

# The Magpiper

## Monthly Calendar

### Thursday, January 14

Board Meeting  
7:00 p.m.

### Thursday, January 21

Membership Meeting  
7:00 p.m.  
Whitman College

### Saturday, January 23

Field Trip  
Harper Joy Theatre Parking lot

**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:** Tom Land  
**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](mailto:housewren084@gmail.com)

## Contact BMAS:

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

Mail: PO Box 1106

Walla Walla, WA 99362

## Meeting

### Membership Meeting:

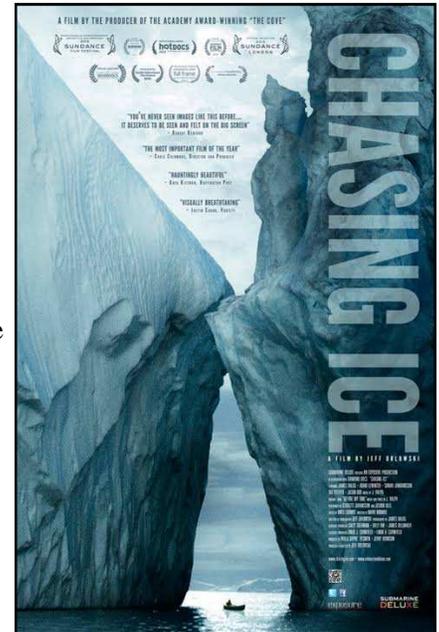
Room 130 Olin Hall, Whitman College

### PROGRAM: CHASING ICE

This visually stunning, award winning film by Jeff Orlowski captures undeniable evidence of our changing planet". In the spring of 2005, acclaimed environmental photographer James Balog headed to the Arctic on a tricky assignment for National Geographic: to capture images to help tell the story of the Earth's changing climate. Even with a scientific upbringing, Balog had been a skeptic about climate change. But that first trip north opened his eyes to the biggest story in human history and sparked a challenge within him that would put his career and his very well-being at risk.

Within months of that first trip to Iceland, the photographer conceived the boldest expedition of his life: The Extreme Ice Survey. With a band of young adventurers in tow, Balog began deploying revolutionary time-lapse cameras across the brutal Arctic to capture a multi-year record of the world's changing glaciers.

**PLEASE NOTE: ROOM CHANGE TO OLIN 130**



## Field Trip

### COOL BIRDS AND HOT DRINKS

Saturday, January 23, 9:00 a.m.



For everyone that likes to see cool birds (wood ducks etc.), but doesn't like to be out in the usually cold, blustery January weather, this is the field trip for you. We will meet at the Harper Joy Theater parking lot at 9:00. The extent of our birding adventures will then depend on the weather. If the weather is decent for birding, the plan is to spend 2 hours visiting 3 or 4 sites around Walla Walla. If the weather is less than ideal for birding, we will visit fewer sites in less time!

Following our birding adventures at 11:00 (or sooner with bad weather), we will go to John's Wheatland Bakery on East Isaacs for visiting; tea, coffee or hot chocolate; and possibly a pastry. If you have any questions, call or e-mail Paul and Judy Treman who will be leading the field trip. **509-527-0722** or [pjtreman@charter.net](mailto:pjtreman@charter.net)



## Meet the Board

### **KATHY McCONNELL—EDUCATION CHAIR**



I became a birder in the late 80's after my first Christmas Bird Count hiking a loop in the Blues in the snow. For about a year I was Audubon's Education Chairman before the demands of parenting and running The Kids' Place, a childcare center where I was

the founding director and lead teacher, took my attention elsewhere.

As a young child, I became interested in what I now call "housing". I had southern relatives who loved riding around in their ever - new model Buicks looking for interesting styles of houses. Once I became a birder (which requires skills much like those of a "houser"), I thought no matter where I was, there was something to see that maybe I hadn't seen before. I love birding. Recently I bought a cabin up Mill Creek and while standing on the roof sweeping pine needles, a raven flew over my shoulder with its wings loudly swishing on each beat. How had I missed knowing that in flight they make that gorgeous sound? This is birding. No end of learning.

Post-retirement I traveled for seven months heading north into that wicked winter of 2013, eventually circumambulating the United States with a detour to Montreal, Canada. I blogged while I traveled and then, since returning home, have continued writing on a memoir about recovering from my husband's passing while on that journey with my small dog (who is also a birder).

As Audubon Education Chairman, I enjoy being involved with kids. Their bright curiosity and sharp capacity for amazement are so rewarding. Our local Audubon organization is the perfect resource for encouraging children to become lifelong birders. In a small town, it is effortless to team with other great organizations like Carnegie Art Center, the Walla Walla Public Library, the Children's Museum, Blue Mountain Wildlife and Whitman College Science Outreach connecting kids to birds and birds to kids. (When I was a mom I began a birding list of birds that saw my baby. The list included one long-eared owl and lots of starlings.) Life is good as a birder – any age.

## Bird of the Month

### **BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON**

*Nycticorax nycticorax*



*Photo by Rodger Shoemake*

Size: 24 inches

Description: Stocky and squat with a light gray body, black crown and dark back, short neck, red eye and thick all-black bill. Immature birds are brown with large white spots on the wings and blurry streaks on their underparts.

Black-crowned night herons live in fresh, salt and brackish wetlands and are the most widespread heron in the world. They are most active at night or dusk when they fly out from daytime roosts to forage. They are social birds that roost, breed and nest in colonies. They often spend their days perched on tree limbs or concealed among foliage and branches.

They are opportunists feeders whose diet includes leeches, earthworms, insects, crayfish, clams, mussels, fish, amphibians, lizards, snakes turtles, rodents, birds and eggs. They also eat carrion, plant materials and garbage from landfills. Rather than stabbing their prey, they grasp it in their bills. They normally feed at night avoiding competition with other heron species that use the same habitat during the day. However, during breeding season they will feed during the day.

Their nest is a platform of sticks, twigs and other woody vegetation. The male chooses the nest site in a tree or in cattails and starts the nest while advertising for a female. Once he has found a mate, the male continues collection material but passes it to the female who works it into the nest. Black-crowned night herons nest in colonies, often with a dozen nests in a single tree and often in groups that include other herons, egrets and ibises. Normal clutch size is 3-5 eggs. Both male and female incubate the eggs and brood the chicks. They young leave the nest at about one month and move through the vegetation on foot. They learn to fly when they are about 6 weeks old, and then disperse widely.

Black-crowned night herons tend to hide in the reeds, but can be found along Mill Creek between WWCC and Rooks Park and at McNary NWR. Another good place to find them is at McNary Wildlife Park just below McNary Dam.

## *News from the Board*

### **BARN OWL NEST BOX PROJECT**



Board member Jill Hesser-Gardiner came up with the idea of building barn owl nest boxes in vineyards after reading about projects like this on the internet. One very informative site is the Hungry Owl Project. Check it out to see what they are doing. [www.hungryowl.org](http://www.hungryowl.org)

*Photo by MerryLynn Denny*

After looking into it, the Board began developing a plan. The project objective is to install barn owl nest boxes in vineyards and other areas to encourage owl nesting and dramatically reduce the rodent population in those areas.

The benefits we envision from this project include but are not limited to:

- **Increase the Barn Owl population**
- **Decrease the use of Rodenticides (Rodent poisons) in the area**
- **Increase our partnership with other organizations such as Salmon Safe and Vinea**
- **Develop educational opportunities regarding Barn Owls and their benefit to the environment**

**What we will do:** Install nest boxes at agreed upon appropriate sites. Monitor the use of the nest boxes. Perform maintenance and cleaning as needed.

**What we need from site owner:** Access to the site both for initial installation and periodic maintenance and monitoring.

**Benefits:** A Barn Owl during the 4 month nesting season can consume 3,000 rodents dramatically reducing the impact in the agricultural area. They are obviously very ecologically friendly.

**Considerations:** Rodenticide (Rodent Poison) cannot be used in the area where the nest boxes are positioned.

**Cost:** It will cost us about \$84.00 to build and install a typical barn owl nest box. We will be seeking donations to help off-set the cost.

#### **Rodenticides (Rodent Poisons)**

We want to install barn owl nest boxes in a variety of locations in the Walla Walla Valley. Adjacent to vineyards, Bennington Lake, Agricultural Areas, the Natural Area and various other locations.

One of the critical factors in placing the nest boxes is the use or rather lack of use of Rodenticides. **We will not place nest boxes in locations where the owls have a probability of getting poisoned.** Rodenticides are expensive, counterproductive and incredibly destructive to wildlife and our shared environment.

Jim Parrish built the first box and it has been installed at the Natural Area.



## *2015 Christmas Bird Count Results*

Canada Goose	1311
Wood Duck	47
American Wigeon	106
Mallard	380
Green-winged Teal	13
Common Goldeneye	1
Hooded Merganser	12
Common Merganser	26
Ring-necked Pheasant	6
Wild Turkey	187
California Quail	321
Great Blue Heron	8
Bald Eagle	1
Northern Harrier	6
Sharp-shinned Hawk	9
Cooper's Hawk	7
Red-tailed Hawk	55
Rough-legged hawk	3
Golden Eagle	3
American Kestrel	44
Merlin	1
Rock Pigeon	227
Eurasian Collared-Dove	130
Mourning Dove	92
Barn Owl	1
Western Screech-Owl	1
Great Horned Owl	13
Northern Pygmy-Owl	4
Long-eared Owl	3
Belted Kingfisher	6
Downy Woodpecker	29
Hairy Woodpecker	3
Northern Flicker	180
Pileated Woodpecker	3
Say's Phoebe	3
Northern Shrike	3
Steller's Jay	93
Blue Jay	cw
Black-billed Magpie	129
American Crow	79
Common Raven	43
Black-capped Chickadee	223
Mountain Chickadee	32
Chestnut-backed Chickadee	3
Red-breasted Nuthatch	17
White-breasted Nuthatch	3
Brown Creeper	7
Bewick's Wren	27
Pacific Wren	5
Marsh Wren	1
American Dipper	2
Golden-crowned Kinglet	34
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	16
Western Bluebird	17
Townsend's Solitaire	20
Hermit Thrush	5
American Robin	236
Varied Thrush	100

European Starling	3973
Bohemian Waxwing	1
Cedar Waxwing	67
Yellow-rumped Warbler	5
Spotted Towhee	9
American Tree Sparrow	cw
Fox Sparrow	4
Song Sparrow	167
Lincoln's Sparrow	2
White-throated Sparrow	1
White-crowned Sparrow	276
Dark-eyed Junco	1763
Red-winged Blackbird	12
Brewer's Blackbird	150
Pine Grosbeak	14
Cassin's Finch	1
House Finch	316
Red Crossbill	2
Common Redpoll	3
Pine Siskin	337
Lesser Goldfinch	14
American Goldfinch	183
Evening Grosbeak	2
House Sparrow	238

<b>Total Species</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Total individuals</b>	<b>11,877</b>
<b>Number of Observers</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Feeder Watchers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Weather</b>	<b>35 fog, open water, calm</b>



Pygmy Owl at Five Points  
*photo by Jim Parrish*

## Events



### **WINTER BIRD COUNT FOR KIDS 2016**

**Saturday, January 16 – 8:00 to Noon**  
**Advance registration is required**  
**Registration is limited to 25 kids ages 7**  
**through 16**

**Meet at the Walla Walla Public Library**  
**at 8:00 a.m.**

**Practice using binoculars and then to out in**  
**small guided groups to count birds.**  
**One parent or guardian must accompany**  
**each kid.**

**Bring a lunch to eat afterwards while bird**  
**sightings are announced and then kids will enter**  
**their species into the Cornell e-Bird website.**

**SPONSORED BY**  
**BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON**

**To register contact Kathy McConnell at:**  
**kathymcconnell5@gmail.com**

### **Food for Thought From Blue Mountain Wildlife**

**350,000 birds are killed annually by wind turbines**

**7 million birds are killed annually by radio and TV**  
**towers, cell towers and power lines**

**3.7 billion birds are killed annually by cats** Keeping  
 cats indoors is one way to make a significant positive  
 difference in the songbird and small raptor populations  
 in your neighborhood.

## Musings by Chris Howard

### **Rock Duck**

Ice and snow make for interesting birdwatching. On a recent Tuesday morning walk around Bennington Lake it was one of those cold, grey days with limited visibility. The lake was frozen solid except for a small pool of water next to the shore out from the parking lot. The lake was speckled with fist sized dark rocks that had been thrown out on the ice by winter explorers entertained by the other worldly pinging sound that rocks make as they bounce along the icy surface. Searching the edge of the small open water pool with our binoculars we spotted an enterprising Long Billed Dowitcher probing for something on the frozen ground.

Further down the edge of the pool were four of what looked to be motionless, typical looking, dark, fist sized rocks lined up next to each other. We stared at the rocks for quite a while with the binoculars trying to make them into ducks, but there was just no evidence of heads, legs, wings or other normal duck parts. We waited for any one of them to move but they all remained as still as frozen rocks.

We headed out on our trek around the lake, warming up as we walked briskly along the trail stopping periodically to search the trees and bushes for the occasional winter regulars...Chickadees, Juncos, Kinglets, White Crowned Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Robins, Bewick's Wrens, and the Townsend Solitaire...alone of course. On this day, a less common Brown Creeper appeared for a moment winding its way up the rough bark of a Ponderosa Pine. We were unsuccessful in our search for Long Eared Owls in the dense conifers on the far side of the lake. I dipped down into the thick forested area near the canal to search for the Great Horned Owls and was rewarding by spotting two of them as they flew away from my entry into their domain. I was happy to see that they had paired up for the approach of breeding season.

Returning to the parking lot after at least a couple of hours, we peered out to the pool of water to see the 4 dark rocks as still as could be in exactly the same spot. Were they rock ducks or just frozen rocks? Riding my bike home along Mill Creek I spotted a dark rock shape on a weir that looked exactly like the other 4. Much closer, I looked through my binoculars and was just able to make out a smidgeon of the green feather of a Green Winged Teal... the notorious rock duck!

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

The cold weather didn't keep an **Anna's hummingbird** away in late November. Nina Conn had a beautiful male at her feeder off and on during the month. My sister Jene had one looking for food on November 26 so she quickly put a feeder back up, but it didn't return.

Heidi Hofer had a **brown creeper** in her yard on November 23 along with **red-breasted nuthatches**, **mountain chickadees**, a **yellow-rumped warbler** and **house finches**.

Brooke Davey watched a flock of about 15 **red crossbills** in her yard in Walla Walla on November 25. This was the first time she had seen them at her house.

Linda Hanson and I walked Bennington Lake on November 25. The water was covered with waterfowl—**tundra swans**, **canada geese**, **mallards**, **hooded mergansers**, **common mergansers**, **lesser scaup**, a **common goldeneye** and **American wigeons**. There were also several **killdeer** and 3 **long-billed dowitchers** along the shore. We saw a **varied thrush** and a **spotted towhee** as well as the usual passerines.

Later in the day Linda and her husband Bob walked Mill Creek and saw 19 **hooded mergansers** and a **black-crowned night heron**. On Thanksgiving they saw a **pie-billed grebe** along Mill Creek.

Mike and MerryLynn saw 5 **western bluebirds** on Seamon Road on November 26.



Rodger and I birded north of Walla Walla with George and Deanna Jameson on November 28. Our target bird was a **long-eared owl**, and we found 4 of them north of Prescott. George was able to get this photo through the branches of one of them. It was a cold, foggy day and we didn't see too many other birds. However, **American kestrels** seem to be everywhere.

Susan Swayne saw a **Wilson's snipe** in a little tailwater ditch at her place on December 1. She also saw a **downy woodpecker** at her suet feeder and a **great horned owl** fly into a Douglas fir in the yard.

During the cold spell on December 2, a **spotted towhee** came into Brooke Davey's yard looking for something to eat.

There was a report of two **eastern bluejays** in the St. Mary's Hospital parking lot trees on December 15.

On December 10, Mike and MerryLynn saw a new yard bird in their yard—a **red crossbill**. Here it is at their feeder.



It returned the next day and was joined by two **chestnut-backed chickadees**.

Thirteen people joined Mike Denny on December 12 for the Pre-Count Field Trip. They visited some of the areas in the count and learned about the birds, the habitat and the Christmas Bird Count. Finding five **great horned owls** was a highlight of the trip. Other interesting birds seen were a **merlin**, a **Townsend's solitaire** and several **Steller's jays**.



Our yard continued to be full of birds (when the **sharp-shinned hawk** and **merlin** weren't around) in early December. On the 13th the usual yard birds were joined by a **varied thrush**, a **lesser goldfinch**, a **mountain chickadee**, numerous **evening grosbeaks** (which have been here since September 27!) and two beautiful male **ring-necked pheasants**.

Mike and MerryLynn scouted Mill Creek for the CBC on December 16. They were very surprised to find a **Say's phoebe** near the Blue Creek turnoff.



Several people have reported **mountain chickadees** in their yards this winter. Here is a photo Paul Treman took of one in their yard.



Joanne Hesser-Jones and Mike Jones had two **common redpolls** show up at their feeder on December 18. Mike took this wonderful photo of one of them. And, they stuck around to be counted on the Christmas Count!



Another Walla Walla Christmas Count has come and gone. The weather outside was foggy, cold and wet but that didn't keep people from walking and driving around to count birds. The award for best effort was awarded to Linda Hanson and Chris Howard, who walked nine miles around Bennington Lake and other areas in pursuit of some great birds. Their target bird was the **long-eared owl** and they were rewarded with 3 of them at the lake. Many thanks to MerryLynn Denny for organizing the Count and to Nancy Mitchell and Pat Keef for hosting the wrap-up at their home.

Jonathan and Melissa Webster found this **pygmy owl** in a tree at the elementary school next to their home on December 21.



Photo by Jonathan Webster

Three of us enjoyed one last walk around Bennington Lake for 2015 on December 29. There was snow on the ground and the lake was frozen so no waterfowl were present. A **great blue heron** was sitting near the beaver house and two **killdeer** flew over the lake. We saw a **northern shrike**, 3 **varied thrushes**, a **spotted towhee** and several **Townsend's solitaires**. We also saw lots of rabbit tracks. Three **northern harriers**, two **kestrels** and two **sharp-shinned hawks** were actively hunting. Of course there were **juncos**—over a hundred of them flitting around in the bushes.

Welcome to the New Year. Mike and MerryLynn asked us all to take part in a Walla Walla County Big Day on January 1, and report to her what we saw. The total number of species seen was 114 by 19 people who scoured the county from the rivers to the mountains. Here are some highlights:

Great gray owl  
Golden eagle  
Western bluebird  
Purple finch  
Gray-crowned rosy finch  
Short-eared owl  
Northern saw-whet owl  
Lesser goldfinch  
White-breasted nuthatch  
Rusty blackbird  
American pipit  
White-throated sparrow  
Peregrine falcon



*great gray owl  
photo by Nat Drumheller*

Pam Fisher had three species of **chickadees** in her yard on January 2—black-capped, mountain and chestnut-backed. Later in the day a **great horned owl** perched in the trees in her yard and serenaded her with his “hoots” after dark. Here is a photo she took of the **chestnut-backed chickadee**.



What birds are you seeing in your yards? Email me [housewren084@gmail.com](mailto:housewren084@gmail.com) and let me know.

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**Mission Statement:**

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

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

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