December Field Trips

Throughout December, keep your eyes peeled for winter highlights: thousands of snow geese at McNary, possible redpolls along rural roads, and blue jays in the urban forest of Walla Walla. There are also many reports of Anna’s Hummingbirds; the numbers overwintering in our valley seems to be increasing annually. The Great Horned Owls will be hooting at each other and forming mating pairs at Bennington Lake. The search will be on to find out where they choose to nest.

2021 Christmas Bird Count

This year’s Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will take place on December 18th. The CBC will serve as our membership meeting for the month of December. Due to Covid concerns the CBC will be somewhat limited this year. Those wishing to be included in the count should contact MerryLynn at: mdenny@charter.net. Those who are not in the counting groups are asked to tally the birds in their backyards and report the birds seen and where they were seen to MerryLynn. Counting teams will meet at Whitman at 7:30am to receive their clipboards and bird lists. All counters will rendezvous there at 4:00pm to hand in lists, and MerryLynn will tabulate the grand totals. Due to Covid concerns no potluck gathering will be held but a Zoom meeting will take place at 5:30pm. The Zoom link is posted below for all those interested to attend the meeting. Highlights of the day and totals will be shared.

Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83763683197?pwd=SVBMZDVYVG53NFZWUmdSeXZKdFVyZz09
Meeting ID: 837 6368 3197
Passcode: 598970

Your December Bird Sightings
Report your December bird sightings to Ginger Shoemake: BlumtnAudubon@gmail.com

Your Bird Photos
Don’t forget to send your photos to Judy Treman for the Blue Mountain Facebook page.
The Magpiper has a new article of interest for readers. Sue Weiler will provide us with educational and entertaining articles gleaned from scientific research on the internet.

Sue Weiler is a research associate at Whitman who sent this for her bio: “I am over-educated with a PhD in oceanography; my work focused on microscopic life in the central oceans where even the albatross were rare. I can reliably identify under 10 birds at best and none to species but have high hopes for the future with BMAS. I’ve only become interested in birds in retirement, where bird patterns are intersecting with my long-standing interest in climate change. I am interested in web surfing and better at that than bird sighting, I’m hoping that some will enjoy these flights of fancy from the Internet, and forgive my total uselessness as a reliable source for bird identification…..”

The first article of interest is:
“Muppet-faced Frogmouth is the ‘most instagrammable bird’ on Earth” by Brandon Spector
https://www.planetark.org/newsroom/news/study-finds-tawny-frogmouth-is-the-most-instagrammable-bird

Researchers scoured more than 27,000 bird photos on Instagram, so you don’t have to...

**Bird Sites**

The end of the year is traditionally a time to make donations and offer support to those organizations we find worthy. Blue Mountain Community Foundation offers a way to support non-profit organizations, such as Blue Mountain Audubon through their Valley Giving Guide: www.valleygivingguide.org By going to this website you will find Blue Mountain Audubon Society and can make a donation to support our community activities. Donations made through the Valley Giving Guide are matched through Valley Giving Guide sponsors. Thank you for your generosity. Have a happy holiday and join us for next year’s activities.
November Turkey Trot

On November 14th, Tom Scribner led his annual Turkey trot throughout the foothills and drainages of the Blue Mts. It was an incredibly warm fall day, 69 degrees! Fall colors put on a show, as did the turkeys; 127 gobblers were found. The 21 species found included these exciting finds: a Rough Legged Hawk soaring in the wind, two Northern Shrikes and a Dipper in the Touchet river.

Tom added a new element of fun this year. Three envelopes were “hidden” along our route, and when found could be redeemed for a gift certificate to John’s Wheatland Bakery. How fun to have an addition of a treasure hunt while birding! And thanks to Rebecca and Evan Heisman for bringing along their enthusiastic three year old birder, Theo. His delight in everything from using his own binoculars to stomping mud puddles made the trip extra fun.

Education Outreach

By Sue Parrish

Turkey facts and trivia circulated through the students at Edison and Garrison Middle school in November. At Edison, Kay Barga created a turkey billboard display full of facts and drawings, as well as many copies of a fun pamphlet with trivia, photos and even jokes. Both were made available to all the students. Sue Parrish compiled lots of turkey facts and photos and challenged the kids at Garrison to create something fun. The result was a digital turkey document that contained links to facts, a national Audubon page on turkeys, and an interactive quiz, all of which were shared online with students and staff. So hopefully there were some interesting Turkey discussions around the table as Thanksgiving dinners were gobbled down.

December plans include introducing the kids to bird counts, common backyard birds and then challenging them to take an hour and count what they find in their yard or neighborhood.

Bird Safety Video

I recommend this brief video that was presented at an on-line bird safety workshop I attended.
—Bruce Barga
Bird Safety Advocate

https://youtu.be/Lri0jzhBZqo

“Very powerful and poignant video. I hope everyone will view it to awaken the reality of this tragic problem that could be prevented.”—Chris Howard

“Around here it is often needless gunshot wounds. And learning of the toxins in their bloodstreams that weakens and kills so many.”—Kathy Howard

December 2021
Musings
Making Friends with the Weather
By Chris Howard

There is an old adage among “outdoors people” that I also subscribe to. It states: “There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad gear.” Now I admit that is a bit of an exaggeration and that I would not choose to be out in a hurricane or tornado but in general it is true. A few days ago, it was 38 degrees and raining out and I thought "what a great time to test my rain gear!" I arrived at the Bennington Lake parking lot and was not surprised to find not a single car there. I zipped up my fleece layer, added my binoculars, pulled on my rain pants then covered it all with my rain coat. Ready to go! I plunged down the trail through the woods toward the canal and quickly spotted a Ruby Crowned Kinglet flitting in the leafless tree limbs...a good sign. I crossed the canal that had no water in it as the lake is being drained as part of its winter emergency flood reservoir duty.

The rain showed no sign of letting up but I felt warm and dry beneath my many layers of insulation. I slowly crept through the Cottonwood grove on the other side of the canal, hoping to gain some insight into where Great Horned Owls hide to get out of the rain.

I scared up a couple of White-Tailed Deer with their white banners waving behind them but didn’t find a single owl. Continuing around the lake I spotted a couple of Northern Flickers but otherwise all the birds seemed to be hunkered down. I quietly entered the next Cottonwood grove in which I have often seen owls. Slowly creeping forward, constantly stopping and searching my wooded surroundings, I stopped about half way into the grove when I made out the form of a Great Horned Owl nestled under some Ponderosa Pine branches at the back of the grove. That looked like about as dry a roost as the owl could find. I was happy to spot it without flushing it which is always my goal. I backed out of the grove and continued on the trail around the lake. Having found the one owl under pine cover I decided to check another row of pines on the east side of the lake. Sure enough, I spotted another owl snuggled beneath the branches about a third of the way up the pine tree. Again, I was able to depart without flushing it.

It was still raining as I turned my attention to the lake. Slowly moving to the edge of the cliff over looking the lake I saw what must have been around 250 Mallards with a few Common and Hooded Mergansers, Green Winged Teals and lots of Coots. Looking closer into the paddling groups of ducks, I spotted a Western Grebe and a Pied Billed Grebe which I haven’t seen in a while. I watched the Pied-billed Grebe perform its signature submarine dive in which it sinks straight down into the water without diving head first as all the other grebes do.

Not a bad list for a rainy-day bird walk and my rain gear worked well too!

Photo by Chris Howard

Photo by Chris Howard

Pied Billed Grebe
In the Field

By Ginger Shoemake

Bob and Linda Hanson had a great day of birding on October 28. Their first stop was Nine Mile Canyon where they found Lapland longspurs, American pipits and Savannah sparrows. Later that day they went down to the McNary Dam area where they located a rare emperor goose that had been spotted there the previous day. While looking for the goose they saw a surf scoter and an eared grebe.

Mike and MerryLynn found a Harris’s sparrow at Ayers Boat Basin on October 30. Look for them this fall and winter with other sparrows on the ground under your feeders.

Not “seven swans a swimming” but “eight tundra swans a swimming” were seen by the Bennington Lake Tuesday walkers on November 2.

On November 3, MerryLynn reported thousands of waterfowl on the Columbia River at the Port of Wallula. In amongst all those birds, she was able to find a red-throated loon. This was only the third record of the species in Walla Walla County. She also saw a Pacific loon and 10 common loons.

Rodger and I saw 62 raptors on our first raptor survey of the season on November 5 including four rough-legged hawks. However, the biggest surprise was coming across a herd of over 60 elk on Dodd Road.

Chris Howard had some nice birds in his backyard on November 6. Robins, juncos, a flicker, a Anna’s hummingbird, a ruby-crowned kinglet and a song sparrow were there in spite on the steady rain. Later in the day he saw six hooded mergansers on Mill Creek.

Kathy Howard saw a northern shrike on Mill Creek on November 9.

Several people have reported Anna’s hummingbirds in their yards this fall, but on November 13, Jim and Sue Parrish had four in their yard at one time.

On November 13, Mike and MerryLynn saw lots of birds at Fishhook Park including 13 common redpolls and 24 yellow-rumped warblers.

On November 14 while on another of our raptor routes, Rodger and I found a northern pygmy owl on Blue Creek Road. It had been three years since we last saw one, although not for the lack of trying!

Chris Howard braved the rain on November 19 to see what was happening at Bennington Lake. Most of the action was on the water where he saw mallards, green winged teal, common and hooded mergansers, coots, a ringed necked duck, a western grebe and a pied billed grebe.

Bob and Mary Betz saw a pair of Eurasian wigeons at Hood Park on November 20. There has been one there the past few years in the winter, so it’s nice to know it’s back – and this time with a mate.

On November 23, Bonnie Roemer relocated the red-breasted merganser on Mill Creek. She had seen it earlier in the month and there is a nice photo of it on the Blue Mountain Facebook page.

Don’t forget to send your photos to Judy for the Blue Mountain Facebook page. It’s fun to see what people are seeing. Earl Blackaby’s video of the hooded mergansers on Mill Creek, and Paul Treman’s stunning photo of the American kestrel near Rooks are just two of the wonderful posts you won’t want to miss.
What to Do If You Find an Injured Bird
By Bruce Barga

Birds that have hit windows often have internal injuries that are not obvious from the outside, even if they just look stunned. Recovery from injury is most likely if the injured bird is taken to a wildlife rehabilitation facility. In our region, Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton is the closest rehabilitation facility.

Follow the following steps for an injured small adult bird (crow-sized or smaller):

1. Assign someone to watch over the bird while you go find a container for it. Window collision victims are very susceptible to predators and pedestrian traffic.

2. Find an unwaxed paper bag or a small cardboard box to contain the bird. Poke a few air holes in the cardboard if you are using a box. Waxed paper bags such as from fast food restaurants are not suitable. Scrunch up a clean, unscented tissue or paper towel inside the container to provide something soft for the bird to grasp.

3. To capture the bird, approach it from behind, using both hands to gently cover the bird. Expect the bird to vocalize or flutter once it is caught. Stay calm, and do not squeeze tightly. It should feel like you are gently holding onto a cotton ball.

4. Place the bird upright in the paper bag or box, taking care not to let it escape as you remove your hands. Securely close the bag or box.

5. Place the bird in a dark, warm, quiet space, away from children or pets. Do not give food or water. Avoid talking to or handling the bird, as this will cause additional stress.

6. Contact Animal Clinic East (509) 522-0763 for evaluation of the injured bird if it was found during the work week. They will communicate with Blue Mountain Wildlife about treatment options. On weekends, contact Blue Mountain Wildlife (541) 278-0215 directly for instructions. For assistance in capturing or transporting birds, call (509) 240-7927 for a volunteer from the Bird Rescue Network.

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:____________________________________________