

Blue Mountain Audubon Society

The Magpiper

November, 2015

Monthly Calendar

Thursday, November 12

Board Meeting

7:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 14

Field Trip - 9:00 a.m.

Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

Thursday, November 19

Membership Meeting

7:00 p.m.

Whitman College

President: George Jameson

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

Website:

<http://www.blumtn.org>

Bird sightings:

housewren084@gmail.com

Contact BMAS:

Email: housewren084@gmail.com

Mail: PO Box 1106

Walla Walla, WA 99362

Meeting

Membership Meeting: November 19—7:00 p.m.

Room 157 Olin Hall, Whitman College

PROGRAM: HERPTILES OF WASHINGTON STATE



Wandering garter snake

Retired Washington State Parks and Recreation Commissioner Gary Lentz will share his knowledge about reptiles and amphibians found in our part of the Pacific Northwest. Reptiles and Amphibians are closely tied to their environment and unlike species such as birds, mammals and fish, seldom have the ability to move very far from ecological changes. They are excellent indicator species of how we are treating our living spaces on this planet. In addition, Gary will administer a quiz to test our knowledge about herptofauna.

Gary served as a park ranger and area manager for over 35 years. He was stationed at Ginkgo Petrified Forest, Lyons Ferry, Palouse Falls, Central Ferry, Camp Wooten Environmental Learning Center and Lewis & Clark Trail State Park. Prior to his work with the Park Service, he volunteered at Woodland Park Zoo Reptile House in Seattle and spent four years in the U.S. Coast Guard. His work has given him opportunities to observe and discuss local populations of reptiles and amphibians with visitors, indigenous people, and local residents. He has kept a record of observations for over 40 years and this information has been incorporated into the WSDF&W data bases.

Field Trip

TURKEY TROT

Saturday, November 14 - 9:00 to Late Afternoon

It's time for the annual November Turkey Trot led by Tom Scribner. We will scour the Blue Mountain foothills in both Walla Walla and Columbia counties in search of wild turkeys. The record high was 365 turkeys in 2007. While looking for turkeys we will keep an eye out for other birds, especially those not commonly seen around Walla Walla and College Place (northern shrike, Townsend's solitaire, pileated woodpecker, Steller's jay, mountain chickadee and more).

This will be an all-day trip so bring munchies to nibble on along the way and a lunch; and don't forget your binoculars. This trip is always a lot of fun and the scenery alone makes it a trip you won't want to miss. You don't have to be a member of Blue Mountain Audubon to attend and there is no limit on the number of attendees. Meet at the Whitman College Harper Joy Theater parking lot and we will car pool. Questions? Contact Tom : **529-8628 or tom@minnickhayner.com**

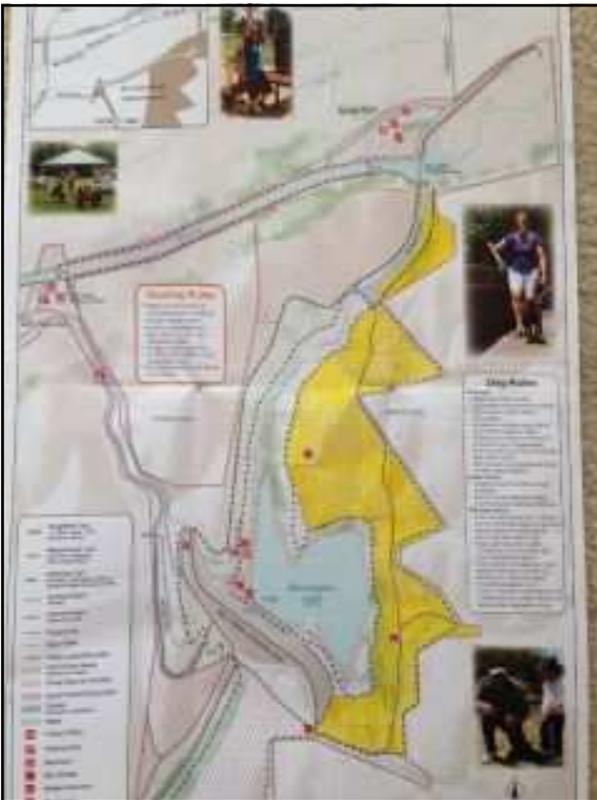


Local News

MILL CREEK MASTER PLAN

Chris Howard, Conservation Chair, urged members at the October meeting to send letters to the Corps of Engineers in response to the Mill Creek Draft Comprehensive Management Plan. This draft, when finalized, will affect recreational usage of the entire Mill Creek/Bennington Lake area for the next 20 years. Blue Mountain Audubon (along with many other groups) is very concerned about the section that deals with hunting at Bennington Lake. We feel it is a serious safety issue and should be phased out.

The map below shows in yellow the areas that BMAS would like to see become “no hunting” **now** because it covers two trails and a road which are heavily used year-round by birders, walkers, runners, bicycle riders, horse back riders and others.



The comment period ended October 25. I hope many of you voiced your concerns to the Corps of Engineers. We will let you know if they acknowledged this safety issue.

NEEDLESS SHOOTING OF BIRDS

Often Lynn Tompkins, from Blue Mountain Wildlife, reports raptors coming to the center with gunshot wounds. Many times these injuries are not repairable and the birds must be euthanized. Why do some people not see wildlife as valuable?

A recent incidence of a bird killed by gunshots prompted Jim Nelson, long-time friend of Lynn's, to offer this poem.

On the Shooting Death of a Redtail Hawk

*Hey, you in the truck, with your beer and your gun
With your sights out the window you slither along
Your crosshairs are seeking to center on one
of the innocent creatures who've done you no harm
So, finally you found it, the target you seek
The mottled light breast of a proud redtail hawk
Are you hungry and killing a meal that you need?
Or is it your ego that's needing to feed?
Hey, you in the truck, that's my redtail too!
In ending her life you're thieving from me
and all those who look upon raptors as part
of that which is sacred; respect is its due
Would you slash up a canvas? Take knife to Monet?
How, then, can you slaughter a live work of art?*

*James W. Nelson
Ellensburg, WA
(circa 1979/80)*

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 19, 2015

Mark your calendars now! The more people who participate, the more birds we count, and the more areas we can cover.

Details coming in the December Magpiper

Meet the Board

PAUL & JUDY TREMAN:



The Tremans are Co-Secretaries, Paul is also Field Trip Chair, and Judy is Facebook Administrator. Mike Denny is to blame for this couple's sudden passion for birding. Paul took Mike's birding class at WWCC in 2006 and Judy in 2009. Life has not been the same since.

Paul grew up in Sutherlin, Oregon. After graduation from Oregon State University he worked for engineering firms in Bellevue, Washington. He was a licensed Civil/Structural Engineer specializing in the design of bridges.

Paul and Judy were married in 1967. They moved to Judy's hometown Walla Walla in 1994 to be near her family. Paul worked for Anderson Perry until his retirement and was especially busy after the 1996 floods working with cities and counties to repair or replace damaged bridges.

Judy is a watercolor artist. Her paintings have appeared nationwide in juried and one-person exhibitions, as well as being published in many magazines and books. Her own book *Building Brilliant Watercolors* explains her watercolor techniques which she taught in workshops around the country. The Colville St. Patisserie will feature her artwork in November; check it out!

After adopting a rambunctious pound-pup in 2004, Paul and Judy collaborated with the Walla Walla Parks Department and the Walla Walla Dog Park Committee to design, fund and build the Walla Walla Dog Park on Dalles-Military Road, which opened in 2008. Judy created the colorful steel dogs on the fence with a plasma cutter!

The Tremans have long enjoyed hiking and camping—their favorite spot being the Lostine River in the Wallawas. Since succumbing to birding, Paul and Judy enjoy capturing feathered subjects with their identical, dueling cameras—a very friendly and supportive rivalry. They have enjoyed many outings and trips with Audubon birding friends, as well as road trips to National Wildlife Refuges across the country, Magee Marsh, Cape May Birding Festival, southeastern Arizona and northern California. They have their future sights on Texas birds. They agree, “You meet the nicest people birding!”

Bird of the Month

LONG-EARED OWL *Asio otus*



Size: 15 inches

Description: A medium sized owl with a slender body, long orange face, yellow eyes and large ear tufts, intricate black, brown and buff patterning on feathers and two vertical white lines between the eyes.

Photo by George Jameson

Long eared owls are found throughout North America. They are nocturnal and generally spend their day roosting in dense parts of trees, often near the trunk where their plumage provides excellent camouflage. They require a combination of grassland or other open country for foraging, and dense tall shrubs or trees for nesting and roosting.

They use nests built by other birds—most commonly black-billed magpies, crows, ravens and some hawks. They prefer stick nests, but have made nests in dwarf mistletoe brooms in Oregon, and sometimes nest in crooks of saguaro cactus in Arizona. Their clutch size is 2-6 eggs. Incubation period is 25-30 days and nesting period is approximately 21 days. Nesting owls sometimes form loose colonies, occupying nests as close as 50 feet apart. Outside of breeding season, the owls roost in groups of up to 100 birds.

Their food consists mostly of small mammals—voles, mice, rats, shrews, gophers and young rabbits. They hunt over open ground or below the canopy in sparsely forested areas. They may hover over prey or hunt from perches in strong winds.

One of my favorite things to do in the late fall is to begin looking for long eared owls. It's like a treasure hunt because they are so secretive. For me, the best way to find them is to look for “owl splatter” under a dense stand of trees or brambles. They tend to roost in numbers in the fall and winter, but it is easier to find their signs than it is to find the birds. After spotting the splatter, it's a matter of carefully searching through every dense limb (always from a distance and very quietly because they spook very easily). Sometimes I never find the owls, but when I do the excitement of finding them, and the awe of watching these beautiful owls, makes it a very rewarding experience.

The World Around Us

GRAYS HARBOR ESTUARY THREAT

October 20, 2015

An ecological disaster may be unfolding in the Pacific Northwest, and we have only weeks to stop it.

Proposed oil terminals in Grays Harbor estuary, on the Washington state coast, **would endanger critical habitat for a host of migrating and resident bird species**, including Red Knots and Marbled Murrelets. The proposed terminals would store roughly 91 million gallons of toxic crude, most of it for export to China. Grays Harbor is a site of hemispheric importance for shorebirds and supports six Important Bird Areas and a national wildlife refuge.

The state of Washington closes its public comment period for two of the proposed terminals on November 30th. **This is an important window for national action.**

The majority of the Pacific Coast population of Red Knots congregates in the mudflats of Grays Harbor each spring to fatten up before heading on to breeding grounds in the Arctic. That means a significant portion of the population could be wiped out with a single accident or spill.

If the terminals are built, more than 126,000 barrels of crude would arrive by train every day, another enormous source of risk. Oil trains have a bad safety record. In 2014 there were 141 oil train spills across the U.S.

For more information contact:

Gail Gatton

Executive Director, Audubon Washington

audubonconnect@audubon.org



Red Knot

Photo by Tim Boyer Photography

PACIFIC GIANT SALAMANDER



The largest, and perhaps one of the most bizarre amphibians of the Pacific Coast is the Pacific giant salamander. Reaching thirteen inches in length, these semi-aquatic creatures are brown and have external gills as juveniles, and are mottled brown and black as adults. Their ideal habitat is made up of clear, icy mountain streams of the Cascades and coastal ranges of Washington and Oregon. They start their life entirely aquatic, with gills that allow them to breathe under water. Most of their time as adults is spent undercover beneath logs, bark or stones, either in the streambed or on land, though they will roam about freely after heavy rains. They feed mostly on small aquatic invertebrates and small vertebrates such as smaller salamanders or fish hatchlings.

Although the Pacific giant salamander is not a particularly threatened species, it has some potential cause for concern. As an amphibian, it depends on clean aquatic habitat for survival of its young and as foraging habitat. Logging and other human activities can lead to siltation and higher temperatures of stream water, making important salamander habitat much less desirable. **Amphibians such as the Pacific giant salamander are considered indicators for the declining health of waterways.** They are particularly sensitive to changes in water quality and are often the first to be affected by them.

Although salamanders are land creatures, they need to keep their skin and their eggs wet. This means that they prefer to stay in damp and dark areas, such as under dead wood, logs, rocks and anything else that they can slide under. This means that animals that hunt for them either have to be able to turn over or dig in these areas or catch them when they are out looking for insects to eat. The salamanders' preference in damp areas means that they are more likely to be found looking for food in the night or after a rain storm. The creatures that find them the most appetizing include those that spend a good deal of time searching for their own food source in the night, such as owls or skunks.

A related species, the California giant salamander, is one of the only salamanders that make noise. It will emit low-pitched barks when threatened.

Board Meeting Highlights

- At the October 8 board meeting, Chris Howard gave an update on the Mill Creek Levee Project. The possibility of someone spiking the trees was discussed to some length. If it did happen, the Board voted to contribute \$250 towards a reward for apprehension and prosecution of the persons involved. It was also decided that President George Jameson would write a letter to the Union Bulletin stating BMAS's abhorrence of the possible spiking. Mike Denny will follow-up on the threat.
- Jill Hesser-Gardiner sent a report on the Highway Pick-up that was held on September 27. There were 8 volunteers who picked up 19 bags of trash. Thanks to all that helped keep our stretch of Highway 12 looking good.
- Chris encouraged everyone to send comments to the Corps of Engineers in regards to their Draft EA Comprehensive Management Plan as it pertains to hunting at Bennington Lake. In the draft, it appears that hunting boundaries will not be changed. The only change will be the placement of signs along the trail to show where hunting is allowed.
- Kathy McCormick, Education Chair announced 6 children nights are planned with Whitman College for the coming year. She also discussed having a Children's Bird Count outing at Pioneer Park in the winter.



Student at Berney School comparing his reach to osprey wingspan.

Musings by Chris Howard

Change

We are living in a world of change. In fact, the only thing that is constant is change. Once, where there were trees, there are no trees. Where there are trees, their leaves have changed colors from green to orange or red or yellow and then fell fluttering to the ground to slowly decay and become part of the soil. Summer birds have long left to continue their journey...no more Yellow Breasted Chat or Lazuli Buntings until next spring. Gold Finches are now harvesting the sunflower seeds, squirrels are stashing entire sunflower heads for their winter food supply.

Children who were toddling down the sidewalk have now grown up and are having babies of their own. Friends and relatives are getting older, moving slower, having hip or knee replacements and eventually passing on to whatever comes next. Who is that grey haired person looking out of the mirror at me?

Let's all welcome back the salmon who, after swimming in a wide arc around the Pacific ocean, are fighting their way upstream through all the human made obstacles, to return to their spawning streams. How do they find their birth streams? I recently read that a dog's sense of smell is 1000 times more sensitive than a human's. A bear's sense of smell is 1000 times more sensitive than a dog's and a salmon's sense of smell is 1000 times more sensitive than a bear's. This means that a salmon's sense of smell is a billion times more sensitive than ours. How many of us could find our way home by smell alone?

Not that long ago we were sweltering under the summer sun and now the sun has headed south for its winter vacation. The mornings are cool and the first frost is just around the corner. The night sky is changing with Orion and the Pleiades making their journey across the southern skies.

Gardens are being prepared for the winter. Tomatoes and squash are hoping to make it to the finish line before the first frost hardens the morning dew. Birdfeeders are being filled offering nutrition to the birds who are hardy enough to stay for the winter. Chickadees, Juncos, Evening Grosbeaks, Cedar Waxwings and others are brightening up the cool grey mornings.

We two-leggeds are making the shift to the new season. Without a fur coat like the bears and the beavers, we are pulling out the fleece and long underwear, getting ready to hunker down for the long winter ahead.

In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake

MerryLynn birded Whitman Mission on September 28 and found an adult **northern goshawk**, a **gray flycatcher**, a **Cassin's vireo** and several species of warblers that had been around during fall migration.

A immature **Anna's hummingbird** showed up in our yard on September 29. It stayed around all month.

Interesting birds seen on the Bennington Lake Tuesday walk on October 6 included three **American pipits** eating insects in the mud, an **osprey** flying low over the water searching for fish, an out-of-place **Steller's jay**, a **great egret**, a **western grebe**, **ruddy ducks** and 5 other species of waterfowl.

On October 10 while out walking their dogs, George and Deanna Jameson came across the wing of a **great horned owl** at the base of a power pole. They looked up and saw the rest of the bird hanging from a transformer. Unfortunately this occasionally happens to owls and other birds that perch on power poles.

MerryLynn found the first **snow geese** of the fall at the Walla Walla River Delta on October 10.

Mike and MerryLynn birded the west side of the county on October 11 and 12. They found a large number and variety of waterfowl including a **red phalarope** and two **bald eagles** at Two Rivers HMU. There were many species of waterfowl at the Walla Walla River Delta, and they also saw the first **dunlin** and the first **northern shrike** of the fall.

On October 12, Lynn Sealey watched as a pair of **belted kingfishers** hit her window, killing the female and stunning the male. After keeping a close watch on the male for several hours, she watched it fly off into a tree.

Nina Conn was very surprised to see a **Steller's jay** at one of her feeders on November 13. It was a first for her yard. Linda Hanson saw three of them at Bennington Lake on November 11 so they are around. They do like peanuts if you want to see if you can get them to come to your feeders. Also, **Eastern blue jays** have been seen in past years, so be on the look out for them while you are looking for Steller's jays.

It was a beautiful fall day at Bennington Lake on Tuesday, October 13. Two **greater yellowlegs**, two **long-billed dowitchers**, several **killdeer** and a **great egret** were feeding in the mud. **Robins** and **yellow-rumped warblers** were abundant—and very busy chasing each other all around. **Ring-necked ducks**,

wigeons and **green-winged teal** were floating on the glassy lake with the reflections of fall colors all around.

Jim and Sue Parrish birded Scenic Loop on October 14 where they found a **northern shrike**.



Thirteen birders enjoyed a beautiful fall morning on a Field Trip to Bennington Lake on October 17 led by the Tremans and the Shoemakes. There were **long-billed dowitchers**, **greater yellowlegs** and a **great egret** in the mud as well as a **western grebe** in the lake. **Robins** and **cedar waxwings** were plentiful. **Bewick's wrens** and **ruby-crowned kinglets** were singing from the trees. Rodger found a young **gopher snake** which he picked up to show everyone its beautiful markings. It was a lovely day to be outside.

I went birding with George and Deanna Jameson on October 18. There were **dark-eyed juncos** and **robins** all along Scenic Loop as well as **cedar waxwings**, **Steller's jays** and this photogenic **Bewick's wren** that George was able to coax out of the bushes for a picture.



The Bennington Lake Tuesday Walkers found a **northern shrike** on October 20. They also saw several **Townsend's solitaires**, **black-capped chickadees**, a **mountain chickadee**, **ruby-crowned kinglets**, **golden-crowned kinglets** and a **brown creeper**. There were **cackling geese**, **canada geese**, **green-winged teal**, **mallards**, **ring-necked ducks** and **western grebes** on the water.

October 21 found Mike and MerryLynn back on the west side of the county. McNary NWR Headquarters was filled with large numbers of waterfowl including **lesser** and **greater scaup**, **hooded mergansers**, **ruddy ducks**, **pie-billed grebes** and **horned grebes**. There were two **black-crowned night herons**, several **marsh wrens** and a huge number of **coots**. Two Rivers HMU had many of the same species. Shorebird migration is winding down, but they found **greater yellowlegs**, **dunlin**, **western sandpiper** and **long-billed dowitchers**. On Dodd Road there was a **Wilson's snipe** and a few **American pipits**.

Our yard was teeming with **evening grosbeaks**, **pine siskins** and **cedar waxwings** the entire month of October. **White-crowned sparrows**, **juncos**, **house finches**, **lesser goldfinches**, **house sparrows** and **red-breasted nuthatches** were also daily visitors. **Downy woodpeckers** and **flickers**, **black-capped chickadees**, a **spotted towhee**—the list just goes on.... I put out a few peanuts for the **magpies** every day hoping a **Steller's jay** would join them (which it did once). I can't remember having so many hungry birds in my yard in the fall before!

On October 24, Rodger and I drove north of Walla Walla to see what birds we could find. There were many **robins**, **flickers**, **white-crowned sparrows** and **meadowlarks** on Sudbury and Luckenbill roads as well as **kestrels** and **red-tailed hawks** and one **rough-legged hawk**. Coming back south on the North Touchet Road we saw a **northern shrike**, an **osprey**, **kingfishers** and **great blue herons**. About 40 **mourning doves** were lining the wires at one place. Finally, on Langdon Road we saw a **Cooper's hawk** keeping a watch on several **Eurasian collared doves**.

Jim and Sue Parrish walked around Bennington Lake on October 24. Jim took this photo of a **long-billed dowitcher** that has been hanging around in the mud on the west side of the canal.



At Casey Pond on October 25, Rodger and I saw several **great egrets**, a tree full of **great blue herons** and 8 **tundra swans**. There were also a nice variety of ducks on the water. On October 28, the swans were still there.

On October 27, the Tuesday walkers found several hundred **canada geese** on Bennington Lake and flying over. They saw many of the same birds that have been reported the past few outings, but there was a definite increase in the number of **yellow-rumped warblers**.



Chris Howard walked down into the brush along the canal and spotted a **great horned owl**. He then watched it swoop down and screech at another great horned owl. Perhaps it was this owl that Jim Parrish photographed at Bennington on the 24th.



Here's a great photo of the **great egret** that has made Bennington Lake its home for the past two months. Judy Treman captured the egret playing with its reflection in the water.

Fall weather has finally come to the Walla Walla valley. Rainy days and cool temperatures may keep us inside more, but we can still watch the birds in our yards. Keep your feeders full and fresh water close by for those fall and winter visitors. Let me know what you are seeing email housewren084@gmail.com

**LOOK FOR BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
ON
FACEBOOK**

BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON
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Mission Statement:

Blue Mountain Audubon Society (BMAS) was organized in 1971 and chartered by National Audubon Society in 1972. The Chapter's objectives are to serve its membership and the larger communities of Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon with the goals to appreciate, preserve and enjoy birds, wildlife, and the natural environment of the area. Education is a primary objective of Chapter activities. Through volunteer efforts BMAS provides educational opportunities, conservation activities and enjoyment of wildlife and wildlife habitat opportunities to members and to the public. The Chapter meets the third Thursday, (September through May) at 7:00 p.m. in the Whitman College Science Building. A newsletter, **The Magpiper** is published September through May and is free to members. Non-member subscription fees are \$25 annually. BMAS is a non-profit 501c(3) organization. Find us on the internet at www.blumtn.org

Join Blue Mountain Audubon Society – Complete the following information and mail along with a check in the amount of \$25 for your first year's membership to: Blue Mountain Audubon PO Box 1106, Walla Walla, WA 99362

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____