Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Membership Meeting

Life on Land and Sea: Owls and Whales

Thursday, March 21, 2019—7 p.m.

Kimball Theatre in Hunter Conservatory, 324 Boyer Avenue —NOTE location!

Presented by Leigh Calvez

Owls are fascinating avian predators. Whales are the largest creatures on the planet. Wonder what they have in common? Join naturalist and nature writer, Leigh Calvez, for an amazing look into the lives of these seemingly disparate species. Leigh will discuss the biology and ecology of owls and whales, as well as sharing a few of her wild encounters along the way.

**Monthly Calendar**

**Board Meeting**
March 14 at 7:00 P.M.

**Membership Meeting**
March 21 at 7:00 p.m.

**Board of Directors**
- **President:** Chris Howard
- **Vice President:** Jeff Fredson
- **Secretary:** Paul and Judy Treman
- **Treasurer:** Jonathan Webster
- **Conservation:** Mike Denny
- **Education:** Kathy McConnell
- **Membership:** Melissa Webster and Holly Howard
- **Programs and Publicity:** Nancy Mitchell
- **Natural Area:** Tom Land
- **Bluebird Trails:** Tom Scribner
- **Adopt a Highway:** Larry Boe
- **Webmaster:** Kathy Howard
- **Facebook Admin:** Judy Treman
- **Field Trips:** Paul Treman
- **Magpiper Layout:** Wendy Foster
- **Community Outreach:** Mike Denny
- **Member at Large:** Priscilla Dauble
- **Bird Sightings:** Ginger Shoemake

**Website:**
http://www.blumtn.org

**Bird sightings:**
housewren084@gmail.com

**Contact BMAS:**
Email: BlueMtnAudubon@gmail.com
Mail: PO Box 1106
Walla Walla, WA 99362

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Blue Mountain Audubon Society

**Field Trip**

**Wallula Gap**

**Saturday, March 16**
9:00 a.m. to approx. 4:00 p.m.

**Leaders:** Mike and MerryLynn Denny

Join Mike and MerryLynn Denny on a fun “flowering” and birding trip to various locations in the vicinity of Wallula Gap. We will look for Shooting Stars, Prairie Stars, Yellow Bells, Buttercups and other wildflowers along the emerald green rocky hillsides in the gorge and on nearby Hatch Grade. Target birds will be loons on the Columbia River, raptors in the gorge, and early Spring migrants.

If you have a copy of “Where the Great River Bends” or can borrow a copy, it would be helpful to read about the fascinating geography and history in the Wallula Gap where ice-age floods rushed through. Mike, along with Bob Carson and others, were authors of this most interesting and informative book.

Come prepared for the weather and bring water, snacks, lunch, binoculars and a friend or two. Boots are recommended as we will scramble over rocks.

Meet at the Harper Joy Theater parking lot on the Whitman College campus and we will car pool. You do not have to be a member of Blue Mountain Audubon Society to attend, the field trip is free and no pre-registration is required (just show up). If you have any questions, contact Mike and MerryLynn at 529-0080 or m.denny@charter.net.
Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Field Trip
Millet Pond

Saturday, April 6
8:00 a.m. to approx. 4:00 p.m.

Leaders: Mike and MerryLynn Denny

Join Mike and MerryLynn Denny on a fun “flowering” and birding trip to various locations in the vicinity of Wallula Gap. We will look for Shooting Stars, Prairie Stars, Yellow Bells, Buttercups and other wildflowers along the emerald green rocky hillsides in the gorge and on nearby Hatch Grade. Target birds will be loons on the Columbia River, raptors in the gorge, and early Spring migrants.

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A Snowy Owl Mount

By Kathy McConnell, Audubon Education Chairman

Heidi Chapin, Science Outreach Coordinator for Whitman College, assisted Blue Mountain Audubon by having a display case made for a snowy owl. The owl originally belonged to Art Rempel, who was Biology Professor Emeritus at Whitman College. With the Audubon Science Night school activities focused on owls this year, the hope was to display this gorgeous bird. Heidi posed the question, “Did we know what chemicals were used to preserve the bird?”

The earliest methods used to preserve birds for display in natural history cabinets was published in the year 1748 by a man named Reamur in France. By 1793 the use of arsenic and arsenic soaps was touted as effective in preparing mounts. Although alternative safer methods were developed, arsenic, formaldehyde and other hazardous chemicals were the most popular substances used by taxidermists well into the 1900’s. (Wikipedia)

Given the likely age of the snowy old mount, it was determined that it might have traces of arsenic or other nasty chemicals, and therefore shouldn’t be touched by children. Heidi researched the cost of glass cases and found that the most reasonably-priced enclosure could be made by the local glass company, Jim’s Glass Shop on Poplar.

The snowy owl attracts comments from many children. It is so beautifully mounted that children ask if it is alive.

Thanks to Heidi and Whitman Outreach for the purchase of the case and Jim’s Glass for the attractive container.

Two male Cinnamon Teal

Photo by Judy Truman
The snow is falling outside our sunroom windows and as I write this note I am listening to cello music. So now that the stage is set let’s talk about conservation of natural resources and bad behavior that places us all at risk.

First let’s visit about plastics. Our earth is awash in plastics. What plastics do you most often see discarded by the thoughtless right here in the Walla Walla basin? What I see is single use plastic bags from stores, water bottles, oil and wind shield wiper fluid bottles, candy and nut wrappers. Many food, battery and electronics corporations over package their products leaving people to dump tons of Styrofoam, heavy pressed clear plastic see through protective wrapping and those extra pieces of useless plastic. So here are the three largest issues connected to plastic packaging and other plastic stuff. It breaks down over time and becomes micro-plastics which wash into our water-ways and down into streams. All this plastic is then ingested by fish, and many other vertebrates like ducks, geese, shorebirds and amphibians. Lots of micro plastics from us end up in us in water we drink, food we eat and even the air we breathe in the form of micro fibers. So, what can be done about this here in this river basin? You must ask yourself how you contribute to the growing issue by what you do every day? Are you willing to pick up plastics you come across? Those water bottles, their plastic caps and plastic bags blown in the wind? Carry a trash bag and pick-up all the plastics you come across. It is all about individual action.

The next topic is closely related to the first on this page. I am speaking of litter and dumping and the cost to all of us.

This last week six friends and I presented a power point presentation to the County Commissioners on the increased amount of litter and dumping that is going on here in Walla Walla County. We made a plea to them to create an ordinance that would bolster and enhance the State of Washington’s minimal enforcement fine of $110.00 should you get caught littering or dumping. No one in the Commission chambers that day was aware of a single fine ever being levied against a single person for littering in Walla Walla County. So, we proposed a six-month signage campaign to inform the general public about the coming local litter ordinance. We urged the commissioners to adopt this idea of starting with this educational sign campaign about
Walla Walla County being too wonderful to trash and litter.

They all entirely agreed and were starting the process of dealing with this issue. The second part of this antilittering campaign is enforcement. We urged them to enact a stiff penalty based on North Carolinas state laws that require a minimum of 250.00 and on up to a 1000.00 cap for first time offenders. This would be a law and not a suggestion. If caught a second time it would be a 2000.00 fine and a class 3 misdemeanor placed on the persons record.

The third part would be opportunities for community service for those that continue to litter and persist dumping pick-up loads of junk/dead livestock on both public and private lands as well as in our rivers and streams.

There are those that ask why do this now? The reason is that there are those that are habitual dumpers and litters that consider littering almost a right. Trashing an area is not a right and it impacts all kinds of residents of Walla Walla County. We know that a very small percentage of people here do the littering and dumping. So, to cause these folks to reconsider their poor choices we are pushing for this much stronger and meaningful law.

So, who gets impacted by trash and litter? It is a crime against all of us. A true lack of respect for the county, property owners and wildlife, water quality and it also creates an economic loss.

With Walla Walla County as a destination site, known all over the world and the fact that no visitors or tourists want to see litter everywhere. It is a must that littering come to a stop. The tourism factor alone is one very good reason to put a lid on litter.

Pea and Garbanzo farmers lose many thousands of dollars annually at harvest from trash being pitched in their fields, primarily beer and wine bottles as this type of garbage is picked up by harvesters and shards of glass end up in the hoppers full of peas and garbs and then that farmer looses that whole hopper full of crop as it has been mixed with glass shards and is unsaleable and a real safety issue. Many thousands of dollars are lost right here locally. Chemical, petroleum and herbicide/pesticide containers also get dumped and those products end up in our water ways.

All trash belongs in the approved landfill or recycled by all of us. Please call the Walla Walla County Commissions office at 524-2505 and let them know you are in favor of this much stronger anti-trash/littering ordinance with teeth in it.

Thank you!
Mike Denny, Conservation Chair—BMAS

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Photo by Mike Denny

Dumped car in WW County—three weeks ago, along Wooden Rd.
Musings

On the Trail of the Red Fox

By Chris Howard

For some people, a coating of 4 inches or more of snow is a deterrent to stepping out of their warm house into the cold, crunchy snow. For the nature lover, it is a golden opportunity to head out early onto the untracked slate of white and see evidence of all the animal activity that occurred the night before, something that is hard to know when the ground is hard and dry. Following a recent snowfall, I took my cross country skis and headed out to the Ft. Walla Walla Natural Area to survey the tracks of the area. On an earlier snowy occasion, I had come to the Natural Area and spotted a large Red Fox sitting majestically in the middle of the snow covered open area as if it were surveying its domain.

This time there was no Red Fox sitting in the field but as began my ski trek around the area I came upon the lone tracks of a small canine that I would bet was the Red Fox. There had been one other two legged out walking leaving boot tracks who was accompanied by a dog but those dog tracks were always close to the boot tracks. It is not that I expect to see the Red Fox by following its tracks, although that would be a welcomed bonus, it is to be able to absorb the movements of the fox, to imagine what it was seeing and smelling on its quest for nurturance and survival. The fox was taking advantage of the human made trail but also often diverted into and under nearby bushes with the tracks disappearing only to reappear a little ways down the trail. There were places where the fox had pawed and dug through the snow into the dark grass and dirt beneath seeking a hidden rodent. At one point I followed the tracks down to a creek and saw where it had leaped 4 feet up onto a snow covered log to cross the creek...a feat that I certainly could not duplicate on skis.
In the Field
by Ginger Shoemake

On January 31, Pam Fisher watched a small flock of golden-crowned kinglets in her yard. They were a new yard bird for her.

February brought winter! The first few days of the month our yard was filled with birds – juncos, white-crowned sparrows, chickadees, song sparrows, house finches, American goldfinches, house sparrows, lesser goldfinches, collared doves and of course a sharp-shinned hawk that was delighted to have such a smorgasbord to choose from.

The winter weather brought birds to our neighborhoods that we don’t normally see. For instance, on February 7 Linda Hanson saw a varied thrush in her yard. Several other people also reported varied thrushes in their yards. There have also been reports of large flocks of red-winged blackbirds and American robins in the trees around town.

On February 13, Melissa Cummins had two yellow-headed blackbirds come to her feeders looking for something to eat in the snow.

It’s been fun watching different birds come to our yards in this winter weather. Del Henry had a red-tailed hawk and a barn owl in his yard, and Pam Fisher watched a yellow-rumped warbler in her water feature. Several people reported lesser goldfinches at their feeders. I know the numbers are back up at our feeders as well as a big increase in the number of American goldfinches. They love the little cones on the alder tree along the creek.

With all the snow in the last couple weeks, Mike and MerryLynn decided it would be a good idea drive north of town and look for snow buntings on February 16. They didn’t find any, but did see several hundred horned larks. Because snow buntings can sometimes be found with horned larks, they spent considerable time scanning all the larks looking for something different. Although they didn’t find any buntings they did find some great birds including three golden eagles, gray partridges on two different roads, two short eared owls and a lesser black-backed gull at Lower Monumental Dam.

On February 18, Martene Purcell had five varied thrushes and a spotted towhee in her yard along with her house finches and juncos.

We were able to drive our Walla Walla NW raptor route on February 18. We tallied 104 red-tailed hawks, 21 American kestrels, 6 northern harriers, 8 rough-legged hawks, a prairie falcon, 2 sharp-shinned hawks, 2 Cooper’s hawks and 4 great horned owls. It was a good day!

With all the snow and ice we have been having this month the birds are flocking to back yard in search of food. While black-oiled sunflower seeds and mixed seeds are good for sparrows, finches and juncos, larger birds like robins and thrushes are looking for berries. Since most of these are gone, try putting out small pieces of apple for these hungry birds. They will appreciate your help. And don’t forget to let me know what you are seeing.

I'm looking forward to the next fresh snow to check on the wanderings of the resident Red Fox.

Photo by Melissa Cummins

Yellow-headed blackbird

I followed the tracks as they made the complete circuit of the area, I realized that it is not easy to be a fox in the winter. It is a constant challenge to find food, to stay warm. It’s fortunate the fox has the Natural Area where the tracks of rabbits and rodents reveal a prey base and hopes of sustenance for the future. Even the snow can be an insulating factor for warmth on these cold winter nights.

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housewren084@gmail.com

Photo by Melissa Cummins

Yellow-headed blackbird
**Mission Statement:**

Blue Mountain Audubon Society (BMAS) objectives are to serve its membership and the larger communities of Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon with goals to appreciate, conserve and enjoy birds, wildlife and the natural environment of the area. Education is a primary objective of our chapter activities. Through volunteer efforts BMAS provides educational opportunities, conservation activities and enjoyment of wildlife and wildlife habitat opportunities to members and the public.

Blue Mountain Audubon Society was organized in 1971 and chartered by National Audubon Society in 1972. BMAS is a non-profit 501c(3) organization. Find us on the internet at [www.blumtn.org](http://www.blumtn.org) or on Facebook.

**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:_________

Phone:_______________________ Email:____________________________________________

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**Bird of the Month**

**Varied Thrush**

*Ixoreus naevius*

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Size: 9.5 inches

Description:

Male has a dark breast band, mask and bill, orange eyebrow, throat, wing patches and wing bars. Female is a faded version of the male.

The varied thrush is a beautiful robin-like thrush which can be distinguished from the American robin by its black “V” on the breast and orange eyebrow. It is best known for its eerie bell-like, prolonged whistle that slowly fades away from the listener.

It breeds in mature moist coniferous forests high in the Blue Mountains. In the winter it can be found at lower elevations, usually with flocks of robins, eating berries or foraging on the ground for insects. During cold, snowy weather varied thrushes often visit backyards looking for berries and insects, especially along our many creeks.

The diet of a varied thrush includes sow bugs, snails, worms, fruit and weed seeds.

Their nests are usually against the trunk of a small conifer and are a bulky mass of mud, dried leaves, inner bark strips, soft moss reinforced with twigs with a lining of grass or rootlets. The female builds the nest and incubates the eggs (usually 3-4). Incubation last approximately 14 days. Both sexes tend the young.

Many of you have reported varied thrushes in your yards during the month of February. If you haven’t been one of the lucky ones to see one yet, take time to look through the robin flocks and you may be rewarded with a sighting of this beautiful winter visitor.

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Photo by Paul Remen