Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Membership Meeting
Sablefish Stomach Contents and Adventures in Southeast Alaska

Thursday, April 18, 2019—7 p.m.
Olin Hall, Room 129 on the Whitman College campus

Presented by Willa Johnson

What are sablefish? What do sablefish eat? Do small and large fish consume the same prey? Come to this talk and find out! Willa Johnson will be presenting her thesis research comparing the diets of two size classes of juvenile sablefish. She will also be presenting a little slice of Alaska’s natural history from her summer in Juneau. From fish stomach contents to glaciers to whales to birds, there is lots to explore!

Willa Johnson ‘19 is the 2018 Arthur G. Rempel Scholar and a senior at Whitman College majoring in biology. She is interested in fisheries, ecology and science education. She is very involved around campus including leading trips for the outdoor program and working as a biology lab assistant. In her spare time Willa enjoys reading, birding, kayaking and baking. Her favorite bird is the Harlequin Duck.

Arthur G. Rempel taught biology at Whitman College from 1938 through the mid-1970s. He was a founding member of Blue Mountain Audubon Society and in his honor, Blue Mountain Audubon annually presents a biology major with a scholarship in his name to support their studies at Whitman College.

Wallula Gap
March 16
Birds and Wildflowers Field Trip led by Mike and MerryLnn Denny
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

The Millet Pond is one of the best places in Walla Walla County to see early Spring migrating shorebirds and waterfowl. We will go first to Madam Dorian Park located on US 12 immediately north of the Walla Walla River bridge at Wallula Junction. After birding the park we will go east on North Shore Drive past Sanctuary Pond to the Millet Pond, where we will walk the dike trails.

Target birds will be Cinnamon and Blue-wing Teal, Long-billed Curlew, swallows, and other early April migrants. We might even find a Virginia Rail, Marsh Wren or a Great-horned Owl.

Weather co-operating, we will make other birding stops along the way. Plan to walk at least a mile. Dress for the weather, which can be quite windy. Bring water, snacks, lunch, binoculars and a friend or two.

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.

Photo by Judy Treman

Two male Cinnamon Teal

Blue Mountain Audubon Facebook Page
For information regarding Blue Mountain Audubon programs, field trips, events, beautiful bird sightings and more . . . Check out Blue Mountain Audubon Facebook page at: https://www.facebook.com/BlueMountainAudubonWallaWallaWa/
You do not need to sign up with Facebook to look at our page.
Wenas Audubon Society

56th Annual Wenas Audubon Campout

Wenas Creek Campground

Memorial Day Weekend, May 24–27

You're invited to attend a celebration of birds, bats, butterflies, botany, and the beauty of spring in eastern Washington. The 56th Annual Wenas Audubon Campout will take place on Memorial Day Weekend (May 24-27, 2019) at the The Hazel Wolf Bird Sanctuary at the Wenas Creek Campground (SW of Ellensburg).

This casual and friendly gathering offers a variety of activities, including birding field trips, wildflower walks, field sketching, owl prowls, and campfire presentations PLUS a special guest speaker. You do not need to be an Audubon member to attend. All are welcome to this family-friendly event.

Visit the Wenas Audubon website (www.wenasaudubon.org) for directions, an outline of field trips and programming, and more information (2019 program coming soon). The campout is free and open to all ages. No reservations or registrations needed; just show up, set up camp, and participate in activities.

Donations are encouraged to cover SaniCans, signage, and other administrative costs. Every vehicle must display a Washington State Discover Pass (http://www.discoverpass.wa.gov/). Barring high fire danger, campfires will be allowed.

Follow us on Facebook, too! We'll be sharing photos and stories from past years, as well as tips from Wenas Campout pros to help make your trip a fun and memorable experience. facebook.com/wenasaudubon/ General questions? Contact Carol Kohler, carolkohler98607@gmail.com

Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Volunteers!

Highway Litter Pickup

Just a few miles west of Walla Walla on highway 12 is a one mile stretch that is maintained by Blue Mountain Audubon. That means that twice a year Audubon volunteers spend an hour or two collecting the litter along the highway. Please join us at Spalding Road on Saturday, April 20th at 9am for some community service. Larry Boe is our coordinator and will provide the vests and pickup tongs. The more volunteers the quicker it goes! See you there.

Arthur G. Rempel

Fort Walla Walla Natural Area

By Chris Howard

The Natural Area changes its personality with every season. Early Spring brings us trails that are wide open, clear springs flowing at their highest levels, ponds with resting ducks and the arrival of new migratory birds. Now is the perfect time to walk these trails any time of day. Hidden owls may be heard hooting in the evenings along with a chorus of croaking frogs. Walking the Natural Area trails in every season gives one a sense of place and an awareness of nature’s seasonal changes. A map of the Natural Area may be found at the Blue Mountain Audubon website: www.blumtn.org
Find the Hidden Owl

By Chris Howard

The Great Horned Owls of Bennington Lake are what I call opportunistic nesters. Over the years we have found the female sitting on some very small and precarious nests. Owls do not make their own nests so they utilize hawk nests, holes in cliffs or even in a fork of tree branches with a few leaves imitating a nest. It seems as though when it’s time for the female to lay her eggs almost any nook or cranny will do. The nests are usually pretty well hidden although proximity to human activity is not a factor. One of the nests is overlooking a parking lot and another is adjacent to a popular trail. When the eggs hatch there is often little room in the nest for the fluffy owlets to perch. The accompanying photos are of two currently nesting owls. Come out on the Tuesday bird walk at Bennington for more precise location details.

Tuesday Bennington Bird Walk

For the naturalist a sought after gift is to establish a true sense of place. The sense of place is that special location that they walked and explored over and over again at all times of the year in all kinds of weather, under the magical moonlight and searing summer sun. This special place takes on the familiarity of one’s back yard. By returning to the same place one sees the constant changes of the seasons, the variations in the migratory bird patterns. One way to develop a sense of place is to join the Tuesday, Bennington Lake bird walk. Meet at the parking lot at 9am Tuesday morning with binoculars for a walk around the lake. Who knows what bird might show up?
Spring Migration

By Ginger Shoemake

Migration has begun in the Walla Walla Valley. As of March 20, the following birds have returned:
  - Say’s phoebe
  - Western bluebird
  - Long-billed curlew
  - Violet-green swallow
  - Tree swallow
  - Savannah sparrow
  - Sandhill crane (seen in the Columbia Basin)

Following are some of the birds to look for in April:
  - Turkey vulture
  - American avocet
  - Black-necked stilt
  - Mountain bluebird
  - Caspian tern
  - Cliff swallow
  - Northern rough-winged swallow
  - Bank swallow
  - Barn swallow
  - Osprey
  - Swainson’s hawk
  - Cinnamon teal
  - Yellow-rumped warbler
  - Nashville warbler
  - Orange-crowned warbler
  - Yellow warbler
  - Townsend’s warbler
  - Cassin’s vireo
  - Western kingbird
  - Hammond’s flycatcher
  - Greater yellowlegs
  - Spotted sandpiper
  - Vaux’s swift
  - White-throated swift
  - Loggerhead shrike
  - Fox sparrow
  - Calliope hummingbird
  - Black-chinned hummingbird
  - Rufous hummingbird
  - House wren

Recent Sightings

CW: Western Screech Owl (See p. 7), Western Bluebird 3-20, Black-necked Stilt FOY 3-26, Eared Grebe 3-25

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 or on Facebook.
Musings
By Chris Howard

Winter Survival

I enjoy being out in nature in the cold, snowy weather. Occasionally I find just the right place on a snowy ridge with a view, on a moon-lit winter night and snuggle into a warm sleeping bag for real winter adventure. This short term winter camping does not require me to find my food. I bring an ample amount of food with me as well as a stove and fuel to warm it. When out in this cold environment I am always aware of how fragile and vulnerable I am and how dependent I am on my high tech insulated clothing and sleeping bag to keep me warm and my fiberglass skis to transport me across the deep snow. I often think about how difficult it must be for the woodland inhabitants to survive in extreme winter conditions. As evidence to the challenges of their survival, occasionally I come across the carcass of a deer or elk. Winterkill is the term most widely used to describe this unsuccessful struggle with the elements.

February is the month that the Great Horns Owls have finished their courtship ritual of hooting to each other and the female has settled on a nest. She is dependent on the male to bring her rodents or rabbits to keep up her strength. While x-country skiing around Bennington Lake this snowy February I wondered, how do the Great Horned Owls find enough food with all the snow on the ground? The most entertaining aspect of getting out early on a snowy day is to observe all the animal tracks from the previous night before they are trampled on by hikers or their dogs. On this particular day, the snow conditions were perfect to reveal all the tracks in fine detail. Right beside the trail I spotted the tracks of a little rodent where it had scurried from one bush to another. Gliding around a corner with the early morning sunlight illuminating the snow, I stopped to view a virtual freeway of rabbit tracks going back and forth before a row of shrubbery. The more I looked the more I spotted evidence of all the nocturnal movements. Was this an ordinary example of the night’s activities or was the traffic due to there not being much moonlight the night before? Further on down the trail, the answer to the question of what Great Horned Owls eat was answered in graphic detail. In the middle of the trail was a large splattering of bright red blood with pieces of rabbit fur and intestines leaving no doubt of the rabbit’s demise. As I pondered the scene of the fatal encounter, I wondered whether I should be sorry for the rabbit that lost its life or happy for the owl that was able to feed its mate sitting on their eggs one more night. I’m glad I had seen the proliferation of rabbit tracks glittering in the morning snow.
February and the first two weeks of March were hard on the birds, and birders wanting to get out looking for them. But never fear – spring is coming!

Jack Gisler reported a western screech owl took refuge at his house from a winter storm on February 24. It first perched on their pergola and then moved into a nook under the roof.

Mike and MerryLynn scattered seed at the Wallula poop piles on March 1, and were rewarded with a Lapland longspur, a Savannah sparrow and an American tree sparrow. On March 2, they found a single snow bunting in with a large flock of horned larks. On March 8, they found another Lapland longspur on Eureka Flats.

Anna’s hummingbirds were still coming to feeders at Linda Hagen’s place and at Jim and Sue Parrish’s home the first two weeks of March.

Brooke Davey walked Bennington Lake on March 3 and saw the bald eagle that has been hanging out there this winter.

Chris Howard saw a pair of bufflehead, a pair of hooded mergansers and a white-throated sparrow on Mill Creek on March 9.

On March 12, Melissa Cummins saw a spotted towhee under her feeders. She also noted that the Harris’s sparrow is still hanging around.

Chris Howard walked around Bennington Lake in the snow, sleet and rain on March 12. He found two great horned owls on nests and three roosting along with a lone great blue heron standing on the frozen lake.

On March 13, Kathy Howard saw a violet green swallow behind Kmart. Spring is definitely on the way when the swallows return!

On March 16, 20 people joined Mike and MerryLynn Denny for a Field Trip to the west side of the County in search of early spring arrivals and to look for wildflowers in Wallula Gap. The heavy snows in February and March made the search for wildflowers tough, but we did find a few sagebrush buttercups and salt and pepper lomatium. However, the early spring arrival of the avian type didn’t disappoint. There were long-billed curlews on Riggs Road, violet green swallows on Detour Road, greater white-fronted geese along Highway 12 near Iowa Beef, a Say’s phoebe in Touchet, and a canyon wren at Wallula Gap. Add to that a nice variety of ducks on the Columbia River and many tundra swans along with one trumpeter swan at the Walla Walla River Delta. The day was capped off by watching about 5000 snow geese fly over our cars on Humorist Road. The total species seen for the trip was 69. Thanks Mike and MerryLynn for another great field trip!

The Bennington Lake trails were mud, snow and ice for our Tuesday walk on March 19. The tree swallows have returned and we saw a tree sparrow near one of the great horned owl nests. There was mostly open water on the lake and waterfowl included mallards, green-winged teal, hooded mergansers, common mergansers, American wigeons, canvasbacks and Canada geese. There was also a dead tundra swan on the edge of the water that looked to have died of starvation. It was a hard winter on wildlife everywhere. Cooper’s hawks were building a nest along the east side of the canal. It won’t be long before the trees begin to green up and spring migration begins in earnest!

Rodger and I drove our Walla Walla North raptor route on March 20. Most of the red-tailed hawks were paired up and near their nests, but none appeared to be nesting yet. However, we were excited to find eight great horned owls—all nesting. We even had a visible chick at a nest on Woodward Canyon Road. On March 23 we drove our Touchet North route and were pleasantly surprised to find three ferruginous hawks near their nest sites. Barn owls and a prairie falcon were a nice addition to the hawks and owls we usually see on this route.

April means it’s time to put up your hummingbird feeders. I always put mine up the first week of April just in case one decides to return early (or a wintering Anna’s comes by for a drink). However, they usually don’t show up along our creek until mid to late April. Let me know when they arrive at your place, and report migrating birds you see. My email is housewren084@gmail.com
Bird of the Month

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Size: 23 inches
Wingspan: 54 inches

Ospreys, sometimes known as the sea hawk, are a large fish-eating bird of prey. They are brown on the upperparts and predominantly white on the head and underparts with a dark mask across the eyes. They are found in a wide variety of habitats, nesting in any location near a body of water providing an adequate food supply. They are found in temperate and tropical regions of all continents except Antarctica, although in South America they occur only as a non-breeding migrant.

An osprey’s diet consists almost exclusively of fish. Prey is first sighted when the osprey is anywhere from 20 to 130 feet above the water, after which the bird hovers momentarily then plunges feet first into the water. They are able to dive to a depth of over three feet. After catching the fish, considerable effort is needed to get airborne again. As they rise from the water, the fish is turned head-forward to reduce drag. Occasionally, they may prey on other wetland animals.

Their nest is a large heap of sticks and other materials built in the fork of a tree, utility pole or artificial platform. They begin breeding around the age of three or four years and they usually mate for life. In the spring the pair begins a five-month period of partnership to raise their young. The female lays 2-4 eggs and relies on the size of the nest to conserve heat. The eggs are incubated for about five weeks. The young fledge in 8 to 10 weeks. The typical lifespan of an osprey is 20-25 years.

North American ospreys migrate to Central and South America in the winter. However, some now stay in the southernmost states such as California. April will bring them back to the Walla Walla Valley. They nest along several rivers and creeks in our area. There are several man-made platforms along the Walla Walla River and along Highway 12 near Lowden. Although they do not nest at Bennington Lake, it is a favorite fishing spot for them and they can be regularly viewed there, especially in the spring and early fall.

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: ____________________________