



The Magpiper

October, 2008

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OCTOBER CALENDAR

- October 4 - 9:00 a.m.
Field Trip: Blue Mt. Wildlife
- October 7, 14, 21, 28 - 9:00 a.m.
Bennington Lake Walk
- October 9 - 7:00 p.m.
Board Meeting
219 Newell Street
- October 16 - 7:30 p.m.
Membership Meeting
Gaiser Auditorium
- October 19 8:00 a.m.
Field Trip: Bennington Lake

Field Trip Information

Trips depart from Harper Joy Theatre parking lot on Whitman College Campus

Bring plenty of food and water

Plan to carpool whenever possible and reimburse for gas

Contact trip leader if you plan to attend

Changes, cancellations and trip results will be posted at <http://www.blumtn.org>

Have questions? Contact Ginger Shoemake at 525-2963 or housewren@blumtn.org

Meetings

Membership Meeting: October 16, 7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

Snakes in the Congo

The speaker for our October meeting will be Kate Jackson. Kate is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Whitman College, where she teaches herpetology, comparative vertebrate anatomy, and animal diversity. She holds a Ph.D. in Biology from Harvard University. Obsessed with amphibians and reptiles since early childhood, she became especially attracted to the poorly-known snakes of Central Africa.

Kate will give a slide presentation about her fieldwork with snakes in the Congo. She has led four expeditions to conduct herpetofaunal biodiversity surveys in areas of the Congo never studied before. She has published many scientific articles and has authored a field memoir about her experiences collecting snakes in the swamp forest of northern Congo.

After the meeting, her recent book "Mean and Lowly Thing: Snakes, Science and Survival in the Congo" will be available for sale and book signing.

Field Trips

Saturday, October 4 – 9:00 a.m. ALL DAY BLUE MOUNTAIN WILDLIFE OPEN HOUSE

The open house at the raptor rehabilitation center just south of Pendleton is a great opportunity to observe awesome birds of prey, enjoy good food and local entertainment, watch falconry displays and see the release of a rehabilitated red-tailed hawk. The hours of the open house are from 12-4, although we probably won't stay the entire afternoon. Of course, we will do a little birding on the way down, so don't forget to bring food and water. We will want to carpool for this trip. Join Rodger and Ginger Shoemake for the day. Shoemakes- 525-2963

Sunday, October 19—8:00 a.m. BENNINGTON LAKE

Take a stroll around the lake with the weekly walkers to see what birds are present. We will be looking for white-fronted geese, bufflehead, ruddy duck, late shorebirds, migrating passerines, and wintering species such as Townsend's solitaire, northern shrike and hairy woodpecker. There's always a surprise or two every time we walk the lake, so come join the fun. This will be a half-day trip.

Tom's Words of Wisdom

DO TRY THIS AT HOME

If you are reading this, it is, I assume, because you are a member of Blue Mountain Audubon. And if you are a member of Blue Mountain Audubon, it is, I assume, because you are interested in birds. Which takes me to a confession. Although interested in birds, I am a failure as a birder. That is, I am unable to identify birds. Oh sure, a few of the more common birds - robins, crows, starlings, house finches, red-tailed hawks (depending on their color phase) and turkeys - but fall warblers, flycatchers and lots of sparrows? No way. And gulls? Impossible.

In which shortcoming I am at least a little better than one of my favorite authors, Edward Abbey. Best known for "The Monkey Wrench Gang" and "Desert Solitaire," Ed was often called a nature writer. A description he much disliked. So much so that in one essay he confessed to being able to identify only three species of birds: the turkey vulture, the fried chicken and the rose-bottomed skinny dipper. I have seen, and am able to identify, all three.

Yes, I could become better at bird identification. I could hang out with some of our crack birders. And we have quite a few in BMAS. Everyone knows Mike Denny. And Merry Lynn, his wife, is probably just as good. Ginger, Shirley, Priscilla and George ain't no slouches. And they all had to start with the common birds and work up from there. Better yet, they are enthusiastic teachers, have lots of patience and genuinely delight in helping folks become better birders.

Still, it is somewhat embarrassing to go tramping off, binoculars at the ready, excited about a white-crowned sparrow, only to have one of them identify six other species (some only by their call) before you have even seen what they are talking about. And if you are like me, sensitive about your limited skills, it is really a bummer to identify a bird, only to be told that it is not a Say's phoebe, but a robin. Hey, at least it had a reddish breast.

Which takes me to my first challenge. Two challenges, really. Both of which you can do at home. The first is a test of how well you read last month's Magpiper. The second deals with your bird identification skills. Ready?

Okay, first challenge. As of September 1, how many species of birds have been seen this year in Walla Walla County? The answer is on page six of the September Magpiper. An impressive 238. And the only reason I gave you the answer is that I need it for challenge number two. Here goes. And trust me on this, it is related to your skill as a birder and designed to improve on that skill.

Get your favorite writing implement, or fire up your computer, and list as many bird species as you can that have been seen, or you think have been seen, in Walla Walla County. This is not an open book test. Olive warblers and rose-throated becards should probably not be listed. When you are done, dust off your favorite field guide or, better yet, check your list against the new Walla Walla County checklist. If you don't get to 238, spend some time with your field guide and see what other birds are or should be on the County list. The exercise will help familiarize you with more area birds and may save some embarrassment on a future field trip.

If you list more than 238, the current County list (since we started keeping track, not just in 2008) is an impressive 337. And, no, the list does not include all 36 sparrows, or 26 gull, or 46 warbler species listed in "Sibley." Nor is there a fried chicken. Although rose-bottomed skinny dippers have been reported along Mill Creek.

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Spotlight on Nature

BRUSH PILES, SEEDS AND BERRIES

As the season changes, it is time for fall clean-up in our yards. Pruning shrubs and trees and cleaning out flower beds are probably high on your priority “to do” list. I have a suggestion that will help both you and the birds prepare for winter. Instead of hauling those branches off, consider making a brush pile somewhere at the edge of your yard for the birds. Sparrows, blackbirds, quail, finches, doves and other birds all love brush piles. They can hide in them from predators such as neighborhood cats and sharp-shinned hawks, and they give the birds shelter in the cold, wet weather. If you do make a brush pile, be sure to place it somewhere you can watch it from inside your house on those cold winter days. Try placing a feeder near the brush pile, or scatter seed on the ground in front of it—the birds will appreciate it.

Also, when you get ready to cut down all the old dried perennials so they will be ready for new growth in the spring, consider leaving the ones that have seeds (such as coneflowers, daisies, and black-eyed susans) for the birds. They make nourishing treats for hungry birds. Of course we all know the finches love the sunflower plants, but did you know that downy woodpeckers also love them? They find tasty insects to eat inside the decaying stalks. And of course, leave the berries on the shrubs for the birds to nibble on during the cold weather.

All of these suggestions might make more work for you in the spring, but the birds this winter will love you for helping out. And, with the high price of bird seed these days, the more natural food you can provide the birds, the more economical it will be.

BIRDS AND HABITAT

From Audubon Washington

Why are birds and habitat important? Because, ultimately, what happens to birds happens to us. To survive and thrive, birds and humans need the same thing: a healthy place to live. Healthy habitat. Habitat with clean air, clean water, food, shelter, and safety—all of which are fundamental to creating a good quality of life. Audubon believes in protecting the richness of nature, encouraging learning and exploration, strong communities, and investing in the future.

Habitat. It isn't just for the birds!

Bird of the Month

WHITE CROWN SPARROW

Zonotrichia leucophrys



Fall is upon us and our winter birds are returning. One of the first to make an appearance is the white-crowned sparrow, which was first seen early in September. It

is one of the most common winter birds in our area and the adult is easily identified by its black and white striped crown, plain gray throat and breast, wing bars and a pinkish bill. Juvenile birds have a brown and tan striped crown.



White crowned sparrows are found in brushy habitat. They are seed eaters and are a common visitor under backyard feeders and in backyard brush piles. They arrive early in the morning and feed until dark. Although they do not nest here, they spend almost nine months here serenading us with their beautiful song and cheeky attitude.

There are three other *Zonotrichia* sparrows: golden-crowned sparrow, white-throated sparrow and Harris's sparrow. They can all be found here in the winter but are uncommon to rare. The golden-crowned sparrow has a large black stripe on its crown with a yellow forecrown and a bicolored bill. The white-throated sparrow has a very sharp dark border on a white throat, and a gray bill. These two species look similar to the white-crowned sparrow at a glance, so you need to take a closer look. The Harris's sparrow is the largest of the four and the lightest in color with a white belly, black breast stripe, light brown head and a pink bill. All three relatives of the white-crowned sparrow can be found in similar habitats.

Conservation

ELECTRICITY: SOME QUESTIONS TO THINK ON

By Mike Denny, Conservation Chair BMAS

Well here I sit with the lights on writing this note surrounded by perfect air temperatures, about 68 degrees, on a fast modern computer, and all these things are powered by electricity created 100% of the time by a turbine in a dam here in the Lower Columbia Basin. A source of clean renewable energy. All I have to do is look out our window to see that thousands of other folks across the Walla Walla Valley are also enjoying the benefits of clean electricity. To the east and west of us are folks watching the pulse and flash of hundreds of red or white lights atop wind turbine generators that produce clean renewable electricity on the average 18% to 22% of the time .

Many folks never stop to think about where this power comes from that brings comfort, security and convenience to their lives. Is there a need for more electricity in the Pacific Northwest or in the Walla Walla Valley? Do we need more transmission lines, wind turbines or even dams to create more electricity? Will solar power ever be a big contributor to our energy needs? The dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers produce thousands of megawatts of electricity daily along with the lone nuclear power plant and a single coal fired power plant near Boardman. Most of this electricity is sent out of the region to areas that need it. So what is the big deal if 70% of the power produced from water and wind here is sent elsewhere? Is conservation of energy really needed here in the Lower Columbia Basin with all this ample energy being produced? Is there a cost to us when all this energy is produced here and sent elsewhere? What will energy needs look like in 10 years, 20 years and beyond? Do we need the 3000 plus wind turbines proposed in the next six years when we have very poor wind resource areas? Is ample transmission really a good reason to build wind turbines if efficiency and out-put are very low-poor? What is the long term cumulative impact on our native protected fish, birds and bats, and our health if our appetite for more energy keeps growing?

These are just a few of the questions to think on when it comes to energy and demands from us for it. Is unchecked consumption always a sign of progress?

OUR NATIONAL FORESTS

Excerpts from The Wilderness Society Report on The Economic Value of Alaska's National Forests Sept. 2008

America's national forests contain some of the country's finest recreation areas, most valuable fish and wildlife habitat, and watersheds that provide clean water for communities across the country. The US Forest Service is charged with managing these assets and providing for the multiple uses and benefits of the lands it owns, including recreation, wood products, watershed protection, species habitat, scenic views, cultural and scientific values, and wilderness.

Every ten to fifteen years the Forest Service must update its management plan for each national forest, evaluating past practices, projecting future forest uses, and proposing areas for wilderness designation. The agency's own rules for these planning efforts direct it to pay special attention to valuable natural assets such as intact watersheds, backcountry recreation opportunities, and high quality wildlife habitat that the national forests are especially, if not uniquely, able to provide. But more often than not, management plans tilt in favor of industry demands for commodities, such as timber, while giving short shrift to wildland values. In some cases, wildland values receive no consideration—or zero value. The result is forest plans with too little protection for wilderness, and management decisions that may ignore or even undermine wildland values.

ARTHUR G. REMPEL SCHOLARSHIP

Blue Mountain Audubon Society has established a scholarship at Whitman College to honor Dr. Arthur G. Rempel, Emeritus Professor of Biology. Dr. Rempel was a Life Member of National Audubon Society. The scholarship will award \$500 each year to a Whitman College Junior, majoring in biology—the money to be applied toward that student's senior year tuition. In order to fund the scholarship, Blue Mountain Audubon Society will need to raise \$10,000. If you would like to contribute to the Rempel Scholarship, please send your check, payable to BMAS, to P.O. Box 1106, Walla Walla, WA 99362.

Please indicate on your check that it is for the Rempel Scholarship Fund.

Miscellaneous

WHICH IS OUR FAVORITE?

By George Jameson, BMAS Board Member

For many years Deanna and I traveled around the country volunteering at parks and national wildlife refuges. We would volunteer for 3-4 months at one location travel for 2 months and volunteer at another. This was a wonderful lifestyle and when we are asked which is our favorite it is a really difficult question to answer.

On Kachemak Bay in Homer Alaska in early May we saw in excess of 100,000 shorebirds at one time, certainly a memorable site. In the winter months at Bosque del Apache in New Mexico we heard and watched upwards of 25,000 sandhill cranes up close to the road for viewing, an equally wonderful experience. On our travels to Newfoundland we visited the northern gannet colony at Cape Saint Mary's and were awed by the 20,000 or more nesting northern gannets and a wide variety of other seabirds. At Patagonia Lake State Park in Arizona during the winter months we found flocks of sparrows that contained 8 different species, and species of birds that we here in the Pacific Northwest consider rare, even mind boggling. In Chassahowitzka NWR in Florida we worked building pens for the whooping cranes and swam with the manatees, which was really fun.

We have seen quite a variety of species and had a lot of different experiences, and the above mentioned are only a short, partial list, of all we have seen and done. So which is our favorite? Each has its own uniqueness and its own varied environment to offer. Each is different than the other. Together they create a composite of an experience that is truly memorable and that composite is our favorite.

Today we spend time looking for birds around our local area and we have found and been shown some wonderful spots to add to our collective experience. The point I want to emphasize is that you need to get out at different times of the year and to different locations to build that total set of experiences that will be your favorite. All of us cannot travel full time and wander about the country, but there are some great birding locations right around here and so many wonderful things to see that we really must get out as much as we can.

So get out and enjoy the beauty of nature and it's wildlife as much as you can and build you own composite of favorites.

BIRDS CAN'T VOTE, BUT YOU CAN!

From Audubon Washington

On November 4, 2008 Washington will hold its General Election. In the spirit of the Audubon mission of education and advocacy it is important to stay in tune with candidate platforms and understand what they mean for the future of our state.

As voters, we have the power to decide how our state will act on many different issues including: the environment, health care, transportation and other topics that directly affect our daily life. Education, advocacy and action are essential tools in accomplishing conservation goals and sustaining a healthy community here in Washington State.

It is important that we lead by example by participating in the upcoming elections.

If you need to register to vote, know someone who needs to register, or have any questions, go to: <http://www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/register.aspx>.

BOOKS: PRISCILLA'S PICKS

Priscilla spent much of the month of September on a birding trip to Bolivia. However, before she left she recommended two books for us to read in October.

Shadow of the Silk Road: by Colin Thurbon

To travel the Silk Road is to trace the passage not only of trade and armies, but also of ideas, religions and inventions. Making his way by local bus, truck, car, donkey cart and camel, Colin Thurbon covered some 7000 miles in 8 months from the heart of China into Kurdish Turkey. This travel epic explores an ancient world in a modern format and is a fascinating look into the people and places of Central Asia.

The Perfect Summer: by Juliet Nicolson

This historical novel is a portrait of Britain's most privileged citizens during the summer of 1911. Drawing on material from intimate and rarely seen sources, it is a vividly rendered glimpse of the twilight of the Edwardian era. But perfection was not for all. Cracks in the social fabric were showing and England was on the cusp of irrevocable change. The book is an entertaining look at British life before the storm.

In the Field

September is the month for bird movement, and this year some very interesting species were sighted. Read on to learn what and where birds were seen. Remember too that up-to-date sightings can be found on the Blue Mountain website <http://www.blumtn.org> under the “birding blog” link.

Mike and MerryLynn Denny birded the west side of the county over Labor Day weekend. They saw a wide variety of birds including four new 2008 county birds: **clay-colored sparrow, a pectoral sandpiper, a black tern and common terns.** There was a banded **peregrine falcon** on the Delta, 75 **red-necked phalaropes** at Casey Pond and a young **osprey** still on a nest at McNary NWR.

There were some migrants at Bennington Lake on September 2. **Orange crowned, Nashville, yellow-rumped and Wilson’s warblers** were seen. The only migrating shorebird seen was a **solitary sandpiper**. There were also **white-crowned sparrows**.

Tori Kaufmann saw the first **junco** of the fall in her courtyard on September 3. When the white-crowned sparrows and the juncos return we know fall is here!

Cynthia Reese reported hearing a **barred owl** the first week of September behind her place along the Walla Walla River on Last Chance Road.



BMAS Field Trip—at the Walla Walla River Delta

Mike and MerryLynn led the first BMAS Field Trip of the fall on September 6 (see results on website) to look for fall migrants and more. Highlights were a **clay-colored sparrow, Eurasian collared doves, common terns, a Franklin’s gull, a parasitic jaeger, red-necked phalaropes, Nashville warblers and orange-crowned warblers.**

After the field trip Mike and MerryLynn headed up to Wind Dust Park on the Snake River and found a **variegated flycatcher.**



Variegated fly-catcher Photo courtesy of Harold and Karen Cottel, Spokane

Previous to the Denny’s “mega find” there were only three sighting of a variegated flycatcher in North America (Maine in 1977, Tennessee in 1984, Ontario in 1993). It only remained for two days; but in those two days many birders made the dash to Eastern Washington to look at the bird and get photographs of it.

Kudos to Mike and MerryLynn for finding this rare bird.

After spending a couple days birding Windust Park and Lyons Ferry (Mike found a **blackpoll warbler** there) MerryLynn was back out looking for birds here at home. She found a **gray flycatcher**, a **Cassin’s vireo** and an **olive-sided flycatcher** at the Natural Area.

We continued to see migrant movement at Bennington Lake on September 9. There were 3 **common yellow throats** in the willows at the south end of the lake and a **semi-palmated plover** flew over. There were many **vaux’s swifts** but the only swallows seen were **barn swallows**. A common **nighthawk** flew overhead, **yellow-rumped warblers** were plentiful and we saw a couple **orange-crowned warblers**.

Alice Chaney reported an Eurasian collared dove on September 12 along Stateline Road. This species is becoming more common in the Walla Walla Valley.

Rodger and I watched about 12 common nighthawks soaring above Whitman College campus the evening of September 13.

On September 15 MerryLynn found 2 golden-crowned sparrows, a fox sparrow and an olive-sided flycatcher at Hope Cemetery in College Place.



We saw a white-throated sparrow and a Lincoln's sparrow at Bennington Lake on September 16. MerryLynn also saw the first Townsend's solitaire of the fall. Juncos were seen for the first time and there were many yellow-rumped warblers in the trees.

Townsend's Solitaire Photo by George Jameson

The evening of September 16, Rodger and I watched about 150 vaux's swifts going into a chimney on Main Street in Waitsburg.

MerryLynn, my sister, and I drove up Jasper Mountain on September 17. It was hot, dry and very dusty in the mountains with few birds. We saw flocks of horned larks and American pipits on the way up and several western bluebirds. At the "T" there were many chipping sparrows, white-crowned sparrows and yellow-rumped warblers, but very few nuthatches or chickadees. We saw red-naped sapsuckers, a Williamson's sapsucker and a red-eyed vireo.

Robson Newbold watched a very bold red-breasted nuthatch at the feeder in his back yard on September 18. It was feeding just a few feet away from him while he was mowing the lawn, and didn't seem at all nervous about Robson or the lawn mower.

Mike and MerryLynn once again headed for the west side of the county on September 20. At Mile Post 300

on Highway 12 they saw a black-necked stilt, several red-necked phalaropes and the first fall sighting of common goldeneyes. East of Burbank they saw over 1200 white-fronted geese. They had a Swainson's thrush at Ayer Boat Basin on the Snake River and hermit thrushes at Lyons Ferry.

Shirely Muse still had a hummingbird in her yard on September 19, and MerryLynn had three on the 23rd.

On September 22, Rodger and I drove out Frog Hollow to McDonald Road to check on the Swainson's hawks. We only found two. They appear to have left this location although some are still being seen in the county. There were numerous red-tailed hawks and northern harriers hunting the fields on a very windy morning. On the way home we ran into a large flock of American pipits.

Carolyn Corvino saw a long-billed dowitcher on Mill Creek on September 23.

We found 6 species of warblers at Bennington Lake on September 23—yellow, yellow-rumped, orange-crowned, MacGillivray's, Townsend's and yellow throat. White-crowned sparrows were everywhere and we saw a beautiful fox sparrow. Waterfowl included canada geese, mallards, pintails, wigeons, coots, shovelers, green-winged teal and a western grebe. Other notable birds were several ruby-crowned kinglets, two house wrens and a great horned owl.

Remember: Call me [525-2963](tel:525-2963) or send me an email housewren@blumtn.org and let me know what you are seeing in your yards and out in the field.

Chelan Ridge Fall Raptor Migration Project

Hawk Watch International announces that it's fall migration site at Chelan Ridge is open until October 27. They invite you to visit the site to view and study migrating raptors with their on-site crew members who will be counting and banding raptors. Their counts provide information on the health of raptor populations and the environment; and band returns provide valuable information on where the birds go after they pass through Chelan Ridge.

Chelan Ridge is located in the Wenatchee National Forest. For more information and directions to the site, visit Hawk Watch International's website at www.hawkwatch.org.

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Mission Statement:

Blue Mountain Audubon Society (BMAS) was organized in 1971 and chartered by National Audubon Society in 1972. The Chapter's objectives are to serve its membership and the larger communities of Southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon with the goals to appreciate, preserve and enjoy birds, wildlife, and the natural environment of the area. Education is a primary objective of Chapter activities. Through volunteer efforts BMAS provides educational opportunities, conservation activities and enjoyment of wildlife and wildlife habitat opportunities to members and to the public. The Chapter meets the third Thursday, (September through May) at 7:30 in Gaiser Auditorium, Whitman College Science Building. A newsletter, **The Magpiper** is published September through May and is free to members. Non-member subscription fees are \$20 annually. BMAS is a non-profit 501c(3) organization. Find us on the internet at <http://www.blumtn.org>

Join Blue Mountain Audubon Society – Complete the following information and mail along with a check in the amount of \$20 for your first year's membership to: Blue Mountain Audubon Society, PO Box 1106, Walla Walla, WA 99362

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