Blue Mountain Audubon Society

**46th Annual Christmas Bird Count!**

**Saturday December 14**

7:30 a.m. Meet at Harper Joy Theater parking lot
5:30 p.m. Wrap-Up at Ft. Walla Walla Museum

Mark your calendars for Blue Mt. Audubon’s awesome holiday event, the Annual Christmas Bird Count. We’ll meet in the Whitman parking lot at 7:30 a.m. on Saturday, December 14th to divide into teams to head out for the ultimate treasure hunt; how many bird species can we find in the Walla Walla area? Every year a surprise or two show up, and your team may be the one to find it.

Afterwards, meet at Fort Walla Walla museum for a soup, bread, salad and dessert potluck, followed by the grand tally. The more eyes the more birds are found, so hope to see you there.

Our CBC circle is centered at Bennington Lake and is 15 miles across. It is broken up into 12 areas – some areas require a lot of walking – others can be birded from the car. If you cannot come out for the day you can still contribute by counting birds at your feeder (if you live within 7.5 miles of Bennington Lake). All bird species AND numbers are counted.

The wrap-up gets together is at 5:30 p.m. at Fort Walla Walla Museum off Myra Rd. Hot soup, bread and drink provided. You do NOT have to come on the count to join in the wrap-up – and you are welcome to bring your favorite salad and/or dessert. Please contact MerryLynn Denny—m.denny@charter.net or 509-240-5552 if you plan on participating so she can assign folks to areas and organize the count. If you cannot come to the wrap-up please send your bird count to MerryLynn.

**Last year** 76 Species were found with SANDHILL CRANE new to the count. Several records were broken—the expected ones like Eurasian Collared-Dove—414 compared to 392 last year. Lesser Goldfinches continue to expand with 223 found this year—real increase over 97 last year. 6 Anna’s Hummingbirds were reported— not surprising in this mild weather. And lastly over 12000 starlings were reported—SE Walla Walla is inundated with huge flocks of these birds because of the vineyards. Fifteen Western Bluebirds were a nice find on Biscuit Ridge Rd., and the Bennington Lake counters were treated to great views of an adult Northern Goshawk. Misses—Pileated Woodpecker, C. Goldeneye—first miss in 10 years, and Bufflehead.

**Arthur G. Rempel**

**Fort Walla Walla Natural Area**

Fort Walla Walla Natural Area is a great place to go any time of the year. Now that we are moving toward winter and the first frosts have occurred, all the vegetation has settled down into its dormant phase, the leaves have fallen and a hiker can see for long distances across the areas that are obscured by vegetation in the summer. The trails are completely clear with fallen leaves on top of a bark spread path. The Natural Area is especially fun when there is a thick coating of snow for excellent cross country skiing following the tracks of the fox, deer and other inhabitants. Take the kids and go for a nature exploration. There is a map at the trailhead. Unfortunately the signs marking the trails were recently stolen. We are in the process of making another set. —Chris Howard
President’s Corner

By Chris Howard

As I write this, the first heavy snows are falling in the mountains and winter is just around the corner. Along with the change of seasons there plenty of fun activities through Blue Mountain Audubon. Our Bennington Lake Tuesday morning bird walk continues to take place starting at 9 a.m. Even though the summer birds are long gone there are the hardy winter birds to look for. There is also the annual fall mystery hunt of where the Great Horned Owls will find a special place to lay their eggs and raise another brood. The annual Christmas Bird Count and wrap up pot luck at Fort Walla Walla is the high point for the winter season. It is a great time to join together with others in search of birds in the holiday season. Our regular monthly meetings will continue on the third Thursday of January. Happy Holidays and fun birding to all!

Successful Turkey Trot

by Sue Parrish

On a wet but warm November Sunday, Tom Scribner once again used his turkey radar to lead a very successful Turkey Trot. By scouring the backroads in the foothills of Walla Walla and Columbia counties, 262 turkeys were found. Besides gobs of gobblers, thirty two other species of birds were sighted. Highlights included Cedar Waxwings everywhere, a Golden Eagle, five Great Horned Owls, and a beautiful Barn Owl Tom flushed from his secret spot. After a soggy morning, the sun appeared and made the hills glow in all their fall glory. Many thanks to Tom for leading this all day trip and sharing his knowledge of where to find those turkeys!
Birding Books for Kids

By Kathy McConnell, Education Chairman

With the holidays approaching I thought that I would give a few gift suggestions for books about birds. There are marvelous stories and reference books available for all ages. These books can become a starting point for talking with kids about birds seen on walks or on holiday car trips. A bird book can become the gift of a life-long birding passion.

Here are two delightful fiction books, one for the younger children and one for the youth:

“Snow Ravens” by Bruno Hächler is particularly perfect for this time of year. Goodreads describes it as “A raven, who doesn’t complain about the cold and snow but rather enjoys watching children play in the snow, attracts their amazed attention after he tries to make a snow angel himself.” To compliment this book, share this video with kids which shows a playful raven sliding down a roof in Russia on a piece of plastic. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dWw9GLcOeA

My second is a chapter book titled, “The Desperate Adventures of Zeno and Alya” by Jane Kelley for kids ages 8 to 12. “A desperately ill girl and an orphaned African gray parrot find friendship, security and healing when they are inadvertently joined by fate.” (Review by Goodreads)

These next two books are for older kids.

“Woodpecker and Raven, A Bird Book for Kids” is a book in a series by Novare Lawrence. I can’t think of two better bird species to explore with kids. They are both noisy and intelligent. The book has a number of great photos and interesting facts.

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Although in Walla Walla we don’t have all the birds portrayed in “Baby’s First Book of Birds of Color,” we do have a number of colorful birds. (When my daughter was a toddler, I kept a bird list of birds that noticed her. The list included a great-horned owl!) The second book, “Bird Builds a Nest,” might seem the wrong kind of gift for this time of year, but with the leaves gone from the trees, this is the perfect time to spot last year’s nests.

And just in case, you are out birding with kids and don’t have a reference book along, upload Cornell Lab’s app, Merlin, All About Birds. Have a lovely birding season!
In the Field
By Ginger Shoemake

Bob and Mary Betts found the first _tundra swans_ of the fall at McNary NWR Headquarters on September 26. They also saw about 300 _snow geese_ and 50 _canvasbacks_ along with other waterfowl.

MerryLynn Denny bird North Fork Coppei Creek Road on October 26. On the way she saw a late _western bluebird_ on a wire on Minnick Hill. Her most notable sightings on N. Fork Coppei were all three nuthatch species that can be found here ( _red-breasted, white-breasted_ and _pygmy_ ), all three chickadee species found here ( _black-capped, mountain_ and _chestnut-backed_ ). She watched a beautiful _golden eagle_ soaring over the canyons at the top of the road, and found _pygmy owls_ in two locations.

It was a cold walk for the Bennington Lake group on October 29, but we did see some nice birds. _Killdeer_ dotted the shoreline of the lake while a _great blue heron_ kept watch on the far side. There were some ducks, including several _buffleheads_ and _hooded mergansers_, but the most interesting bird on the lake was a _Bonaparte’s gull_. We got a glimpse of a _northern shrike_ in the distant trees on the east side and a _Cooper’s hawk_ in the trees on the west side. It

Musings
A Praying Predator
By Chris Howard

For some reason I seem to have a fascination with unusual animals. Last summer, the animal that caught my attention was the Praying Mantis. There are a number of interesting qualities of the Praying Mantis that makes it worthy of an in depth investigation. Mantises are from the order ( _Mantodea_ ) of insects which includes 2,400 species. The triangular head contains two bulging compound eyes and 3 spare simple eyes in between giving them great vision. Their forearms are bent under the head which give them the appearance of being in prayer. In actuality, their forearms are set for extending out quickly to grasp and hold prey. They are serious predators. Being masters of camouflage they come in many different forms disguised as leaves, sticks, branches and even beautiful flower imitations which spell death for flying insects coming in for what they expect will be a nectar filled flower. Praying mantises eat only live food including all kinds of insects, crickets, grasshoppers and (brace yourselves bird lovers) hummingbirds and other small passerines. They have been known to stalk hummingbird feeders, leaping from nearby perch to nab an unsuspecting hummer. In two reported cases, females, which are the larger than the males, were seen feasting on birds while copulating with males. To make sex even more interesting for the males, females routinely bite off their heads and devour them. Females lay from 100 to 400 eggs in the fall which are encased in a sturdy shell and attached to a branch or wall. Generally the females die during the winter and the eggs hatch out when it warms up in the spring. Praying mantises are valued as predators of garden pests...but be careful of the placement of the hummingbird feeder!

This past summer I observed a little known fact about mantises. They are baseball fans. Sitting at a Walla Walla Sweets game I watched a mantis flutter through the night lights to land on the netting behind home plate for the best seat in the house. It appeared to be rooting for the home team. While volunteering at the Sleep Center I observed a homeless praying mantis fly in for a safe place to spend the night. The most interesting encounter I had with mantises last summer was when I was standing in front of Providence hospital late at night getting a breath of fresh air while my daughter was laboring upstairs with our first grandchild. I walked over to the large statue of Mary in her benevolent stance. I had never noticed before that she was standing on a snake whose head was sticking out from under her foot. As I inspected the statue, I noticed a praying mantis was perched on its base looking up with its front arms bent in prayer. Obviously a Catholic praying mantis. Not a bad idea I thought, thinking of my daughter upstairs.
was fun walking through all the dry leaves along the trail although it made it hard for MerryLynn to hear the birds with all of the noise we made.

On November 2 Rodger and I took drove north of Walla Walla looking for raptors. We were pleased to find that their numbers have improved. We saw 22 red-tailed hawks (including several rufous morphed and one dark morphed), 12 American kestrels, 2 northern harriers, a golden eagle and a Cooper’s hawk. Our only disappointment was not finding a rough-legged hawk. We did see a northern shrike though, several horned larks and many, many American goldfinches. We’re looking forward to starting our Raptor Routes later in the month that will take us northwest of Walla Walla and north of Touchet.

Wendy Foster saw a blue jay in her neighborhood on November 2. It was in her yard on the 7th and she has seen or heard it off and on almost every day since then.

Bob and Linda Hanson saw two purple finches at Fishhook Park on November 4. MerryLynn had reported them earlier so they decided to go look. They also watched hundreds of snow geese flying down the river – probably on their way to McNary NWR where they have been seen in great numbers.

On his way to work on November 5, our son Steve saw a pileated woodpecker fly onto a utility pole on Last Chance Road.

Jim and Sue Parrish found some nice birds along Jasper Mountain Road on November 8 including a white-breasted nuthatch, a pygmy owl, two ruffed grouse, a brown creeper and three pine grosbeaks.

MerryLynn found a white-headed woodpecker on Dent Road on Nov. 10. It was only the third record of one in Walla Walla County and a county life bird for both her and Mike.

While driving home from shopping on November 10, Rodger and I were very surprised to see a red-shouldered hawk sitting on a sign on Highway 12 near the Clinton Street exit. We have seen a few of them in the past but always in Oregon, so we were very excited.

November 12 Tuesday Bennington Lake walk was a bit cold and rainy, but we saw some nice birds including a hairy woodpecker, several varied thrushes, a Cassin’s finch and four common mergansers. Bird activity at the lake has slowed down, but we still walk every Tuesday at 9:00 unless the weather is too bad, so come out and join us sometime.

It was a real joy watching an adult golden eagle soaring low over the fields along Coppei Creek Road during the Turkey Trot Field Trip on November 17. What a majestic bird!

We drove over to the Tri-Cities on November 20. There were several hundred snow geese at McNary NWR Headquarters pond. If you haven’t seen them yet this fall, you don’t want to miss getting over there. There is nothing quite like watching and listening to them as they fly around the refuge.

There have been some great photos on the Blue Mountain Audubon Facebook page of birds seen in the county and surrounding area recently. Have you checked it out lately?

It will be interesting to see what birds are seen on The December 14 Christmas Bird Count. I hope many of you are planning on participating. Remember, you can count from home (if you live inside the circle) Just let MerryLynn Denny know what you see at the end of the day. And let me know what birds you are seeing all during the month of December. My email address is housewren084@gmail.com
**Bird of the Month**

**Northern Pygmy Owl**

*Glaucidium gnoma*

_by Ginger Shoemake_

**Size:** 6.75 inches  
**Description:** Small owl with large head, long tail, yellow eyes, dark brown head and upper parts with white spots, streaked breast and two large black spots on back of head.

Pygmy owls inhabit open to semi-open woodlands of foothills and mountains of western North America. They usually nest in a tree cavity and will often use old woodpecker holes.

The female typically lays 4-6 eggs. During the breeding cycle the female incubates the eggs, broods the young and guards the nest. Unlike other owls, the pygmy owl begins incubation only after the clutch is complete, so that young tend to hatch over a period of 1-2 days, rather than one every 1-2 days. The male feeds everyone—his mate, the young and himself, making food deliveries about every 2 hours. The young fledge at about 30 days, but remain together and are fed and defended by their parents for another 20-30 days.

These little owls are secretive and unsociable, remaining solitary much of the year. Despite their small size, pygmy owls are quite fierce, and will attack prey or drive off intruders several times their own size. They are a “sit-and-wait” predator, moving from perch to perch with short flights when pursuing prey. They are diurnal hunters that swoop down on their prey which consists mostly of small mammals, birds and large insects. During winter, surplus prey may be cached in a cavity, helping them meet their metabolic needs during very cold winter periods.

Several people have seen pygmy owls this fall, mostly in dense shrubbery along roadsides in the drainages east of town. Trying to locate one of these little owls can be challenging, but finding one is well worth the effort.

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**Blue Mountain Audubon Society**  
**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.

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**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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**Photo by Jim Parrish**