts returned to the chimney in College Place on April 18.

On April 20, an out-of-town birder found about 50 sandhill cranes in a flooded field on McDonald Road. At least some of them were still around two days later.

Melissa Cummins reported a pair of downy woodpeckers drilling a nest hole in an old apple tree at her place on April 23. She also reported seeing and hearing several house wrens and a western kingbird.

MerryLynn walked the Rooks Park area on April 23 and was serenaded by several yellow warblers. Another returning summer bird is back!

Our yard was still full of evening grosbeaks on April 23 plus a pair of Cassin's finches, a yellow-rumped warbler and a Nashville warbler. The black-capped chickadees are nesting in a box in our yard and a house wren was checking out the box where we've had wrens nest for 20 years.



Rodger and I took my sister to Palouse Falls on April 23 and Rodger got a photo of a western kingbird along the road into the falls. There were lots of violet-green swallows and cliff swallows, plus a few

white-throated swifts. We were not able to find the peregrine falcon pair that nest there but there was a lot of "evidence" on the rocks that they were around.

Like so many other people, Nina Conn reported lots of evening grosbeaks at her feeders on April 23. She also had a visit from a yellow-headed blackbird. Nice yard bird!

Mike Denny had a purple finch visit their feeder on April 24.

We had our first rufous hummingbird of the year show up at one of the feeders on April 25.

Pam Fisher saw about 150 American white pelicans circling above the Walla Walla River just east of Whitman Mission on April 26. Also she heard a western screech owl calling from a tree in her yard when she got home.

MerryLynn pretty much covered the Walla Walla County the weekend of April 25-26. Here are just a few of the highlights:

Wallula Gap: white-throated swift, peregrine falcon, western kingbird, canyon wren, Say's phoebe
Nine Mile Canyon: ferruginous hawk, rock wren
McNary NWR Hqts: American bittern, osprey
Walla Walla River Delta: American avocet, black-necked stilt, marbled godwit
Tyson Ponds: tro-colored blackbird, sora

Blue Creek: ruffed grouse, Nashville warbler, yellow warbler, orange-crowned warbler, yellow-rumped warbler

Lewis Peak: red-naped sapsucker, mountain chickadee, chestnut-backed chickadee

Jasper Mountain: western bluebird, mountain bluebird, chipping sparrow, lesser goldfinch

On April 27, Linda Hanson saw four pairs of ruddy ducks on Bennington Lake along with several buffleheads and northern shovelers.



If you haven't seen a male ruddy duck in breeding plumage, you should try to find one. Its bright blue bill is something to behold.

Things are starting to pick up at Bennington Lake. On our April 28 Tuesday walk we were serenaded by yellow warblers, house wrens, red-winged blackbirds, and very noisy western kingbirds. Cliff swallows were gathering mud to make their nests on the concrete structure in the lake and the osprey was fishing. The lake was dotted with bufflehead, green-winged teal, redheads, green-winged teal, cinnamon teal, wigeons, mallards and even a coot. A Wilson's snipe flew up from the south shore of the lake as we walked by, and we found two calliope hummingbirds. Chris and MerryLynn found a vesper sparrow on the south end. Two great horned owl chicks were in the bank in the parking lot and an adult was calling from the trees.

Take a walk around Bennington Lake this summer and you will be amazed at what you find. I will post what we are seeing on the Blue Mountain Audubon webpage blog this summer. There will be photos on the Blue Mountain Audubon Facebook Page all summer as well.

The website and Facebook are good ways to keep up on field trip results and find out what is happening in the local "bird world" over the summer months.

I hope you all have a "birdy" summer. We'll see you in the fall!

BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
Ginger Shoemake, Editor, **The Magpiper**
PO BOX 1106-0022
Walla Walla, WA 99362

Non-Profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Permit 44
College Place, WA 99324

Address Service Requested

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: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____