Blue Mountain Audubon Society

January Membership Meeting

A Visual Tune Up — Looking at Birds

George Jameson will be our speaker on January 20th at 7 p.m. in Olin Hall, Room 129 on the Whitman College campus.

The presentation will show a large sample of various bird images with associated discussion regarding field identification and different attributes of some of the bird species. We will chat about where you can see some of the birds, (many of them will be familiar to you), tune your eyes up for the coming spring, and have fun, mostly have fun. This will largely focus on the Western United States, no exotic travel to far off places in this presentation. Come join us for a visual discussion about birds, all about birds.

We departed Walla Walla in October of 2019 and headed south. We traveled around Arizona quite a bit and then Covid-19 arrived. We decided at that point to buy a small home in a retirement community just outside of Sierra Vista Arizona which is about 15 miles north of the border with Mexico. We stayed there until deciding to return to Walla Walla in the fall of 2021. There is nothing wrong with Sierra Vista, it is about 4,600 feet in elevation, the summers are about 15-20 degrees cooler than Phoenix and there are lots of birds in the area. We decided to return to Walla Walla because this feels more like home. We will do some local traveling in the future but plan to stay in Walla Walla forever.

NOTE: COVID Policy

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.
**Monthly Calendar**

**Board Meeting**
January 13, 7:00 p.m.

**Membership Meeting**
January 20, 7:00 p.m.

**Board of Directors**
President: Chris Howard
Vice President: Tim Parker
Secretary: Kay Barga
Treasurer: Jonathan Webster
Conservation: Mike Denny
Education: 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
Bird Safety Advocate: Bruce Barga

**Website:**
http://www.blumtn.org

**Bird sightings:**
BlueMtnAudubon@gmail.com

**Contact BMAS:**
Email: BlueMtnAudubon@gmail.com
Mail: PO Box 1106
Walla Walla, WA 99362

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**President’s Corner** *By Chris Howard*

As the year 2021 comes to an end, I can look back and see what a challenge it presented and also find many things to be thankful for. Blue Mountain Audubon has persevered throughout the year continuing to fulfill our mission of providing opportunities for nature activities and conserving the environment. We continue to offer our monthly membership meeting presentation which is open to the public free of charge. Our monthly field trips have been great - this month is the Christmas bird count. We offer an 8:00 am Tuesday morning bird walk at Bennington Lake which is a great opportunity to view local birds and meet with fellow birdwatchers. Blue Mountain Audubon maintains the trails at the Fort Walla Walla Natural Area, which is an urban oasis. We have recently created a bird safety advocacy position aimed at decreasing the injuries and fatalities to birds in our local area. All these activities are provided by volunteers and maintained through donations. All activities and venues are listed on our website: [http://blumtn.org](http://blumtn.org). At the website, check out our informative newsletter, “The Magpiper.”

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**Greater WF Goose** 10  
**Cackling Goose** 44  
**Canada Goose** 1986  
**Trumpeter Swan** cw  
**Wood Duck** 2  
**Gadwall** 12  
**American Wigeon** 83  
**Mallard** 626  
**Northern Pintail** 1  
**Green-winged Teal** 30  
**Ring-necked Duck** 16  
**Bufflehead** cw  
**Common Goldeneye** 1  
**Hooded Merganser** 16  
**Common Merganser** 43  
**Ruddy Duck** 1  
**California Quail** 210  
**Ruffled Grouse** cw  
**Ring-necked Pheasant** 9  
**Wild Turkey** 94  
**Great Blue Heron** 12  
**Golden Eagle** 2  
**Northern Harrier** 8  
**Sharp-shinned Hawk** 6  
**Cooper's Hawk** 5  
**Bald Eagle** 6  
**Red-tailed Hawk** 86  
**American Coot** 3  
**Kildeer** 4  
**Ring-billed Gull** 1  
**Rock Pigeon** 94  
**Eurasian Collared-Dove** 174  
**Mourning Dove** 71  
**Anna's Hummingbird** 7  
**Great Horned Owl** 5  
**Belted Kingfisher** 4  
**Downy Woodpecker** 15  
**Northern Flicker** 156  
**Pileated Woodpecker** cw  
**American Kestrel** 48

**Merlin** 5  
**Northern Shrike** 2  
**Black-billed Magpie** 157  
**American Crow** 49  
**Common Raven** 45  
**Horned Lark** cw  
**Black-capped Chickadee** 133  
**Red-breasted Nuthatch** 3  
**Pacific Wren** 1  
**Bewick's Wren** 13  
**American Dipper** 2  
**Golden-crowned Kinglet** 22  
**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** 17  
**Townsend's Solitaire** 18  
**Hermitt Thrush** 2  
**American Robin** 622  
**Varied Thrush** 2  
**European Starling** 4463  
**Bohemian Waxwing** cw  
**Cedar Waxwing** 52  
**Yellow-rumped Warbler** 5  
**Dark-eyed Junco** 1145  
**White-crowned Sparrow** 88  
**White-throated Sparrow** 4  
**Savannah Sparrow** cw  
**Song Sparrow** 83  
**Spotted Towhee** 4  
**Red-winged Blackbird** 16  
**Brewer's Blackbird** 5  
**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch** 34  
**House Finch** 194  
**Cassin's Finch** cw  
**Pine Siskin** 11  
**Lesser Goldfinch** 117  
**American Goldfinch** 74  
**House Sparrow** 212

**SPECIES** 76

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**Walla Walla CBC December 18, 2021**

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Wood Duck 2  
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American Coot 3  
Kildeer 4  
Ring-billed Gull 1  
Rock Pigeon 94  
Eurasian Collared-Dove 174  
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**SPECIES** 76
Blue Mountain Audubon Society
January “Field Trip”
Backyard Bird Count
By Sue Parrish

With both COVID and lots of snow flying around, it’s time for a “backyard” bird count. Feed the birds, peek out your windows, and take a walk in the neighborhood. Last year nine Audubon members took part in this little challenge, and 33 species were discovered. Some good finds included a Says Phoebe by Lynn Seeley, two Blue Jays by Linda Hansen and Annas’ Hummers by Chris Howard, Greg Mendel and the Dennys. So sometime between January 9th and 16th, get out there and see what you can find. Email your results to wallawallananana@gmail.com, I’ll tally up the totals and let everyone know via the Audubon website and Facebook. And don’t forget in 2022 to let Ginger know of anything special you find anytime at BlueMtnAudubon@gmail.com. As the song almost goes “The weather outside is frightful, but birding is so delightful.” Here’s to a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Blue Mountain Audubon Society
2021 Christmas Bird Count
By MerryLynn Denny

The Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count occurred on Saturday, December 18th. The count week includes 3 days before and 3 days after the count day. We found the average count numbers with 76 species found—the same as in 2020. Eight of those were count week birds—but not found on count day. The worst misses—Hairy Woodpecker, Steller’s Jay and Rough-legged Hawk. New to the count were Trumpeter Swan and Greater White-fronted Geese. There were very low numbers of birds overall with only 11,462 total birds sighted—about half of last year. House Finches and Goldfinches, White-crowned Sparrows, Juncos—and especially Starlings were reported in much lower numbers than recent years.

Our personal “best” birds of the day were 34 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches up Mormon Grade—at snowline.

Thanks again to all those that helped with the count.
As the sky became darker, Amber and I checked the first Cottonwood grove where there are often owls but didn’t hear or see a single owl. We continued around a string of pine trees that are also good for owls but none were there this evening. We made it up to the bench on the far side of the lake and looked down at numerous flocks of ducks paddling on their watery evening refuge. It was too dark to identify most of the multitude but the white shapes of the Common Mergansers and the loud quacking of the Mallards gave clues to at least a couple of the species present. We continued to slip and slide along the muddy trail, past a few owl-less pine trees until we came to the string of pine trees at the foot of a cliff on the south side of the lake. Looking carefully at the row of pines I caught a glimpse of a dark shape dropping down out of a tree and disappearing in the lower foliage. Then we got a clear look at a second owl swooping in front of the grove and landing in the last tree. While standing in the dusky evening light we heard exactly what we were hoping for. The deep resonant call of the male Great Horned Owl quickly followed by the higher tone of the female giving us some hope of a mating pair that will find a nesting spot somewhere in this area. As the trails dry up a little we will be out searching for where those owls will choose to make their home. Feeling satisfied with our quest we walked through the semi-darkness to find our car in the empty parking lot.

Musings
Winter Walks
By Chris Howard
Great Horned Owl Photos by Chris Howard

It was only a couple of days after the Winter Solstice that my daughter, Amber, and I went for quick late evening walk around Bennington Lake. It was the magic hour of dusk, that time after the sun drops below the horizon but it is not yet dark. We quickly walked across the mud where the lake used to be before it was drained for potential flood relief. This time of dusk is the time when the owls come out of their hidden daytime roosts and watch carefully from their arboral perches for dinner scampering in the underbrush. Late December is also the time when the Great Horned Owls begin searching for a mate. It is the time of year when you can often hear them hooting back and forth in their deep, resonant tones.

After crossing the muddy lake bed, we entered the path that winds through the trees on its way around the lake. Unfortunately, there had been recent snow which left in its melted wake, very muddy and slippery trails. I was wearing some old rubber boots that were great for keeping water out but offered very poor traction. I found myself almost ice skating in some areas to keep from ending up in one of the puddles.
In the Field

By Ginger Shoemake

Melissa Cummins had a chance to get out for a few hours of birding with her friend Diana on December 5. The highlight of the trip was a golden eagle found on Smith Springs Road. It was sitting on a post and they were able to get great looks with her spotting scope. They also watched a Say’s phoebe being harassed by a northern shrike on Nine Mile Canyon Road. The only rough-legged hawk they saw was one sitting on top of a house on Byrnes Road.

The Tuesday walkers found some interesting birds on December 7. There was a snow goose, 8 greater white-fronted geese and 31 cackling geese along with a huge number of canada geese on the lake. They were also able to locate three great horned owls, which have been rather elusive in the past few weeks. On December 13, owl whisperer Chris Howard found 5 great horned owls at Bennington.

Rodger and I saw 46 red-tailed hawks, 39 American kestrels, an adult bald eagle, a merlin, a prairie falcon and an adult golden eagle on our Walla Walla NW raptor route on December 9. The golden eagle was on the ground, being harassed by several crows. We didn’t see what it was protecting, but it wasn’t about to give it up to the crows!

December 17 was an exciting day for two people at Bennington Lake. Linda Hanson watched a large flock of about 150 bohemian waxwings fly into some junipers near her. They only stayed for a few minutes but she was able to get good looks. The same morning Bruce Toews saw two trumpeter swans on the east side of the lake. There was no mistaking their booming honk as they took to flight after a passing jogger scared them off.

The most notable species found on the Christmas Bird Count were 10 white-fronted geese seen by Bonnie and Joe Roemer on Mill Creek and 34 gray-crowned rosy finches seen by Mike and MerryLynn Denny on Mormon Grade.

There was a huge flock of Bohemian waxwings reported the week before Christmas. On December 21, Bruce Toews saw a flock of over 180 on Biscuit Ridge Road, and Mike Denny and friends watched a flock of nearly 200 swirling around a large cottonwood tree on Spring Creek Road. They are definitely moving around. Jim and Sue Parrish looked for them on Biscuit Ridge on December 22 and only found one. Rodger and I looked for them on December 24 on Spring Creek Road, Biscuit Ridge Road and Mill Creek Road and found none. Keep a lookout for this flock—they are undoubtedly still around. With the cold weather, they could very well be in town.

Remember to keep your feeders full, and scatter seed on the ground during the cold weather. Also, hook up your heated hummingbird feeder for those Anna’s hummingbirds that are still here. All the birds will appreciate the extra help.

Happy New Year to everyone. New year, new year lists for those of you who enjoy keeping track of what you see during the year.

BlueMtnAudubon@gmail.com

Winter fun in the Natural Area

Photo by Chris Howard
Bird Sites
By Sue Weiler
Educational and entertaining articles gleaned from scientific research on the internet.

This photo of Golden pheasants is one of 15 photos in an article of past Wildlife photographers of the year awardees, taken from a recent article in The Atlantic—Dancing in the Snow. In the Lishan Nature Reserve in Shanxi province, China, Qiang Guo watched as two male golden pheasants continuously swapped places on this trunk—their movements akin to a silent dance in the snow.

NOTE: This link is viewable by computer only.
https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2021/12/

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:_________________________________________