

# The Magpiper

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*Newsletter of Blue Mountain Audubon Society, October, 2007*

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## **CALENDAR**

### **MEMBERSHIP MEETING, October 18, 7:30 p.m.**

Gaiser Auditorium, Science Hall, Whitman College

“If you look on a map of the Oregon-Idaho borderlands, you’ll see the words “Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. It’s printed over the area where the Snake River flows through the bottom of the deepest canyon in North America. On the map these words give a sense of definition to this wild and remote territory. But the story of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area is as unique as the rugged lands that lie within its boundaries.

Brian Kelly, Restoration Coordinator with the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, LaGrande, Oregon, will show the film “*Wild Connections*” at the *October Meeting*. This spectacular landscape and the Seven Devils and Wallowa Mountains that rise above the canyon is home to uniquely diverse communities of plants and animals and provides a living bridge of connectivity to surrounding regions. It literally took an act of Congress and a presidential signature to create the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (NRA). Come and learn more about this “recreation area that covers over 652,000 acres. The act was written “to assure that the natural beauty, and historical and archaeological values of the Hells Canyon area . . . are preserved for this and future generations and that the recreational and ecologic values and public enjoyment of the area are thereby enhanced . . . “

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

Chapter Board members will meet October 11, 7:00 p.m., at the Muse home, 219 Newell Street

## **FIELD TRIPS**

- Trips depart from Harper Joy parking lot on the Whitman College Campus unless otherwise stated.
- Most trips are several hours in length, so bring plenty of food and water.
- Binoculars are a must, and a spotting scope is useful if you have one.
- Plan to carpool whenever possible to reduce fuel costs. Also, the fewer the cars, the easier it is for everyone to see the birds.
- Contact the trip leader if you plan to attend
- Last minute changes or cancellations, as well as trip results will be posted on the Blue Mountain Audubon website <http://blumtn.org>.
- If you have questions, contact Ginger Shoemake at 525-2963, or [housewren@blumtn.org](mailto:housewren@blumtn.org)

### **Saturday, October 13 – 8:00 a.m.**

#### **Bennington Lake**

After a busy summer of watching nesting birds, it’s time to see what changes fall brings to Bennington Lake. Waterfowl should be plentiful, and this is the time of year that unexpected species drop in. Late shorebirds could be around and it’s not too late to look for northern shrike, Townsend’s warblers and both species of kinglets. Join Rodger and me as we look for old favorites and visitors to the lake. This will be a half-day trip, but you will need to wear your walking shoes and bring water.

Shoemakes 525-2963

### **Sunday, November 18 – 9:00 a.m.**

#### **Tom Scribner’s Annual Turkey Trot**

(Look for details in the next Magpiper or on line at [blumtn.org](http://blumtn.org))

## **THOUGHTS FROM MY PERSPECTIVE**

George Jameson, President, BMAS

The Swainson's Hawks have left the valley now, heading south to Argentina. I am sure you have noticed the morning air is crisp and cool. The Rough-legged Hawks and the Northern red-tail will soon be arriving. Large flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese are moving along the river to the west and the gray Catbirds are headed to their winter homes along with the myriad of other feathered creatures that make this wonderful valley their summer residence. The seasons are changing.

So far this year in Walla Walla County there have been 241 different species of birds reported. This is quite a list and it can be found at our web site at <http://www.blumtn.org>. There will be a few additions to this list over the coming months as stragglers and juveniles pass through our area, making their way South.

It is enjoyable for me to watch the seasons change and the different species pass through or move on after having spent the summer rearing young. I hope you all have gotten out and watched these feathered friends this past summer and heard their calls and watched their antics. They can bring much delight to one's spirit.

One additional item: I want to thank all of you who participated in or attended the recent auction that Blue Mountain Audubon conducted. Unfortunately a business trip kept me from being there, but I understand from reputable sources that a great time was had by all. Tom Scribner cajoled many of you into bidding on a variety of items and I am sure all of you laughed at his antics and had a grand time. A nice sum of money was raised that will be put to good use, and so I want to say thanks to all of you.

Now, let's all get out and enjoy the birds!

## ***CONSERVATION ISSUES***

*"This administration has done more for the environment and addressing energy security and climate change than any other in history."*

Martin McGuinness, Special assistant to the President for legislative affairs.

This quote is from an email message from Al Gore in which he states that he is always willing to welcome converts to our movement . . . While the claim that George Bush has done more to address climate change than any administration seems ridiculous, Al Gore states that he is willing to welcome converts to our

movement. If this administration has finally come around on the climate crisis, then now is the time for them to take action. Al Gore invites us to join together and demand that the Bush Administration commit to an international treaty that would cut CO2 by 90%.

### **WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATIVE ISSUES**

If you would like to track Washington State's coming legislative sessions as they unfold, you might want to receive Audubon Washington's Bird's Eye View, which would give the current status of bills before the Legislature, and also provide information needed to contact our Legislative Representatives. If you are interested, contact Heath Packard, Policy Director, 360-786-8020, ext. 205, [hpackard@audubon.org](mailto:hpackard@audubon.org).

### **VOTE NO ON INIATIVE 960**

Initiative 960 on this November's ballot would halt progress in Washington and put funding for environmental priorities at risk. The initiative would jeopardize critical environmental programs including efforts to address global warming. We are urged to **Vote No on Initiative 960**. This Initiative, sponsored by Tim Eyman, would create inefficiency, waste and confusion instead of accountability. It would require super-majority approval of the State Legislature and expensive public advisory votes on every change in revenue, even routine fund transfers. I-960 would require special elections for hundreds of conservation programs, such as:

- New revenue needed to support projects like the Puget Sound Partnership
- The state Department of Ecology's innovative grants program to improve and protect rivers and lakes across the state

Funding needed for the Energy Freedom Fund  
The 2007 legislative session took major steps to address climate change including establishing the Climate Advisory Team, goals for reducing global warming pollution, and investments in clean energy, but I-960 would put those advancements at risk by requiring a legislative and public vote for each funding step.

Clearly, the whole thing is designed to have a chilling effect on legislators' ability to take bold action and invest in the future of our state. There are a whole host of environmental programs that depend upon state taxes and fees, ranging from the newly established Puget Sound Agency to the Clean Air/Clean Fuels bill that passed in the 2007 legislative session. This Initiative would undermine these efforts and destroy the momentum that we have built for environmental progress in the state

by requiring that most of the routine funding of these programs be sent to voters as “tax increases.”

That’s why many environmental organizations, including Sierra Club, Audubon Washington, Climate Solutions, American Rivers, Environment Washington, Transportation Choices Coalition and many more have joined with health, education and labor organizations in the **NO ON I-960 Coalition**.

### **THE SPOTTED OWL –YET AGAIN**

[Wild Alert, News, September 2007, Wilderness Soc.] The Bush Administration has released a “Draft Spotted Owl Recovery Plat” that is so seriously flawed that it failed a recent scientific peer review. The plan would roll back more than a decade of wildlife protections by reducing critical habitat for owls, and selling ancient forest lands to timber companies. This battle will not end, at least for the foreseeable future—or perhaps until the old growth forests are gone—or until the Barred Owl forces the Spotted Owl out of the disappearing remnants of the Northwest Forests.

[Ed. Note: Can we really save this species from habitat destruction, , continued logging, or the invasion of a naturally aggressive related owl?

## **MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS**

### **THANKSGIVING BIRD COUNT**

The Annual thanksgiving Bird Count is almost upon us again! Dr, John G. Hewston at Humboldt State University in Arcata, CA has held/sponsored these counts for many years. He states that it is through the help of folks like us that supply the birding records. He did not send forms last year he is hoping to increase the number and distribution of reports this year. Copies of the materials will be at Chapter meetings in the next three months.

Thanksgiving Bird Counts are to take place on Thanksgiving Day! They are to last only ONE HOUR! The counter chooses the time of day that best fits his/her holiday schedule. The count is to be made in a 15-foot diameter circle, the location of which also is the counter’s choice. Such circles are usually located around something that attracts birds—such as feeders, baths, cover, etc. Most people select a count area visible from a comfortable spot near a window. This is one winter count that can be made in comfort regardless of the weather. Some counters choose a spot outdoors at a

favorite place, but the same circle should be used each year. And be sure the birds are within the circle.

Actually the count circle can be considered a cylinder, since birds passing through or over the circle/cylinder can be counted. **DO NOT COUNT** those flocks of geese , gulls, or hawks and vultures, way up there. To be certain the birds pass through the count area, establish some sort of top limit. Count individual birds only **ONCE!** Some will make repeated visits, but ten visits by the same bird is only one bird. To count flocks, make a count each time they visit, but count on your tally only the highest number on one of those counts.

Last year 401 counts were received from eleven Western States and Alaska. Counters tallied 141 different bird species inside their circles at count time. Number one was the House Sparrow (1,991) for the eighth year in a row. In second spot was the Dark-eyed Junco (1,941) and the House Finch was third (1,930). The rest of the top ten were (in order) Black-capped Chickadee, American Goldfinch, California Quail, Mourning Dove, Steller’s Jay, White-crowned Sparrow and Common Redpoll. This last one is a surprise. Although reported from only three states, the Common Redpoll was the most abundant species in Alaska and also seen in Montana and Colorado. Alaska also reported 45 Hoary Redpolls.

Thanksgiving Bird Counts were begun in 1966, by Dr. Ernest Edwards in Virginia, and Dr Hewston began coordinating and compiling this count in the West in 1992. [Copies of the Forms will be available at Chapter meetings, or call Shirley Muse, 529-2540]

### **ASK AUDUBON**

**What type of potable water bottles are safest for my family to use?”** Submitted by Maura S., Brooklyn, NY

Stainless steel bottles are the safest options. Plastics, which include the popular Nalgene bottles, have been known to release toxins into the water they hold. Case Western University’s Dr. Patricia Hung made the 1998 discovery that Lexan polycarbonate resin (which is used to make Nalgene) can release the hormone disruptor bisphenol – (A (BPA). A 2003 study from the University of Missouri found that BPA can leach from water bottles when the bottles are merely sitting at room temperature. Heat or being exposed to direct sunlight increases the chance of BPB leaching. Children and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to hormone disruptors. Stainless steel bottles do not cause any of these problems and are lightweight.

Whatever kind of water bottle you use, keeping it clean is integral to having healthy water. Water bottles

should be rinsed regularly with mild soapy water or a vinegar and water solution (vinegar kills 99% of germs and bacteria.) Allow the bottle to thoroughly dry before filling it with water. If you are concerned about the quality of your tap water, you can purchase a filter for home use. There are various kinds of filters, all of which are more economical than buying bottled water. In fact, an NRDC study found that 25 percent of bottled water is really filtered tap water.

## IN THE FIELD

*By Ginger Shoemake*

September can be described as a “month of surprises and change” in the birding world. Summer birds leave and winter ones appear. Migrating shorebirds stop at any available mud or beach on their way south. Vagrants get blown off course in storms and end up in our backyards. Here is the report of what was seen around Walla Walla over the past few weeks.

George Jameson reported 5 red-necked phalaropes at a pond in the Table Rock housing development south of Walla Walla on August 27.

On August 28, Tori Kaufmann called to let me know that she has black-capped chickadees and a red-breasted nuthatch in her apartment courtyard. Also, she has watched a pair of kestrels all summer. Their favorite perches are the top of St. Patrick’s Church and the conifers in front of the courthouse. Recently they have been joined by a third bird – perhaps their offspring.

MerryLynn Denny saw a white-breasted nuthatch at the Natural Area on September 1. She and Mike birded the Walla Walla River Delta several times over Labor Day weekend and found another Walla Walla County first – a brown pelican. Now, that’s one lost bird!! They also saw a nice assortment of shorebirds, terns, and several soras and Virginia rails.

On our weekly Bennington Lake walk on September 4, we noted that most of the visiting nesting migrants have left. There were a few western wood peewees, a couple

lazuli buntings and a black-chinned hummingbird still present. We saw two white-crowned sparrows – a sure sign that fall is coming.

While walking in her neighborhood on September 4, Brooke Davey had a great horned owl fly over her head. We heard four of them behind our house early the same morning. It’s time to be watching for them, especially when you are out in the early morning or evening. Now that the young are on their own, your chances of finding these beautiful owls are greatly increased.

We saw a Clark’s nutcracker on South Fork Russell Creek on September 5, and a turkey vulture above Mill Creek on September 6. The Goodhews watched a Lewis’ woodpecker fly over their place on the Walla Walla River the same day.

Mike and MerryLynn had a broad-tailed hummingbird at their feeders on September 7. It stayed around for about five days.

Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> was our first field trip of the fall led by Mike and MerryLynn Denny. We scoured the west side of the county looking for fall migrants. We found a good assortment of shorebirds, terns, warblers and more. Highlights of the trip are posted on the Blue Mountain Audubon website – [blumtn.org](http://blumtn.org)

Mike and MerryLynn went out to the Walla Walla River Delta on September 9 and found the following uncommon migrants: a juvenile Sabine’s gull, a clay-colored sparrow 3 sanderlings, a marbled godwit, a Bonaparte’s gull and a common yellowthroat.

Bennington Lake was hopping on September 11. Yellow-rumped warblers, cedar waxwings, white-crowned sparrows and Vaux’s swifts were abundant. Uncommon sparrows included Lincoln’s, vesper and clay-colored. There were 4 Wilson’s warblers and 2 orange crowned warblers. On the water’s edge we saw American pipits along with greater and lesser yellowlegs. The highlight of the morning was being able to watch a Cooper’s hawk and a sharp-shinned hawk circle over us. It’s not often you get a chance to see the comparison between these two accipiters. New fall birds included a junco and a Townsend’s solitaire.

On September 12, several of us went up Jasper Mountain to see what birds might be around. We were rewarded

with at least 12 pygmy nuthatches, 5 white-breasted nuthatches, over 30 red-breasted nuthatches, 3 Clark's nutcrackers, a vesper sparrow, a Lincoln's sparrow and all the other usual small mountain birds. The only woodpeckers we saw were a pileated and a downy. Raptors were no where to be found with the exception of a couple red-tailed hawks.

Rodger and I went out looking for raptors with George and Deanna Jameson on September 13. We found 136 of them – mostly along Frog Hollow and Byrnes Road. The majority were Swainson's hawks and red-tailed hawks, but there were also several northern harriers and American kestrels.

A red-naped sapsucker visited our back yard on September 14. It returned again on the 18<sup>th</sup> for a few hours.

Mike and MerryLynn found an American golden plover at Tyson blood pond on September 15. It was joined by several other species of shorebirds. This is a very smelly place to bird, but the birding is great when shorebirds are migrating, so it's worth putting up with the unpleasant odors.

It was cool and cloudy at Bennington Lake on September 18. We saw a lot more waterfowl including 3 blue winged teal, 4 ruddy ducks and a horned grebe. There were very large numbers of vaux's swifts and yellow-rumped warblers. New shorebirds were pectoral sandpiper and long-billed dowitcher.

Mike ran across an irrigation puddle near Touchet on September 20 that was hopping with five species of sparrows – Brewer's, vesper, savannah, lark and sage.

On September 22, Melissa Webster reported some interesting birds on her Mill Creek/Rooks Park walk. There were both greater and lesser yellowlegs, white-crowned sparrows, cedar waxwings, wood ducks, a great horned owl, a black-headed grosbeak, a ruby-crowned kinglet and a Cooper's hawk.

Mike and MerryLynn found two red-breasted mergansers at Casey Pond on September 22. There were also about 1250 white-fronted geese in the same area. The geese should be around for a few weeks, so I hope you all get a chance to see them.

Most of the Swainson's hawks have left. Rodger and I looked for them south of Lowden on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and only found six. We saw plenty of red-tailed hawks, northern harriers and American kestrels. Now it's time to start watching for those raptors we see during the winter months – rough-legged hawks, prairie falcons, merlins, sharp-shinned hawks and ferruginous hawks.

Shirley Muse has red-breasted nuthatches that come right up to the feeder while she is re-filling it. How fun!

On September 24, MerryLynn found some very interesting birds. At Bennington Lake she saw Cassin's finches, a Say's phoebe, a common yellowthroat, and a great egret. At Rooks Park she found a red-naped sapsucker, a white-throated sparrow, a Lincoln's sparrow, two golden crowned sparrows and a hermit thrush.

Carolyn Corvino found over 200 vaux's swifts going into the chimney at the Red-Cross building on Park Street the week of September 24. If you haven't seen this behavior, I hope you will go by there at dusk to watch. It's amazing to watch them swirl around high above, and then begin to funnel down into the chimney. They will be migrating soon, so don't wait to go see the show!

On our September 25 walk around Bennington Lake, we were able to add western grebe and ring-necked duck to our list of returning waterfowl. We also watched a peregrine falcon fly over the lake and off to the south.

If you see any of the wintering raptors, or if there are any other bird sightings you want to share with our members, please contact me at 525-2963 or [housewren@blumtn.org](mailto:housewren@blumtn.org)

If you want to know what is being seen during the month, check Blue Mountain Audubon's website - [www.blumtn.org](http://www.blumtn.org) George Jameson, our webmaster, has started a new feature on the website that highlights current sightings with dates, location and contact person.

