

Blue Mountain Audubon Society

The Magpiper

September, 2015

Monthly Calendar

Thursday, Sept. 10

Board Meeting
7:00 p.m.

Thursday, Sept. 17

Membership Meeting
7:00 p.m.
Whitman College

Saturday, Sept. 12

Field Trip
Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

President:

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:

Bluebird Trails: Tom Scribner

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

Members at Large: Mike Denny,
Shirley Muse, Priscilla Dauble

Bird Sightings: Ginger Shoemake

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PO Box 1106

Walla Walla, WA 99362

Meeting

Membership Meeting: September 17—7:00 p.m.

Room 157 Olin Hall, Whitman College



Blue Mountain Land Trust is excited to share it's mission with the Audubon Society at the September meeting. To preserve the lands we all love, the Land Trust creates conservation easements; Sue Parrish and other board members will explain exactly what an easement is, and what it entails, as well as maps and photos of the easements we have so far. Also covered will be the Land Trust's history and growth, and their educational program for the public; Learning on the Land. With input from varied community resources, the Land Trust has also created a conservation plan which identifies critical habitats in our area. This plan will be explained and maps of these important areas will be shared. The Land Trust has lots of volunteer opportunities, so come learn how you can be a part of preserving forever the Blue Mountain lands we all love.

Field Trip

HAWK WATCH ON BALD MOUNTAIN

Saturday, September 12 – 8:00 a.m.

Mike and MerryLynn Denny will lead our first field trip this fall to Bald Mountain north of Tollgate on the road to Jubilee Lake (about an hour's drive from Walla Walla). We will sit in our lawn chairs and watch Cooper's Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Northern Harriers, Turkey Vultures and other raptors as they ride the thermals overhead and in the valley below. We will also look for mountain birds. Our goal will be to see more than 39 raptors and 36 total species (our previous high numbers).

Meet at the Harper Joy Theater parking lot and we will car pool. In addition to a lawn chair, bring your binoculars, lunch, a jacket (as it could get cold at elevation 4100 feet) and a friend or two. We will return to Walla Walla about 2:00 in the afternoon. You do not have to be a member of Blue Mountain Audubon to attend and there is no limit to the number of attendees. Please contact Mike or MerryLynn if you have any questions. m.denny@charter.net or 529-0080.



IN THE NEWS—LOCAL

MILL CREEK LEVEE UPDATE

On August 12, the Corp held a Public Meeting to go over their plans for the removal of trees and shrubs from the section of Mill Creek from their Project Office past Rooks Park. There were many questions and comments from those attending, and unsatisfactory answers from the Corp. After the meeting, a tour was held to show how and where this riparian destruction will take place.

The Board of Blue Mountain Audubon has made clear Audubon's disagreement with the plan, and has asked for compromise. Conservation Chair, Chris Howard, addressed our concerns in a letter sent during the Public Comment Period for the Project. Much of that letter was printed in the Union Bulletin on August 21.

Many other people sent comments to the Corp expressing their concerns. Following is a letter by Sue Parrish, an active member of Blue Mountain Audubon, that sums up the concerns many of us have.

The riparian area next to a stream is arguably the most important component creating stream health, especially the part closest to the stream. It has been classified as a critical area by the Washington Department of Wildlife. In fact they have a 195 page document describing the importance of riparian areas to the life of a stream. It is critical to everything from all forms of life living in and near the stream, to the physical attributes such as temperature and oxygen levels. The management recommendations put forth by WDFW include a minimum width for riparian areas on any stream to be at least 150 feet. Why then does the Corps plan to denude a one mile stretch of Mill Creeks riparian habitat? How can they under state law? None of us private landowners could do this.

Logic would indicate that root structure holds soil in place and stabilizes slopes. When vegetation is removed from a hillside, erosion and landslides occur. The most dramatic example of this is the horrific landslide in Oso, Washington attributed to logging on the slopes above. The Corps owes us a clear scientific explanation of how removing the trees, shrubs and their roots increase stability of the levee. There seems to be no supporting evidence on this issue. Even a study done by the Corps itself states that "The statistical comparison of means did not produce conclusive evidence that tree roots influence the average hydraulic conductivity of a soil layer. Only one test showed evidence of an existing macropore associated with a tree site. These analyses were conducted for Sacramento, CA; Burlington, WA; Portland, OR; Lewisville, TX; Vicksburg, MS;

Albuquerque, NM; Boca Raton, FL, and Danville, PA." In addition, the tree removal will be done with bulldozers and backhoes, the use of which would seem to damage the integrity of the levee far more than integrated healthy web of roots.

California recently won a lawsuit against this destructive policy of the Corps, a policy instituted after Katrina even though vegetation did not cause any of the numerous levee and floodwall failures in New Orleans. California recognized the invaluable contribution of the riparian areas of their state. Hopefully we can do the same in Washington.



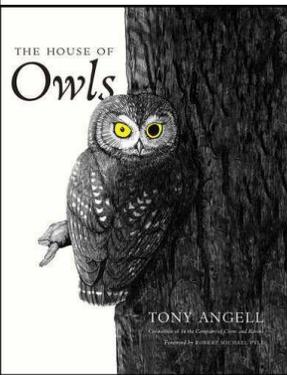
Photo by Judy Treman

And finally, think of the aesthetics. This is a beautiful stretch of Mill Creek, visited by thousands of people a year. Imagine how it will look bulldozed and denuded... and at what cost? Besides the \$300,000 of our taxpayer money, the stream will be warmer, the oxygen levels will rise, causing the fish and invertebrates living within the stream to suffer and possibly die. The insects now breeding in the vegetation next to the stream will be gone, as well as the birds that feed upon them. A walk along Mill Creek will change from one filled with shade, birdsong, mink and otters, to a desolate dusty scene of destruction.

Please reconsider this misguided policy.

*Sue Parrish
Retired Science Educator
Walla Walla Public Schools*

Books



The House of Owls by Tony Angell

From the Preface:

“Evolution has exquisitely designed owls for their lives as predators. They possess memories of place that are so keen they can maneuver expertly through the branches of trees in near total darkness.

They are inquisitive, passionate, aggressive, deceptive, and at times quite valiant creatures. They experience pleasure and fear, and form inseparable pair bonds. As we humans make our impact felt on ecosystems and further pollute our planet, these birds are among the most vulnerable to the changes. The drawings and the narratives here all grow directly from first-hand experiences with a number of owl species, but it is only by considering them in the context of the environmental conditions owls face that they become truly meaningful.”

For a quarter of a century, Tony Angell and his family shared the remarkable experience of closely observing pairs of western screech owls that occupied a nesting box outside the window of their forest home. The journals in which the author recorded his observations, and the captivating drawings he created, form the heart of this compelling book—a personal account of an artist-naturalist’s life with owls. Angell’s extensive illustrations show owls engaged in what owls do—hunting, courting, raising families, and exercising their inquisitive natures—and reveal his immeasurable respect for their secret lives and daunting challenges.

Angell discusses the unique characteristics that distinguish owls from other bird species and provides a fascinating overview of the impact owls have had on human culture and thought. He also offers detailed scientific descriptions of the nineteen species of owls found in North America, as well as their close relatives elsewhere. Always emphasizing the interaction of humans and owls, the author affirms by his own example the power of these birds both to beguile and to inspire.

Tony Angell is a figure in both the Seattle Art scene and the Puget Sound Environmental scene. His life’s work encourages aesthetic beauty and unflinching natural integrity, be it through artwork, publications, advocacy, or illustration. Angell brings a passion and ferocity to his love of nature that leaves audience members and readers alike inspired.

Bird of the Month

BELTED KINGFISHER *Megaceryle alcyon*



Size: 13 inches

Description: Stocky, large headed bird with a shaggy crest on the top and back of the head. Powder blue above, white underparts and a wide blue breast band. Females also have a rusty band on their bellies.

Female—photo by Rodger Shoemake

With their top-heavy physique, energetic flight and piercing rattle, belted kingfishers seems to have an air of self-importance as they patrol up and down rivers, creeks and shorelines. They spend much of their time perched along the edges on the water searching for small fish. They hunt either by plunging from a perch or by hovering over the water, bill downward, before diving. They dive with their eyes closed, grabbing the prey in their bill with a pincer motion. Returning to their perch with the prey, they pound it on the perch before swallowing it head first. For anyone who walks the Mill Creek trail between the Project Office and Rooks Park, they have encountered this raucous bird patrolling the creek. However, if the planned project by the Corp of Engineers goes ahead, the kingfishers will have to find some other place to fish.

Belted kingfishers nests in burrows that they dig into soft earthen banks, avoiding ones with vegetation. The tunnel slopes upward from the entrance, and can range in length from 1 to 8 feet. One such nesting place is along the canal at Bennington Lake. They also have nested in the cut along the road leading to the parking lot at the lake. This location is commonly shared by northern rough-winged swallows and bank swallows.

They are solitary birds most of the year, until they pair up during nesting season. Both members of the pair vigorously defend their territory during nesting season, chasing away intruders while giving loud rattle calls. Predators of kingfishers include hawks, mammals and snakes.

Belted kingfishers are common and widespread throughout North America, although there has been a 46% decline in their population from 1966-2011. Because of this they are considered at Common Bird in Steep Decline.

The World Around Us

RESTORING OLYMPIC RAINFORESTS

Nature Conservancy Magazine, Aug/Sept 2015

Like three graceful fingers of the same hand, the Hoh, Queets and Clearwater Rivers reach west from Olympia National Park, flowing from the Olympic Mountains to the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary.

These undammed rivers have some of the healthiest salmon runs on the West Coast. They are also critical habitat for marbled murrelets, bull trout and other species. Although the rivers are healthy, the surrounding forests have long been managed primarily for timber harvest, not habitat.

The Conservancy's vision is to reconnect the rainforest along these rivers from summit to sea, so that forests, salmon and local communities can continue to thrive. They have purchased more than 11,000 acres along the rivers in parcels that are adjacent to lands already conserved by Washington State and the Hoh River Trust.

It is an intriguing challenge—to turn a young, simple forest into old-growth. That means removing some logging roads, thinning trees and replanting second- and third-growth forests with diverse species. Restoration and sustainable timber harvest will employ local people, while ensuring that the salmon on which so many depend will continue to thrive. These lands will stay open for hunting, fishing and other recreational access, and for Native Americans to practice traditional cultural uses.

Within ten years, new riverside trees will lead to cooler water with less silt. In 60 years trees will mature and some will fall into the rivers, creating new pools and logjams for salmon. Two hundred years from now, old-growth forests will once again thrive.

The Olympic Rainforest restoration is modeled after the **Ellsworth Creek Reserve** project where 8,000 acres of some of Washington's last old-growth stands are now safeguarded. It is also a living laboratory that tests how sustainable logging can restore damaged forests. To read more about the work being done in the Ellsworth Creek Reserve see the August/September issue of the Nature Conservancy Magazine magazine.nature.org

A BIRDER'S GUIDE TO THE FUTURE

By Breanna Draxler

Excerpts from Popular Science Article, April 20, 2015

Land use and climate change are turning some birds into winners, and others into losers. Climate models predict a much warmer world in 60 years, with flash storms and extended droughts. But they don't take into account changes to the land, like urban development, agricultural expansion, or resource extraction. "You're missing a very large part of the story if you don't look at the impact of land-use change," says Terry Sohl, a U.S. Geological Survey researcher. Sohl is the first to publish a study combining climate research and high-resolution land-use data into a single model—in this case, to advance bird research. It shows how each species' U.S. range (the area where it can be found) will change by 2075. "Different species will respond to these shifts in different ways," says Wesley Hochachka, an ornithologist at Cornell University. "Some are tied to specific vegetation; some get along with humans; some are going to move. There will be winners and losers."

The elusive Baird's sparrow has a small range, very specific moisture requirements, and intolerance to fluctuating temperatures. Unfortunately for the bird, climate change will mess with all three. Although its range loss here appears dramatic, that's likely because the species will be moving north into Canada, beyond the geographic scope of this study.

Some species thrive by not being picky eaters. Great horned owls will go after anything they can find, including small mammals, reptiles, and even other birds. In fact, as long as there are enough places to nest, these owls don't seem to mind human company.

As species move into different regions, they'll have to interact with new neighbors. In South Dakota, for example, northern mockingbirds are encroaching on brown thrasher territory. Soon they'll be competing for the same resources. Timing is an issue too. A European bird study found that species that began migrating earlier enjoyed stable or growing populations, while birds that stuck to the usual timetable saw declines. But the early birds face risks too. In response to warming temperatures, a species called the great tit has started laying its eggs sooner. Chicks hatch about 10 days before their primary food source, caterpillars, emerge. That's a problem. For the non-migrators, behaviors may need tweaking.

Read more at www.popsci.com/birders-guide-future

Notes from the Board

The first Blue Mountain Audubon Board meeting of the new year was held on August 13. Most of the evening was spent discussing the Mill Creek Levee project, and how BMAS should respond.

- Chris Howard, Conservation Chair will be making the official Comments to the Corp of Engineers
- The Board discussed placing a visual advertisement in the Union Bulletin to make the public aware of the destruction of habitat plan by the Corp.
- U.S. Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers and U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell will be informed of the plan.
- Possible ligation was discussed as a final alternative.

Mike announced that he will not be continuing as President. A Nominating Committee was chosen and will report back to the Board at the September meeting. The new President elect will be voted on by the BMAS membership at the September Membership meeting.

The Board approved monies to print a new County Bird Checklist. Mike and MerryLynn will make the changes to the current list and have it printed. Contributions will be solicited to help defray the cost of printing.

The Natural Area Chair position is vacant. The Board will ask for volunteers to fill this position at the September Membership meeting.

Cheryl Baker was authorized to make an additional 28 bluebird boxes to be used to replace ones that cannot be repaired along the bluebird trails.



Musings by Chris Howard

A Summer of Fire

Even though this summer still has a few weeks left on the calendar, I think it is safe say that the summer of 2015 will be remembered by its hot weather and fires. Hot weather can be uncomfortable but wild fires are downright scary. The national policy of fire suppression since the early 1900's has resulted in an unnatural accumulation of vegetation in forests resulting in a propensity for fires to be bigger, hotter and more destructive. The Blue Creek fire was close enough to town to for the flames to be able to be seen from Scenic Loop. Fortunately the wind blew the smoke away from town and it was contained fairly quickly, though damage was definitely done. I had plans to hike on the Pacific Crest Trail for a couple of weeks in July and those plans were amended from a trail closure due to a fire on the East slopes of Mt. Adams.

These were all inconveniences for me but what is it like for the animals when their forest home is suddenly on fire? One thing we know is that fire is a natural component of the ecosystem...as necessary as water. All the woodland species of the Northwest have evolved with fire as an aspect of their reality. When flames begin animals attempt to flee, birds fly, mammals run, amphibians and small creatures try to burrow into the ground or hide under rocks. Large elk or deer have been known to take refuge in streams or lakes. The main effect on animals is the change in their habitat. Some trees, such as Ponderosa Pines will survive a low intensity fire. Fire causes some fungi like morels to release their spores. Jack pines upon which the endangered Kirtland Warbler depends on, need fire to release their seeds. Woodpeckers will move into a new burn to feast on the bark beetles. Fires are hardest on birdlife when they occur during nesting season. Other species will have to establish new territory in an unaffected area. Foragers will benefit when the new grasses and shrubs begin to repopulate the burn area. Fire can be nature's way of pushing the reset button.

The Grizzly Bear Complex fire is currently changing the environment in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, one of my favorite hiking areas. A few years ago Tom Scribner and I stood in a Ponderosa Pine parkland on Grizzly Bear ridge overlooking the Wenaha River. Another time we walked the entire length of the Wenaha in 3 days. This fire will definitely change this special destination of mine. Next Spring I intend to go to Grizzly Bear ridge and see if those Ponderosas are still standing.

In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake

It was another successful nesting season in the Walla Walla Valley and the Blue Mountains, despite the hot weather and the devastating fires. Many of the birds that thrilled us with their arrival in May are now leaving for their winter grounds to the south. There is still time to see some of them, but the challenge now is to identify all those immature birds!

One group of birds that came here to nest were the swallows. They came by the hundreds—violet green swallows, cliff swallows, bank swallows, barn swallows, tree swallows and northern rough legged swallows. Most us just glance at the swallows and don't take the time to take a close look. Here is a photo of a cliff swallow taken by Rich Smith. What a beautiful bird when you take a closer look!



August brings the beginning of winter migration for shorebirds. Places to look for these birds as they move through are at the Walla Walla River Delta, the blood ponds, Tyson Ponds, along the Columbia River where there is exposed mud, and of course at Bennington Lake and along Mill Creek.

MerryLynn has been diligently birding all summer. Very few days went by that she wasn't out somewhere in the County looking for birds. On August 8 she found shorebirds!! American avocets, killdeer, spotted sandpipers, a solitary sandpiper, lesser yellowlegs, least sandpipers, western sandpipers, semipalmated sandpipers and a long billed dowitcher—all at the blood ponds or at Tyson Ponds.

On August 7, my sister Jene and I watched 10 black-necked stilts fly into the mud along the canal at Bennington Lake.

MerryLynn found some great birds at Bennington Lake on August 11, including the first recorded white-breasted nuthatch at the lake and a young merlin.

Other migrants seen were evening grosbeaks and olive-sided flycatchers. She saw or heard 57 species of birds.



Pam Fisher walked Mill Creek along the disputed area on August 13. There were many birds in the riparian area that is slated to be destroyed including this western tanager. She also saw goldfinches, yellow warblers, a downy woodpecker, kingfisher, cedar waxwings, song sparrows and western wood peewees. On the water were a great blue heron, a greater yellowlegs, canada geese and mallards.

Our yard was very busy on August 15. Migrants included a western tanager, a chipping sparrow and a warbling vireo. Some of the regular visitors were a downy woodpecker, a red-breasted nuthatch, 18 California quail, flickers and all three species of hummingbirds.

Jene Hall enjoyed the calls from a western screech owl as she went on her evening walk on August 15.

Nat Drumheller watched a barn owl being chased across Bennington Lake by swallows on August 16.

On August 18, Lynn Sealey watched and photographed a solitary sandpiper walking on the algae matt on her pond, poking its beak into the yuk to get some nourishment.



MerryLynn found a black-throated gray warbler at Bennington Lake on August 21.

On August 22, MerryLynn walked Stone Creek by Wal-Mart. She found orange-crowned warblers, a Nashville warbler, MacGillivray's warblers, yellow warblers and Wilson's warblers. She also found 12 white-crowned sparrows—the first of the fall.

Heidi Hofer noticed an influx of migrants and other birds in her yard on August 22 and she was wondering if her yard and feeders might be giving respite to the birds because of the smokey conditions. There were several western tanagers, a black-headed grosbeak, and a much higher than usual number of chickadees, house finches, goldfinches, house sparrows and robins

On August 22, Bob Best reported common night hawks on his property in Touchet. This is the time of year to be looking for them, especially in the evenings along the creeks.

Mike and MerryLynn found a parasitic jaeger at Peninsula HMU on August 22. At the Tyson blood ponds they saw 16 species of shorebirds. Migration is in full swing!

Pam Fisher took this great photo of an American redstart she saw on the channel above Bennington Lake. It was with a feeding flock of warblers that also included orange-crowned warbler, yellow warbler, yellow-rumped warbler and Townsend's warbler.



Bennington Lake was swarming with Townsend's warblers on our August 25 Tuesday walk. We found them in trees all around the lake, along with yellow warblers, Wilson's warblers, orange-crowned warblers and western tanagers. Migration is on!

Heidi Hofer watched a white-breasted nuthatch working the bark along a tree in her yard on August 27. It was a life bird for her, and a VERY nice yard bird.

Let me know what you are seeing. Because of the fires and smoke, who knows what might come through. Email your sightings to me. housewren084@gmail.com

BIRDS WHO COULD BE MOST AFFECTED BY THE DESTRUCTION OF HABITAT ALONG MILL CREEK

Photos by Earl Blackaby



LOOK FOR BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
ON
FACEBOOK

BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
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: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____