BMAS Meeting
October 21 at 7:00 p.m., Olin Hall, Room 129

Bird Migration through Walla Walla County

Presented by Mike Denny

Cornell University states that “each autumn, an average of 4 billions birds move south from Canada into the U.S. At the same time, another 4.7 billion birds leave the U.S. over the southern border, heading for the tropics.”

Scott Weidensaul, author of “Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds”, states, “Bird migration is the world’s only true unifying natural phenomenon, stitching the continents together in a way that even the great weather systems fail to do.”

But closer to home, what is happening in our own backyard? In this presentation, Mike Denny will share what is happening in Walla Walla County as birds take part in this annual phenomenon.

NOTE: COVID Policy

At this time, we plan to meet in Olin Hall, Room 129 on the Whitman College campus; the meeting is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. If the college’s policy changes prior to September 16th and we are unable to use the classroom, we will meet via Zoom. Please watch the BMAS website, Facebook page and your email inbox for updates.

Entry to Olin Hall is via the main entrance facing Ankeny Field and all guests will be required to show proof of full vaccination (either a Covid-19 vaccination certificate or a photo of it); no exceptions. A door monitor will be at the door from 6:45-7:15 p.m. After 7:15 p.m., the doors will be locked.

We realize these policies may exclude individuals from attending but in order for us to use campus facilities we must adhere to these policies. Thank you for understanding.
President’s Corner
By Chris Howard

Autumn has arrived. There are rain clouds on the horizon which is exactly what we need to deal with the still lingering fires in the mountains. Blue Mountain Audubon is continuing to offer a monthly program taking place at on the third Thursday each month at Whitman college. We were delighted this past month to have a very interesting and informative presentation by Mark Vekasy, wildlife biologist for WDFW. The trails of the Fort Walla Walla Natural Area are clear and open for those wanting to walk in nature without traveling a long distance. Keep your eyes open for the resident deer and foxes. The Bennington Bird Walk is taking place every Tuesday at 8:00am. This is a great opportunity to join with others in spotting fall migrants or hidden Great Horn Owls. Blue Mountain Audubon is an all volunteer organization and we are always looking for others who would like to join in fulfilling our mission of conservation and providing opportunities to experience our natural surroundings. See our website: www.blumtn.org to find listings of our events and activities.
October brings fall colors, a full moon, and skies full of flying waterfowl. If this sounds like fun, join Sue Parrish and Chris Howard for a full moon walk at Bennington Lake on October 19th. We will watch the moon rise over the Blues, enjoy the colors of sunset, and of course keep our eyes and ears open for birds. Often hundreds of geese and ducks fly into the lake after sunset, calling to each other as they land. Great Blue Heron, Killdeer and other shorebirds can be found along the lake’s edges. Great Horned Owls are often seen perched in the trees, as well as heard hooting across the lake. Perhaps a beaver or two will be seen swimming across the lake, bringing a branch to stash in their winter storehouse. Meet in the parking lot at 6:00 and bring a flashlight, sturdy shoes, and a sense of adventure.

If Great Horned Owls are your thing, check out Mountain View Cemetery. About 45 minutes before sunset, park on Howard Street or at Prospect Point School and walk into the cemetery. Listen for two things; their characteristic two or three deep hoots, as well as the raspy screech of a young Great Horned. Follow the hoots or screech and you should be able to locate the owl(s) which are often sitting on tombstones. We usually find two or three in the middle area of the cemetery, close to Linden and Meridian Streets. Finding owls in a cemetery, and especially on tombstones, makes for a quick evening birding adventure with a bit of spooky flair. And please keep in mind that the cemetery closes at “dusk” so please leave before it gets dark.

Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Two October Birding Adventures

By Sue Parrish

#1: October 19, 6:00 pm
Bennington Lake Moon Walk

#2: Mt. View Cemetery
Owl Prowl (anytime and on your own)
The first day was not bad as we only traveled about 7 miles up hill all day to camp next to Ridge Lake, an attractive small sparkling clear alpine lake. The next morning we began what would be our routine all week long which was wake up about 6am, roll up the sleeping bag and pad, fold up the tent, cram it all into the pack, have a couple of packets of oatmeal and a protein bar and head out on the trail. Day 2 was supposed to have some of the most spectacular alpine views but all we could see was fog and the trail leading steeply uphill in the clouds. When I think of hiking in the mountains I imagine walking along nice forested dirt trails with pine needles scattered under foot of big old growth trees. Yes, there were some of those picturesque soft trails along the way but there were way more jumbled rock/scree passages just waiting to sprain your ankle if you didn’t pay close attention to every step. Thank goodness for my trekking poles! Late in the day the fog cleared and there were, indeed, beautiful alpine views. Not only were there beautiful views but there were also huckleberries lining the trail the whole way. Whenever I got tired slogging uphill, I would stop for a few huckleberries…then continue on “one step at a time.” I was surprised at the lack of purple bear scat on the trail. Plenty of Marmots and Pikas but few birds or big fauna.

Throughout the trip we often camped next to streams or lakes to be able to access our prerequisite water needs. We only had rain on and off on one day which proved the axiom “if you want the rain to stop, put on your raincoat.” Unfortunately, it was raining in the late afternoon when we had to put the tents up which is always a hassle. Fortunately my sleeping bag remained dry. Due to a forecast of serious rain on our last night we upped our miles per day to 10 to 14 miles a day and completed the trip in 6 days instead of 7. Of course this is nothing compared to the “through hikers” who had been on the trail since April and were covering 20-25 miles a day.

Musings

Into the Wild

By Chris Howard

It seemed like a good idea at the time when my brother-in-law, Jon, suggested that we hike the 71.4 miles from Snoqualmie Pass to Stevens Pass through the Alpine Lakes Wilderness area. I didn’t really take notice of the fact that this would mean climbing 19,130 feet and losing 18,100 feet which I was soon to find out that this meant a seemingly unending array of switchbacks winding over and back down the ridges of this rugged wilderness terrain. It wasn’t the constant ups and downs of the trail or even the distance involved that presented the biggest challenge, it was my love/hate relationship with my pack which was crammed full of 7 days’ worth of food, sleeping bag, tent and clothes for temperatures down in the 30’s. All this gear resulted in a 40lb. pack which didn’t feel too bad when I was walking around Walla Walla getting used to it but became very wearing after climbing up and down with it all day long - day after day. The good news was that every day I munched down a little bit of the weight in terms of dehydrated meals and protein bars.
In the Field

By Ginger Shoemake

The shorebird migration continued the end of August and into September and there were some rare bird sightings included. Several people reported stilt sandpipers at McNary NWR and the Walla Walla River Delta the last week of August and Mike and MerryLynn found a red knot on the Delta on August 27.

On September 2 a Nashville warbler visited our yard, going from flower pots to shrubs looking for insects. It must have been successful, because it stayed around most of the day and Rodger was able to get some nice photos. In the afternoon a warbling vireo made a quick stop in the hawthorn tree.

Also on September 2, I made a quick trip up to Bennington Lake to see if there were any birds along the canal. In the brief time I was there, I saw seven black-necked stilts, a great egret and an American white pelican on the spit. Walking along the trail for a few minutes, I saw or heard black-capped chickadees, lesser goldfinches, robins, a downy woodpecker, Bewick’s wrens, gray catbirds and a belted kingfisher. Leaving the parking lot, I saw the osprey perched on the power pole. Not bad for a quick trip!

Linda Hanson had the first Anna’s hummingbird of the fall visit her yard the first week of September. Several others reported having them in their yards about the same time as well. Watch for them, and consider keeping a heated feeder out for them as winter approaches.

MerryLynn heard chickadees and wrens scolding something at Bennington Lake on September 4. After crawling in the brush, she finally located the culprit – a northern saw-whet owl. There is a nice photo of the owl on the Blue Mountain Facebook page.

As of September 5, white-crowned sparrows were reported around the county, especially at the Millet ponds and Bennington Lake. It’s always nice to see the winter birds return.

Two Wilson’s warblers, two Anna’s hummingbirds, a black-chinned hummingbird, 8 California quail and three black-capped chickadees joined the regular finches and sparrows in our yard on September 9.

Kathy Howard found a barn owl on her walk through the Natural Area on September 12. The old barn is gone, but it’s nice to know the barn owls are still around.

I got a text from Linda Hanson on September 12 saying there was a Lewis’s woodpecker on Mill Creek near the project office. I drove out and watched it flycatching for over a half hour along the north side of the creek. It seemed to have a circuit it was following so I sat on a bench and enjoyed. The next day Linda, Judy Treman and I walked the creek and Rooks Park. The woodpecker was still there, but this time it was staying in one tree, preening and flashing its beautiful pink breast. We also saw a pileated woodpecker at Rooks Park.

On September 14, the Tuesday walkers at Bennington Lake found some very nice birds including a white-faced ibis. Other good sightings were a red-naped sapsucker, a turkey vulture, Cassin’s vireos, a Brewer’s sparrow and a Lincoln’s sparrow.

Gwen Elliott sent me this photo of a common night-hawk on September 19. It appeared on her fence in the morning and spent the day there. Now that’s a nice yard visitor.

Continued on p. 6
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 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: ___________________________