



# The Magpiper

February, 2016

Page 1

## Monthly Calendar

### Thursday, February 11

Board Meeting  
7:00 p.m.

### Thursday, February 18

Membership Meeting  
7:00 p.m.  
Whitman College

### Saturday, February 20

Field Trip - 9:00 a.m.  
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

## Contact BMAS:

Email: housewren084@gmail.com

Mail: PO Box 1106

Walla Walla, WA 99362

## Meeting

### Membership Meeting: February 18—7:00 p.m.

Room 157 Olin Hall, Whitman College

### PROGRAM: THE OWLS OF WALLA WALLA COUNTY

Mike Denny and George Jameson will provide a discussion on the “Owls of Walla Walla County”. Topics such as where you might find the different owl species, what habitat and nesting environments they prefer, what they eat, and when they nest and raise their young will be some of the items included in the discussion. Images of the owls taken by local photographers will be included. Some of the species that will be discussed are Barn Owl, Western Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Northern Pygmy Owl, Burrowing Owl, Barred Owl, Great Gray Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, and Northern Saw-whet Owl. A part of the presentation will detail the current Barn Owl Nest Box Project that BMAS is involved with, and its hoped for impact on the Barn Owl Population within our area. Come join us for a lively and informative presentation.



## Field Trip

### WATERFOWL OF WESTERN WALLA WALLA COUNTY

Saturday, February 20 – 9:00 a.m.



February is one of the best months to see huge numbers of waterfowl and Bald Eagles that winter along the Columbia River. Snow Geese, Canvasback, Mergansers, Grebes, Goldeneye, Scaup, Tundra Swans and lots of other waterfowl species may be seen at McNary NWR and nearby locations. We will also look for raptors and other birds along the way. George Jameson will lead this fun trip to

western Walla Walla County, where on a good day we could see over 50 species of birds. Meet at the Harper Joy Theater parking lot at 9:00 a.m. and we will car pool. Bring a lunch, something warm to drink, your binoculars, a field guide, and a friend or two for a rewarding day of birding. If you don't have a scope, several will be available to allow you to get close looks at the birds. We will return late afternoon. If you have any questions, call George Jameson **541-923-9845**



## REMEMBERING SHIRLEY

By Tom Scribner

On Saturday, January 23, there was a celebration of the life of Shirley Muse at Baker Faculty Center on the Whitman campus. Lots of people attended. And many of them spoke, fondly and movingly, about Shirley. She deserved and earned all that was said.

I am not sure how to measure or value someone's life. But I think the things that Shirley did and what we will remember her for speak well about her. Hers was a life of considerable value.

In her quiet, patient, caring and usually successful way, Shirley did a lot. And the lot she did was, for the most part, supportive of birds, trees and the environment. You are reading this in the Magpiper, the house organ of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society. Shirley was a founding member of BMAS. She was, for many years, the editor of the Magpiper. For years, the BMAS Board met at Shirley's home. For years, the post-Christmas Count potluck was at Shirley's home.

Shirley was a founding member and for years served on the Board of the Blue Mountain Land Trust. She recognized the importance of and worked to protect open space, prime agricultural land and wildlife habitat.

Shirley, with others, from the get-go was a thorn-in-the-side, pain-in-the-butt, and critic of Florida Power and Light and other wind energy companies with regard to placement of wind turbines. She traveled, phoned, wrote letters and lobbied to persuade and educate the wind industry to give proper consideration to where wind turbines were placed. Because, as Shirley and others explained, wind turbines and birds, when they try to occupy the same space, do not always get along. Shirley knew and was known on a first-name basis by lots of the big guys and gals in the wind industry. I am sure she was referred to, behind her back, as an old lady in tennis shoes or a bird- or tree-

lover. She didn't care, as long as she got her way. Which she usually did.

Like the trees in our town? Shirley loved them. And fought for them. It was Shirley who got our state and national trees identified and measured. It was Shirley who was responsible for the Walking Guide to Big Trees.

The trail in the Nature Area? Shirley was involved from the first in the planning and construction of the trail, the placement of benches, and the writing and publishing of the Trail Guide.

Shirley was on the County Planning Commission. She worked, with others, to get control and management of the Twin Sisters from the state to Walla Walla County.

Not saying that the Grandmothers' Round Table would not have existed without Shirley, but she was one heckuva active granny and the Round Table ladies often met at her home.

Shirley, together with other BMAS members, took on Wal-Mart when it wanted to build in College Place. Okay, so they ultimately lost; but not entirely. The patch of wetland on the north side of the ugly box behemoth is thanks to Shirley's fight. Imagine, Shirley stood up to Sam Walton - - and partially won. How many people can say that?

And on and on. She was that type of person. Active, concerned, involved and caring. Shirley introduced me to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and would have been, I am sure, bothered by the recent occupation by a bunch of "Wise Use" (talk about a misnomer) terrorists. And in her way, had she been able, she probably would have traveled to Malheur to defuse the situation. Shirley had that talent.

She will be missed, but not forgotten.

## *Memories of Shirley*

*By Ginger Shoemake*

I first met Shirley Muse when we were both secretaries at Whitman College. I knew she was knowledgeable about birds, but at that time I hadn't discovered the wonderful world of bird watching. One day we had a very strange bird in our yard, so I called Shirley for help identifying it. After much discussion, she determined it was a Wilson's Snipe. I was amazed at the bird, and at Shirley's ability to identify it.

Over the next twenty years I had many opportunities to work with Shirley on Blue Mountain Audubon projects. She was the first Editor of the *Magpiper* and tells stories about running those first editions off of a mimeograph machine. I spent many hours at her dining room table helping her fold and attach labels to the newsletter so she could take it to the Post Office for mailing. Shirley was the Editor of the *Magpiper* until 2008 when she turned the job over to me.

Birding with Shirley was always fun. We went on many trips together including several to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, a favorite place for both of us.



*Shirley enjoying her lunch on a birding outing along the Walla Walla River*

For many years the wrap-up for the Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count was held at Shirley and Cory's home on Newell Street. She always made her famous French onion soup and even shared the recipe with me, but I found it too difficult to try myself. The highlight of those gatherings was the lighting of their Christmas tree. There were real candles every year on the tree, and

Shirley and others would light the candles. Then we'd all sing Christmas carols and enjoy the beauty of the tree. A perfect ending to another great Christmas Bird Count.



*Art Rempel and Cory watching Shirley light their beautiful Christmas Tree.*



Shirley was a founding member of Blue Mountain Audubon. She worked tirelessly for Audubon on the local and State level for many, many years. In 2005 she was given the Tom Scribner Book Award for outstanding service to the Chapter.

*Shirley receiving Scribner Award for Outstanding Service to BMAS*

Shirley was a testament to the belief that people *can* make a difference. She accomplished many things, and did them with knowledge, patience, and calm persistence. She will be missed by all of us who had the privilege to know her.

## [Malheur NWR](#)

*Hopefully by the time you receive this issue of the Magpiper, the stand-off at Malheur NWR will be over and we will all be able to enjoy this wonderful place once again. Recently, Mike Denny shared his thoughts about Malheur NWR and other public lands.*



Lets talk about Public Lands, their ownership, care and protection in light of the ongoing mess at Malheur NWR. My friends I have been going to Malheur NWR every year since 1971. I have enjoyed hiking, birding, photographing, camping and exploring this vast region. It is truly a treasure that we the people own and have access to. Having lived in Burns and gone to high school for a year at Burns Union High, I had the opportunity to get to understand and get to know many folks in this area. I can bet that they are fed up with what has happened. The BLM and the USF&W Service are spread very thin out across these millions of acres of public lands. Their ability to really manage this vast area is limited. Despite this fact these are still our lands and we all have access to each and every acre. The struggles that have been fought over grazing on the refuge over the years have allowed for this jewel of all refuges to survive due to agreements and hard work despite the few who demand the right to harm our lands. This refuge is the economic engine for Harney County tourist dollars float this county. These refuge lands are vital to the Pacific Migratory Birds. I have spent thousands of hours on this refuge and know it well. So to see these neo-confederates stomp into the place and set up a little state of their own sickens me. To watch our Government dilly about while this group entrenches deeper angers me. Do I agree with everything the BLM and the USF&W have done in the Harney Basin-no I do not. At the same time these are agencies that move slowly with a Congress that is apparently incapable of actually protecting our rights and our public lands. So please put the pressure on your legislators to get this taken care of. I do not want bloodshed-never want to see anyone hurt, but if our lands are lost to actions of these mad men then they have created a taking and they owe each American. This is a land grab intended to deprive us of our public lands.

## [Malheur Field Station](#)

*Blue Mountain Audubon has been a supporter of the Malheur Field Station for many years. The Great Basin Society recently put out this statement.*

The Malheur Field Station is an environmental education facility located in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge on land leased from the refuge on a renewable 25 year contract. The Malheur Field Station receives no tax-based funding and is run by The Great Basin Society, Inc., an Oregon-based nonprofit corporation. The Malheur Field Station is supported by the public through fees and donations as well as by regional foundations through grants. The staff who operate the Malheur Field Station are private-sector employees and are not compensated by, nor affiliated with, any government agency.

The Malheur Field Station has operated since 1971 at a former Civilian Youth Job Corps training facility. The buildings were deeded by the federal government to a consortium of regional colleges and universities in 1971. The facility became the property of The Great Basin Society in 1987. Building contents are private property owned either by the corporation or resident staff. We are confident that the private property rights of the Great Basin Society and its staff, who are citizens and residents of Harney County, will be respected at this time.

The Malheur Field Station's educational mission is the study of natural history in the Great Basin Desert. Each year, over 2,500 people of all ages, from middle and high schools, colleges and universities, natural history organizations, Road Scholar groups, and scientific organizations spend from two to ten nights per year and use the station as their base for exploration of the Great Basin ecosystem. Most visitors come from the Northwest, but Road Scholar brings visitors from all over the U.S. and Canada. The economic impact of the Malheur Field Station's visitors is dispersed throughout Harney County, but may be felt most strongly in Burns, French Glenn, Diamond, and Fields.



## Events

### FERRUGINOUS HAWK STUDY

The WDFW is seeking volunteers to assist with Ferruginous Hawk survey work in Walla Walla and Columbia Counties. They will be conducting visual monitoring of Ferruginous Hawk activity near artificial nest platforms. There are approximately 35 platforms to be checked for occupancy, but many of these can be monitored from a single location. Monitoring consists of driving to a vantage point near a platform(s) and visually observing the landscape, both naked eye and with binoculars, looking for any Ferruginous Hawk activity.

Surveys last for 2 hours, or shorter if occupancy is confirmed. If no hawks are detected during the first visit, the site will require a second visit, again for 2 hours or shorter if occupancy is confirmed. First visits should be between March 15 and April 5, and second visits should be at least 2 weeks after the first visit and before May 15.

If you are interested and available during this period, please email your full name and email address to Mark Vekasy at [Mark.Vekasy@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Mark.Vekasy@dfw.wa.gov) or call Mark at 509-780-1016 for more information.

If you are unable to volunteer but still want to help out, you can email any of your Ferruginous Hawk sightings from your birding trips around Walla Walla County to the above email address.

There will be a volunteer training session in late February to review hawk identification and protocols for the survey. Volunteers will be required to sign-up with the WDFW Volunteer Coordinator. A personal vehicle will be required to drive to observation areas, and some funds may be available to reimburse fuel costs.



*Photo by MerryLynn Denny*

## Musings by Chris Howard

### **Celebrating Barn Owls**

Barn Owls are rapidly becoming my number one bird of interest. The less I see of them, the greater my concern. Three years ago, during the Spring runoff when the water levels were high, a friend and I decided to paddle down the Walla Walla river putting in at the Gardena bridge outside of Touchet. We often paddle down this stretch of the river but this time we didn't leave till 6:30pm. We wanted to see what critters were out and about at dusk. We found that if you want to see wildlife, dusk is a great time to go. As we paddled past the many cliffs early in the trip, we spied quite a few Barn Owls poking their white disc shaped heads out of their second story holes. At every corner, we were surprised by loud slaps on the water by beavers who were surprised by us. A coyote trotted along the river bank ahead of us and deer came out to feed on stream side vegetation. Our pace picked up as surroundings became darker...trying to beach the canoe with fast moving water in the dark can be an interesting adventure. The last stretch of our paddle is under high, cave pocked cliffs -- a favorite owl habitat. Soon we were surrounded by numerous screeching, clicking, and diving owls who were swooping over our heads. They were obviously very indignant about our trespassing through their neighborhood. Escaping from the owl onslaught we hurtled around the bend and tumbled onto our rocky landing spot in the now night-time darkness.

The reason for my current concern for Barn Owls is that the next two Springs, we duplicated this evening paddle but there were no screeching and chattering owls swooping down from the cliffs. Barn owl populations are known to fluctuate according to a changing prey base but a more ominous explanation is likely to be the rampant use of rodenticide in the alfalfa fields bordering the river. When the rodents ingest the poison inserted in long furrows in the fields, they die a slow death which often makes them the prey of Barn Owls, raptors, coyotes or even pets, who are seriously affected or killed by the poison.

It has been a very satisfying endeavor to join with other Audubon members in a local barn owl box project. Our goals are to boost the Barn Owl population and support those farmers and vineyards who are choosing to not use the deadly poisons. Hopefully there will be noisy owls on our paddle down the river this year.

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

The January 1, 2016 Big County Day broke previous records with 116 birds reported. Nice job everyone!

Jonathan and Melissa Webster had a big fallout of western bluebirds in their backyard on January 4. Seven or eight at a time were standing on each other in the bird bath while an equal number were perched in the tree above.



On January 5, Pam Fisher watched a merlin behind K-Mart on Mill Creek displaying some unusual behavior. It was sitting in a tree along the path and then flew down into the water where it jumped up and landed again putting its beak in the water. She couldn't see what was in the water, but she was able to get this photo.

Susan Swayne had a ruby-crowned kinglet at her suet feeder on January 5. Other yard bird included a pair of downy woodpeckers, several evening grosbeaks, a great horned owl and three red-tailed hawks.

Mike and MerryLynn found a red-breasted sapsucker, three northern saw-whet owls, and over two dozen purple finches at Fishhook Park on January 6.

Cynthia Reese saw a ferruginous hawk sitting on a fence post near Boise Cascade on January 8. She said it was just watching the traffic go by!

Ralph Trethewey saw a short-eared owl sitting on a snow bank along Scenic Loop at dawn on January 8.

A barn swallow flew right in front of Melissa Cummin's car near Lowden on January 8. Is Spring going to be really early this year, or was this poor bird lost?

Lower Monumental Dam was a bonanza for gulls on January 8. Christopher Lindsey found a slaty-backed gull and got some excellent photos including this one. It is the first time this species has been recorded in Walla Walla County.



He also saw two other uncommon species of gulls - a lesser black-backed gull and Thayer's gulls. Mike and MerryLynn refound the slaty-backed on January 9. It was in with several hundred other gulls. Patience and a keen eye for detail make it possible for expert birders to sift through hundreds of gulls and find something rare! Congratulations Christopher!



A birder from the west side found a pair of long-tailed ducks at Ice Harbor Dam on January 10. Rodger and I met Mike and MerryLynn there on January 12 and were successful in our search. There were several hundred ducks and gulls, and over 20 great egrets, some with their breeding plumage. Rodger took this photo of two of them. There were also mallards, common and Barrow's goldeneyes, common mergansers, double-crested cormorants, white pelicans and five species of gulls.

We had 10 lesser goldfinches visit our yard on January 15. They came in with the American goldfinches.

On January 15, Mike and MerryLynn found a ferruginous hawk on Byrnes Road. We drove out to see it, and also saw a prairie falcon in the same general area. There were many red-tailed hawks (including a beautiful Harlan's red-tailed hawk), several northern harriers, American kestrels and a rough-legged hawk. It's nice to see birds on a road that used to be one of the best winter raptor spots in the area.

Mike and MerryLynn also birded the west side of the county on January 15. Birds of note were snow geese and yellow-headed blackbirds at McNary NWR Headquarters, and tundra swans plus one trumpeter swan at Casey Pond.

Have you been hearing great horned owls in your neighborhood at night lately? February is the time for them to start nesting so they are becoming much more vocal.

On January 17, Heidi Hofer watched a yellow-rumped warbler feeding on the ground and in the trees in her yard. She said it was nice to see something different from the usual winter birds.

George and Deanna Jameson saw 11 ring-necked ducks on Taumarson Road on January 22.

Rodger and I took a quick trip to McNary NWR on January 22 to look for wintering waterfowl. There were over 500 snow geese in three different fields, tundra swans at Headquarters and at Casey Pond on Highway 12 and thousands of ducks on the ponds including a large number of canvasbacks, northern shovelers and northern pintails. It was raining and we had limited time so we only birded from the car, but it was nice to see all the birds. I'm sure we'll see even more on George's field trip on February 20.

A tufted duck was spotted at the Walla Walla Grain Terminal at Wallula on January 23 by two out of town birders. It was still there the next day and was seen by many local birders.

Paul and Judy Treman took 15 eager birders on a Field Trip around Walla Walla on January 23. They found a few wood ducks on South Wilbur ponds, common and hooded mergansers on Mill Creek behind K-Mart; but the highlight was a visit to Jon and Mary Campbell's place to see the wonderful habitat they have on their property. The morning was topped off with hot drinks and treats at John's Bakery.



It was foggy and cold on January 26 when we walked around Bennington Lake. The only birds on the water were eight common mergansers. We found three long-eared owls, and two great horned owls in the groves on the east side of the lake. There were two northern shrikes, several Townsend's solitaires and LOTS of robins, juncos and white-crowned sparrows. A special treat was a brown creeper working its way up a tree in one of the owl groves.

Sandi Burt had three red crossbills coming to her feeders on January 26. She also had chestnut backed chickadees, evening grosbeaks and Steller's jays enjoying the food she put out.

We continued to have evening grosbeaks in our yard during the whole month of January. There were still about two dozen visiting the feeders daily, eating us out of house and home!

February is a great month for waterfowl and gulls. Hunting season ended on January 31, so the Columbia and Snake Rivers will host thousands of wintering birds. If you have a chance to go look for them be sure to let me know what you find. And of course, let me know what you are seeing in your yard. [housewren084@gmail.com](mailto:housewren084@gmail.com)

### **GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time. Since then, more than 100,000 people of all ages and walks of life have joined the four-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

You are invited to participate! Simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, **February 12-15, 2016**. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world!

In 2015, Great Backyard Bird Count participants in more than 100 countries counted 5,090 species of birds on more than 147,000 checklists! During the count, you can explore what others are seeing in your area or around the world. Share your bird photos by entering the photo contest, or enjoy images pouring in from across the globe.

For more information on how to participate contact the Cornell Lab [gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org)

**LOOK FOR BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON  
ON  
FACEBOOK**

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](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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_