Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Membership Meeting
What Are You Reading?

Thursday, March 19, 2019–7 p.m.

NEW VENUE! Baker Center, 364 Boyer Avenue (corner of Boyer & Otis Streets) Parking is available in the Baker Center driveway or on the street.

Curious about what others are reading?
We are, too!

Our March meeting will be Blue Mountain Audubon’s version of a book club with a twist. Come prepared to tell us about a book you’ve read and why you liked it, or what you learned. Books about birds, nature, conservation, climate change, eco-tourism, etc. are what we’re most interested in hearing about. Participants will be asked to fill out a form with the title, author’s name and a brief description; this information will be compiled and distributed via email. If you don’t have a book to share, come anyway... you may find a great book to read!

Dessert, coffee and tea will be provided.

If you’ve cleaned off your bookshelf recently and want to share books with others, bring them along for short-term loan or to give-away. Remember, BMAS sponsors a free lending library at Pioneer Park and if you have books to donate, please bring them and they will be delivered.
Monthly Calendar

Board Meeting
March 12 at 7:00 P.M.

Membership Meeting
March 19 at 7:00 P.M.

Board of Directors
President: Chris Howard
Vice President: Jeff Fredson
Secretary: Linda Hanson
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: Sue Parrish
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

President’s Corner
By Chris Howard

If anyone has any doubts about the beauty of the Blue Mountains and the Walla Walla valley those doubts were erased with marvelous photos of Bill Rogers presented at the February membership meeting. 60 people were present to view the majestic mountains and hidden away valleys in all different seasons. We also witnessed the magic of the Goblin valley in Utah, the Painted Hills to the west of us and many landscapes in between. These photos reminded me once again of what a beautiful planet we live on and how important it is to take every opportunity to protect and conserve our environment. Conservation is one of the main goals of Blue Mountain Audubon and we will continue to strive to protect our environment for the benefit of our children and grandchildren. If you are not a local member of Blue Mountain Audubon please consider joining to support our programs and conservation efforts.

River Restoration Northwest Film Festival
Stories of Our Watersheds
March 5, 7:00 p.m.
GESA Powerhouse Theatre
Tickets in advance: $10, Tickets at the door: $12

For the second year, Kooskooskie Commons and the Snake River Salmon Recovery Board are presenting films on River Restoration at the Powerhouse Theater. The doors open at 6:30 pm where organizations working on river restoration in the Walla Walla Basin will have tables and posters to exhibit their work. Films begin at 7 pm.
One Less Bird on Your Lifetime List?

Pair of crow species becoming one again

The Northwestern crow and the American crow became two separate species as a glacier divided them into two groups hundreds of thousands of years ago, but now the two species are breeding and evolving into a single species again, a study in Molecular Ecology suggests. “It means that speciation isn’t a one-way process,” says study author Dave Slager.

Full Story: Gizmodo (2/11)

Wild & Scenic Film Festival

Sponsored by the Blue Mountain Land Trust

Friday, April 3, 2020

6:00 pm–10:00 pm

Maxey Hall, Whitman College

116 Stanton Street, Walla Walla

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival inspires environmental activism and a love for nature through film. Started by the South Yuba River Citizen’s League (Syrcl) in 2003, Wild & Scenic shares an urgent call to action, encouraging festival-goers to learn more about what they can do to protect and steward our planet. Debuting in over 200 communities across the world, Wild & Scenic continues to build a network of grassroots organizations connected by a common goal of using film to inspire activism. This is the 5th year that the Blue Mountain Land Trust has hosted this event.

Field Trip

Othello Sandhill Cranes

Sunday, March 29, 7:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Harper Joy Theatre Parking Lot

On Sunday, March 29th join Jim and Sue Parrish for a trip to Othello to see the Sandhill cranes. There are often flocks of dozens of these beautiful birds, soaring and landing while giving their rusty hinge rattle. When a group is found that has landed they are often dancing, wings spread as they hop up and down. And of course there will be wetland birds; Stilts, Avocets, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and swallows galore.

This will be an all day trip, so meet at the Whitman parking lot at 7:30 and we’ll caravan. Bring a lunch, wear appropriate clothing and comfortable walking shoes. We will plan on returning to WW by four. So mark your calendars for a day full of amazing sights of spring.

Audubon Highway Pickup

For a number of years Blue Mountain Audubon has sponsored highway clean-up of a mile long section of Highway 12 west of town. This year’s spring pick up will be on Saturday, March 21. Join with other volunteers at 9:00 am at Spaulding Road turnoff on Highway 11. With a good volunteer turnout it only takes an hour or so.
The Bounty of Mud
By Kathy McConnell

Floods have a plethora of down sides and tragedies, but one positive outcome from a child’s perspective might be the potential for finding evidence of animals or birds by the tracks they have left in the mud.

Much of Mill Creek Canyon is now a rock strewn and muddy landscape. The first day that I walked my neighborhood to access damage, I came across these great blue heron tracks between a house and a jumbled pile of debris. They told me of bird struggling to find food in the nearby murky and fast river. Later in Oregon I found both deer and raccoon tracks in close proximity. My regret was that I wished I had a child with me to share in the discovery. Tracks fascinate children.

Today I stopped by the Audubon/Whitman Science Outreach Free Little Library Box in Pioneer Park and loaded it with preschool science books. One of them was about animal tracks. I am going to bet it will be gone soon, but just in case it is still there, you might want to rush over and grab it for that child in your life. Do remember to take a book to exchange... hopefully another science book.

Natural Area
By Tom Land

Chris and Tom were finally able to coordinate their schedules, and the two new signs are now up on the chain link fence at the Natural Area. They are visually striking and thanks to all who contributed to their design – especially Nancy Mitchell who came up with the original concept. One is located at the north entrance to Fort Walla Walla and the other is at the northwest corner of the Natural Area facing Home Depot.

The trails are looking great this winter and open for all to enjoy. The Walla Walla Valley Academy contacted us recently and will send a group of students and staff March 16th and 17th to help spread chips on the trails. The City crew has graciously been providing us with several chip piles.

Ted Bergstrom is working on a new set of signs to mark each trail, and we hope to have those installed this spring.
Musings
Learning to Live with Mother Nature

By Chris Howard

Since my last Musings, Walla Walla has had another hard lesson on the costs of building in a flood plain. This year's flood was the result of 8 inches of two days of rain, much of it landing on mid-elevation snow pack. The mountain drainages such as Mill Creek and Walla Walla River raged in response. Many houses in the Mill Creek flood plain, some of which were ravaged in the flood of 1996, were again devastated by the rushing waters. Having witnessed the effects of both of these floods, it looked to me like when the river is angry it pretty much goes where it wants to. The town of Walla Walla was barely saved by the Corps of Engineer’s flood channel. As in the 1996 flood, the waters were right up to rim of the flood channel hitting the bottom of the bridges in town with huge waves created by the weirs in the channel. The big question, which the Corps also pondered, is what would have happened if the rain had not stopped when it did? Bennington Lake, where water was being diverted, was up to 80% full and the channel through town was filled to the brim. We all experienced a similar event last year in which the lake was filled to 70%. Is it possible that with climate change these extreme weather events such as flooding, drought and fires could become the new norm? I think we are going to have to figure out how live in cooperation with Mother Nature rather than in opposition. Throughout world history, cities that have been built in flood plains have eventually paid the price. I think we all need to get involved in planning for the future health and wellbeing of our valley sooner rather than later.

Are there any benefits from flooding? Floods carry nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus which can benefit agriculture when the flood waters recede from flooded fields. Cottonwood trees depend on high water from streams and rivers allowed to meander to germinate the snow like seeds dispersed on river banks and mud bars. The flood water that was diverted into Bennington Lake covered the parking lot and rest rooms and rose higher and higher up the cliff face that forms the west side of the parking lot. Many local birdwatchers were concerned that rising water would flood the hole high up on the cliff where a pair of Great Horned Owls typically nest. When the waters finally receded and the parking lot became accessible, the female owl was spotted nesting in her familiar hole. Last night at dusk I went to the parking lot and watched as sky became darkened. I couldn’t see the female in the hole but heard a deep hooting from the conifers above the cliff. Suddenly the dark form of the male soared across the parking lot and landed in a neighboring Cottonwood tree to take up his position as the evening guardian.

Will we ever learn to live above the flood waters?

Bennington Lake— The path along canal with flood mud and deer tracks. Photo by Chris Howard
In the Field
By Ginger Shoemake
Photos by Paul Treman

On February 11, ten of us went out to Bennington Lake to look at the flood waters and search for birds. We went in from Rooks Park and walked the east side of the area. There was water up past the middle trail in many places and we found it hard to recognize many landmarks because they were under water. The restroom on the west side was just beginning to reappear after being totally covered when the lake was at 80% full. The happiest birds were the waterfowl! We saw mallards, ring-necked ducks, northern pintails, hooded mergansers, canada geese, wigeons, and a common goldeneye. There were several ravens and red-tailed hawks plus a bald eagle chasing ducks above the dam at Rooks Park. Robins were abundant and we saw several Townsend’s solitaires. One of the group spotted a beaver swimming along the shore below the bench that overlooks the lake. The best sighting of the morning was a northern shrike. The Bewick’s wrens were singing and Paul Treman took this great photo. It will be quite some time before we will be walking the lower trail at the lake, but it’s comforting to know that the reservoir did what it was supposed to during a flood.

The first great grey owl of the spring was spotted and photographed by R.J. Baltierra on February 12 in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. He shared a nice photo on Blue Mountain Facebook page – check it out!

Five Tuesday Bennington Lake walkers were not able to gain access to the trails on February 18, so instead we decided to see what we could find in Rooks Park. Our first sighting was our best for the day – a pair of pileated woodpeckers. We watched them for some
time as they worked the trees near the parking lot, and both Judy and Paul Treman took many photos (you can see their photos of our outing on Facebook). Other nice birds seen were a golden-crowned kinglet, a flock of lesser goldfinches and a male belted kingfisher.

Rodger and I were finally able to drive our Walla Walla Northwest raptor route on February 19. The Touchet North road was finally open (with one small section one-way only). The only road still closed was Luckenbill Road because of bridge work. Numbers of raptors was about the same as it has been – total being 79. This is still about 40 fewer raptors than seen the previous year. A great horned owl has taken over a red-tailed hawk nest at the intersection of Sudbury and Luckenbill roads. The red-tails are still in the area and will probably build a new nest nearby. As you probably know, great horned owls don’t build their own nests and frequently use old hawk nests.

After 40 years, Del Henry reported the great blue herons appear to be building a rookery near his place on Tum-a-Lum.

Linda Hanson, Judy Treman and I led a field trip along Mill Creek on February 22. It was fun having two young families along and encouraging to see such eager young birders. Our first stop was behind the old Kmart. The area has flattened out considerably since the flood, and the birds were taking advantage of all the water. Judy spotted a white-fronted goose in with all the Canada geese and mallards. There were also several common mergansers and hooded mergansers and a common goldeneye. As we started our walk along the creek at the Project Office, a pileated woodpecker flew over us heading west. It returned shortly and we were able to watch it as it made its way up the creek stopping to check out snags along the way. We were able to get great looks at a pair of common mergansers on the creek. Rooks Park was full of dark-eyed juncos and we spotted several ruby-crowned kinglets and black-capped chickadees.

There have been several sandhill crane sightings in the Tri-Cities area so keep your eyes and ears peeled – spring is coming and the spring birds are about to return! Listed below are some of the birds to look and listen for in March.

Email me and let me know what you are seeing. housewren084@gmail.com

**Birds to See in March**

| Say’s phoebe | Sandhill crane |
| Caspian tern | Long-billed curlew |
| Violet-green swallow | Tree swallow |
| Cliff swallow | Mountain bluebird |
| Western bluebird | Red-naped sapsucker |
| American avocet | Black-necked stilt |
| Hermit thrush | Loggerhead shrike |
| White-throated swift | Turkey vulture |
| Vesper sparrow | Fox sparrow |
| Northern rough-winged swallow | |
Bird of the Month

Tree Swallow
*Tachycineta bicolor*
*By Ginger Shoemake*

**Size:** 5.75 inches

**Description:** Male is bicolored with an iridescent blue back and head (including the eye) and pure white underside. Female has a dull brown back and head.

Tree swallows are migratory. They winter in Mexico and Central America and return to the Walla Walla valley in March. They can be found near water and are often seen in small flocks. They nest in natural or artificial cavities and readily use nest boxes.

A tree swallow nest consists of multiple layers of grasses and thin twigs, and is lined with large feathers from other species. The female lays 4-7 eggs and incubates them by herself. The eggs hatch in about 14 days. The hatchlings typically fledge in 16-24 days. While there are young or eggs in the nest, adults frequently dive bomb intruders and attempt to drive them from the area. They typically only have one brood, although they may attempt a second nest if the first fails early in the season. Juvenile tree swallows are a rather non-descript brown and can be confused with northern rough-winged swallows and bank swallows.

Their diet consists of insects, sometimes supplemented with small quantities of fruit. They are excellent fliers and take off from their perch and acrobatically catch insects in their bills in mid-air.

Look for tree swallows over Bennington Lake and along Mill Creek, the Walla Walla River and at the Millet Pond off Northshore Road. Another great place to find them is around the boxes that were installed for bluebirds along Jasper Mountain and Lewis Peak roads. It’s time to start looking for these beautiful birds!

Photo by Rodger Shoemake

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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:____________________________________________