Blue Mountain Audubon Society–April Membership Meeting
Thursday, April 21, 2022, 7:00 p.m. PT, Olin Hall, Room 129, Whitman College campus
NOTE: COVID vaccination certification required for all attendees.

W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area
Presentation by Kari Dingman

The W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area spans approximately 17,000 acres. The main unit, W.T. Wooten covers 16,445 acres in Columbia and Garfield counties. The wildlife area also includes the smaller McDonald Bridge and Swegle Road access areas in Walla Walla County. The main W.T. Wooten Unit is 25 miles east of Dayton and 14 miles south of Pomeroy. About 17 miles of the Tucannon River are located within the boundaries, and elevations range from 4,100 feet on Hopkins Ridge down to 1,800 feet on the lowest section of the Tucannon River. (Sourced from the Washington State Department of Fisheries and Wildlife website.)

Kari Dingman, Assistant Wildlife Area Manager, will give a presentation on the W.T. Wooten Wildlife Area and share about current projects that are in the works and others that are proposed as well as challenges that arise while managing this wildlife area. Her talk will also include information about recreational opportunities in the area.

Kari Dingman earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife Resources and Fisheries from the University of Idaho. She earned her Master of Biology from Minnesota State University at Mankato. She began her career with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game in southeast Idaho. She joined the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and moved to southeastern Washington in 2008 where she is the Assistant Wildlife Area Manager of the Blue Mountains Wildlife Area.
President’s Corner

By Chris Howard

Isn’t amazing how fast the spring colors suddenly appear in this beautiful Walla Walla valley. My 2-year-old granddaughter was having a great time pointing out all the pink and white trees as I was driving her home from preschool. Blue Mountain Audubon has a volunteer education committee which is educating school children on the wonders of birds and nature. Many of our monthly field trips include families with children who are rapidly becoming quite proficient birders. At Blue Mountain Audubon one of our goals is to make our local natural environment accessible to everyone especially children and families. Maintaining the trails at the Arthur G. Rempel Fort Walla Walla Natural area is one of the ways we achieve that goal. We love to have new comers join us on our monthly field trips and on our Tuesday morning bird walks at Bennington Lake. We also enjoy having new comers attend our monthly membership meeting presentations that take place every third Thursday, September through May. All of these events can be found on our website: [www.blumtn.org](http://www.blumtn.org). While you are there, check-out our online newsletter, The Magpiper. Enjoy the wonders of Spring birding.

Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Education Outreach

By Kay Barga and Sue Parrish

Kay and Sue have been busy building birding excitement with students in the district. Middle school students have been given the challenge to find 15 common birds arriving during spring migration.

Kay will treat kids at Sharpstein with three days of fun egg explorations...anatomy, species, nesting and an egg drop.

Sue visited Shannon Harvey’s class and shared a presentation on owls, and the next week was joined by Chris Howard as they met the class at Bennington Lake for a field trip. They spied on a Great Horned Owl, practiced using binoculars and enjoyed a nature hike.

Both Sue and Kay find it so rewarding to see the enthusiasm kids can have for birds.
Blue Mountain Audubon Society
Field Trips
By Sue Parrish; Photos by Jim Parrish

April Field Trip: Millet Pond Trails
Join us on Sunday, April 24 for a stroll through the flooded fields of the Millet Pond. This large wetland area is located about 30 miles west of Walla Walla, close to the confluence of the Walla Walla and Columbia Rivers. In April it is full of many species of waterfowl, swallows, and possibly shorebirds such as Avocets, Snipe and Ibis. Bald Eagles often nest in the area, and Great Horned Owls can be seen roosting in the trees. The trails are dry and flat, and make for an easy 1-2 hour stroll. We’ll meet at the Whitman campus Harper Joy Parking lot at 8am and head out to see what we can find. We should return around noon.

Directions: Head west on Hwy 12, heading to Pasco. About 1/2 mile after crossing the WW river, turn right onto North Shore Road. Stay left at the Y and continue a mile or so, taking the second gravel road to the right. Continue down the hill to a large parking area.

On Your Own: Nesting Bluebirds
Bluebirds are nesting in the foothills and are a wonder to see. Blue Mt. Audubon has placed many nesting boxes on both Lewis Peak and Jasper Mountain Rd.. As it’s difficult to see them when in a large group, it’s best to just hop in your car and head up with a few people.

Here’s how to get there:
Jasper Mt Rd: Head east on Hwy 12, about 6 miles past Dixie, take a right on McCown Road. Cross the Creek and head straight up the steep hill. Stay right at the top, and continue up the gravel road until you reach the pine trees. This is where the bluebird boxes start and continue for several miles.

Lewis Peak: Head east on Hwy 12, and turn Rt onto Lewis Pk Road, which is at the top of the hill after Dixie. Stay right at the Y and continue several miles up to the open areas. The boxes are along the road on fencing. At both spots, enjoy the Bluebirds as well as the views of our beautiful valley.

American Avocet

Western Bluebird
The Shirley Muse Memorial Scholarship Fund for the Advancement of Science

By Mike Denny

February of 2022 the Board of Directors of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society voted to create the Shirley Muse Memorial Scholarship Fund. This scholarship is specifically for students of Walla Walla Community College working on Associate Degrees at the William A. Grant Water and Environment Center studying science. All students in good standing that are sophomores through seniors are eligible to apply for this scholarship.

The scholarship recipient will be selected by the Faculty of the Water and Environmental Center. This scholarship will be 1000.00 dollars entrusted to the Walla Walla Community College Foundation. Anyone wishing to contribute to this scholarship in honor of Shirley Muse may do so by contacting Matt Banderas at the Walla Walla Community College Foundation at 509-527-4373 or by e-mail matthew.banderas@wwcc.edu

Shirley Muse was a founding member of Blue Mountain Audubon. She also spearheaded the discovery and protection of Walla Walla’s Big Trees on which she authored a booklet. She was a wonderful steward of this earth and frequently shared her passion for the natural world and its protection. She felt that education was the key to understanding why and how nature worked through science. She was a very kind and generous person that was deeply involved in this community. If you wish to recognize and honor Shirley, please feel free to add your funds to this scholarship by contacting the Walla Walla Community College Foundation.

Fledging Birder’s Journal

By Kara Adams, age 9

On March 12, me and a group of other birders drove to West Richland to search for sandhill cranes. Here are some things I observed. Sandhill cranes are large birds that like to feed in large groups along their winter and spring migration route. They have long necks with red feathers around their eyes. Most sandhill cranes eyes are yellow-golden colored. Their legs are dark gray or black. The tips of their wings are black or brown and the rest of their body is gray-ish-white. When they are landing they fan out their wings like a parachute and get their feet ready to catch themselves. They make a loud sound like a croak. Crrrrrrr, crrrrrrr. Huge flocks of 100-800 sometimes gather in large fields to graze. They like to count on each other, or other larger animals in the field to look out for danger. To conclude, seeing sandhill cranes was something I won’t forget for a long time.
April Arrivals

By Ginger Shoemake

Things really start picking up in April as more spring birds return. It’s time to get those hummingbird feeders back out (if you didn’t leave one out for the wintering Anna’s hummingbird) because late April is when they return. Also, start checking out the nests and platforms for osprey. Here’s a list of some species to watch for, and where you might find them.

Blue winged teal – Millet ponds
Cinnamon teal – Millet ponds,
Osprey – Highway 12 (platforms around Lowden), Bennington Lake
Swainson’s hawk – south of Lowden/Touchet
Black-necked stilt – Wallula Junct. Pond, Millet ponds
American avocet – Wallula Junct. Pond, Millet ponds
Greater yellowlegs – Wallula Junct. Pond, Millet ponds
Lesser yellowlegs – Millet ponds, Tyson ponds
Spotted sandpiper – Mill Creek, Bennington Lake, Millet ponds
Western sandpiper – Tyson ponds
Least sandpiper – Tyson ponds
Vaux’s swift – Mill Creek, Bennington Lake
Black-chinned hummingbird – backyard feeders, Bennington Lake
Calliope hummingbird – backyard feeders, Bennington Lake
Rufous hummingbird – backyard feeders, Foster Rd.
Red-naped sapsucker – Jasper Mountain Road
Hammond’s flycatcher – Bennington Lake
Western kingbird – Bennington Lake
Cassin’s vireo – Jasper Mountain Road
Bank swallow – Berney Drive, Bennington Lake
Northern rough-winged swallow – Bennington Lake
Barn swallow – Mill Creek, Foster Road, Seaman Rd.
House wren – Bennington Lake
Orange-crowned warbler – Rooks Park, Seaman Rd.
Nashville warbler – Millet ponds, Bennington Lake
Yellow warbler – Bennington Lake, Rooks Park
Townsend’s warbler – Jasper Mountain Road, Biscuit Ridge Road
Chipping sparrow – Bennington Lake
Lazuli bunting – Bennington Lake, Foster Road, Seaman Road
Musings

Birding in Abundance

By Chris Howard

For the last several years, more often than not, I have been lamenting the news of the decreasing populations of many bird species. With the reality of climate change and habitat destruction there has indeed been a decrease in bird numbers which has been noticeable in our area, as well as others. It was with great pleasure and delight that, for at least a short time, I was able to immerse myself in an abundance of beautiful birds.

The first exuberant birding experience came with our March BMAS field trip led by Sue and Jim Parrish to Snively Road on the far side of West Richland. Our caravan of cars pulled up to a series of harvested cornfields in the midst of scattered wet lands. We arrived just in time to watch a multitude of Sandhill Cranes arriving in small flocks, circle overhead, then land in the fields just a hundred yards away. Not only are Sandhill Cranes majestic in their size and elegant stature, they also loudly announce their presence with prehistoric loud vocalizations somewhere between a screech and a squawk...Skkaarrrrooo!! I never get tired of watching these long necked and long-legged birds glide in for a perfect feet-first landing. Three days after the field trip, I came back to the Snively Road fields in the afternoon on a day when a strong wind was blowing. I was wondering if the wind would ground the birds for the day. My worries were soon dispelled as flock after flock of cranes flew overhead then circled to face the wind and spread their billowing wings. They were amazing pilots. At times they would lever their wings which were filled with wind and appear to be almost standing still in the air as they gently lowered themselves to the ground for a perfect landing. I was happy to see this gathering of hundreds of cranes feeding together with a scattered herd of black cows as they prepared for a long flight north to their breeding grounds...the cranes not the cows.

Late in the afternoon of the field trip, Kathy and I were looking at pelicans and swans through the scope at Hanson Loop Rd. when the sky to the East suddenly turned white. I could hardly believe my eyes at the multitude of Snow Geese that had risen off the farm fields to fill the sky in long skeins flying in all directions. There were thousands and thousands of these beautiful white birds with black wing tips making patterns in the sky. We drove to the east on Hanson Loop Rd for a better look at the fields, some of which were painted white, where a portion of the geese had settled down. We stayed around the McNary viewpoint until almost dark watching this abundance of life. This filled me with happiness and appreciation for the health and well-being of nature...at least on this one special day!
In the Field

By Ginger Shoemake; Photos by Rodger Shoemake

Mike and MerryLynn found two violet-green swallows on McDonald Road on March 4. This was the first sighting of swallows for the spring.

March 8 was a rainy day in Walla Walla, but that didn’t stop Chris Howard and Bruce Barga from walking Bennington Lake. They saw 23 species including tundra swans, canada geese, northern shovelers, American wigeons, mallards, northern pintails, ring-necked ducks, lesser scaup and a canvasback.

On March 12 Rodger and I drove our Walla Walla NW raptor route. We found 3 great horned owls on nests and a ferruginous hawk standing on the nest on Touchet North Road. There were lots of red-tailed hawks, mostly paired up and some already on nests. It was nice to see a rough-legged hawk on Luckenbill Road. It won’t be long before they head north to nest. Meadowlarks were singing everywhere and horned larks darted back and forth in many places. We saw several Say’s phoebes and they were also singing. A northern shrike was on a wire and several male pheasants flew across the road. It was a beautiful day to be out enjoying the warm weather and the birds!

Chris Howard biked up Mill Creek trail to Rooks Park on March 14 and spotted 3 violet-green swallows, a few common mergansers, a pair of wood ducks (on the little side pond at Rooks Park) and a pileated woodpecker.

On March 17, MerryLynn found two long-billed curlews on Lambden Road. We saw three of them the next day on our way home from watching the sandhill cranes on Snively Road in West Richland. Later in the month they were back on Riggs Road.

Rodger and I have a new raptor route that is south of Walla Walla going as far west as Northshore Road. Although the counts were down because the area is known for its wintering birds, on March 20 we did see some raptors and one very unexpected sighting – an adult golden eagle on Northshore Road east of the turnoff to the Millet Ponds. We’re looking forward to surveying this new area next winter.

While walking Bennington Lake on March 19, Linda Hanson was surprised to see 30 sandhill cranes fly over. There’s nothing like the sound of cranes! For those of you who didn’t make the Audubon Field Trip to Snively Road earlier in the month, there is still time to take a trip over there to see them. And if that isn’t possible, check out all of the photos on the Audubon Facebook. Judy even has a video with sound so you can enjoy their wonderful call.

On March 22, Kathy Howard saw three great blue herons at nests along the Mill Creek trail near Rooks Park.

Chris Howard went down to the Natural Area at dusk on March 25 and found two western screech owls and two red foxes.

March 26 was a beautiful spring day, so Rodger and I decided to drive up Jasper Mountain Road to see what we could find. We counted 21 western bluebirds flying around the boxes and watched a beautiful rough-legged hawk successfully hunting. The pine trees further up were full of singing Cassin’s finches, and a pair of chestnut-backed chickadees were surveying a hole in a large snag (thank you Jim and Sue for pointing them out to us). Singing western meadowlarks, fox sparrows and song sparrows let us know that spring is here!

Bruce Toews saw an American avocet at the junction pond on March 26. This is always a good place to look for them and black-necked stilts in April.
On March 27 while watching and listening to several Wilson’s snipe at the Lowden/Gardena Road marsh, a Virginia rail popped out within five feet of me and strutted around for awhile before returning to the reeds. That was probably the closest look I’ve had of a rail in my years of birding. On the way home from the marsh, Rodger took this photo of male wild turkeys “strutting their stuff” in a field along the Walla Walla River.

Don’t you love spring! Everywhere birds are singing, and every day a new bird is sighted by someone. Get out there and see what new birds you can find. Because there are so many different species returning in April, the best way to keep track of what is coming in is to check Walla Walla County ebird. New sightings are posted daily.

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:____________________________________________

Bird Sites
By Sue Weiler

Educational and entertaining articles gleaned from scientific research on the internet.

Click Live Migration Map
Over 65 million birds are in the process of migration across the U.S. right now!

Check out the live map here: Live Migration Map

Report your sightings in April to BlueMtnAudubon@gmail.com