



The Magpiper

January, 2009

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January Calendar

January 6, 13, 20, 27
9:00 a.m.
Bennington Lake Walk
(weather permitting)

January 8
7:00 p.m.
Board Meeting
219 Newell Street

January 10
9:00 a.m.
Field Trip - Birds of Prey

January 15
7:30 p.m.
Membership Meeting
Gaiser Auditorium

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
Shoemaker at 525-2963 or
housewren@blumtn.org

Meetings

Membership Meeting: January 15, 7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

BOOKS AND BIRDS

Mike Denny will formally introduce his new book *Birds of the Inland Northwest and Northern Rockies*, which he co-authored with Harry Nehls and Dave Trochlell. Through photos and scenes from Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon, he will explain why habitat is the key to determining which birds will be attracted to an area. He will talk about the more common bird species using the various habitats which are scattered across the landscape of the Inland Pacific Northwest. He will also describe what types of habitat to look for when searching for those harder to find species.

His book will be available to purchase for those of you who do not have a copy. It is an easy-to-carry field guide that has many desirable features—good photos and descriptions, distribution maps, and a place to record sightings on the same page.

As in years past, David Cosby of **Earthlight Books** will have a variety of natural history books on display to peruse and buy, so come early and take a look at what he has available.

Field Trips

Saturday, January 10—9:00 a.m.

BIRDS OF PREY

George Jameson will lead this trip to look for hawks, owls and more. January is a great time to find a variety of raptors in the Walla Walla Valley. Red-tailed hawks are the most abundant species and can be seen in all color variations. Northern harriers and American kestrels also are easy to find. Rough-legged hawks and prairie falcons are not plentiful, but they are around so we should find a few. Sharp-shinned hawks, Cooper's hawks and ferruginous hawks are harder to find but we will be on the lookout for them. Great horned owls are getting ready to nest so they may be found by scrutinizing riparian areas. There is always a chance of finding other owls such as barn owls, long-eared owls, saw-whet owls, etc. And with the winter weather that blanketed the Walla Walla Valley, who knows - we may find a snowy owl. Birding is always a surprise so this trip should be a lot of fun. We will plan to be out several hours so dress warm and bring plenty of food and water. Call George if you plan to attend. 526-4609.



President's Corner

YA SHOULDA BEEN THERE

Sunday morning, December 14, BMAS Christmas Count and I'm out of bed at 6:15. Quick trip to the bathroom, then it's off to the dining room to check the outside thermometer. 12 degrees! &@#! Worse, it snowed in the night. So not only is it cold, everything is snow covered. Ain't no way anybody is gonna count birds today. So I go back to bed. But 28, count 'em, 28, dedicated birders, aka crackpots, showed up at the Harper Joy parking lot to look for the frozen carcasses of those birds too stupid to use the wings God gave 'em to fly south.

Herewith, for those of you who had the good sense to stay indoors and watch football, is a brief synopsis of what I learned from phone calls to several of the crackpots after they thawed out enough to hold the phone and move their lips.

Initial Conversations at Harper Joy

"Damn, it sure is cold."

"Why are we doing this? It's too cold."

"I can hardly move, I'm wearing so many clothes to keep warm."

"Mmmphyurg klurd bmmm." (This from a person wearing a stocking cap pulled down to his/her eyes and a bright red scarf wrapped around his/her head covering his/her nose and mouth. Nobody knew who she/he was.)

"Isn't this a great day?" (This from a person who smelled strongly of alcohol and said he wanted to count birds from the college east to Wilbur. He was last seen at about 11 a.m., staggering into the Green Lantern Tavern.)

Notes From the Field

The count area is a large circle, 15 miles in diameter, divided into areas with counters, aka crackpots, equipped with binoculars, assigned to each. Each area has an identification code.

In area ZK 24-3.5 (don't ask me what this code means), Mike and MerryLynn were supposed to look for birds up Mill Creek Road and on Scenic Loop. Except their car has absolutely no clearance and no snow tires and the snow drifts on Scenic Loop were ten feet deep in places. There may have been some really exotic birds on Scenic Loop this year but we will never know. On Mill Creek Road Mike and MerryLynn had to dodge intoxicated kamikaze snowmobile drivers going 90 mph while doing

handstands on their machines. Many of whom were heard to shout something that sounded like, "Isn't this a great day?" And they were momentarily delayed while a house burned to the ground. The only time all day they were warm.

In area 753.6-HK 4.27, Ginger, Rodger and George were supposed to walk around Bennington Lake while not freezing to death. Which they managed to do, at least the latter, by sitting in their car in the parking lot, with the heater on, counting whatever bird flew past their windshield. Seeing nothing, they made up an impressive list of birds they had previously seen at Bennington Lake before it froze over and was covered under two feet of snow. Then they went to Starbucks.

Where they met Judy, Jonathan, Melissa, Sue, Chris, Andy and Dawn, all of whom had been assigned to other areas and all of whom had the good sense to go somewhere warm. Birds be damned. All of whom, as you might expect, were embarrassed to be found out as cheaters and slackers. Not that any of them left the warmth and cozy chairs of Starbucks the rest of the day. By 4:30, when it was dark enough to slink off, they had each consumed so much caffeine that none of them has probably slept a wink since then. Serves 'em right.

Sue, Barney and Shirley did area P 410 L, north and west of town. Since they had a 4-wheel drive rig, they could go where no man had gone before, including the Prison pond where they were hassled by a shotgun-toting guard who thought they were trying to smuggle drugs into the Prison. Their bulky outerwear, the guard said, must have hidden pounds of contraband. A full body cavity search in the snow was avoided thanks only to Shirley's fast talking and Sue's copious tears.

But the best was the affairs of area X, north and east of town, including beautiful downtown Dixie. Priscilla and a gaggle of her birding cohorts drove the back roads in a car with bald tires. Just before darkness fell on the affairs of the day, Priscilla, thinking she saw a bird, pulled off to the side of the road while a positive id was attempted, only to go sliding into a ditch. Kim and Nancy, two of her colleagues, pushed, swore, prayed and never again saw the suspect bird, before they flagged down a passing motorist in a big pickup with a mean german shepherd riding shotgun. Priscilla's car, we are told, is still where they left it, covered with snow and frozen solid.

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Spotlight on Education

YOUNG BIRDERS OF ROGERS SCHOOL

By George Jameson

In early December I was contacted by Loralee Thomas at Rogers Adventist School in College Place to give a bird presentation to her 5th and 6th graders who had been studying birds in their class. There were to be about 35 students. When I arrived for the presentation on December 9, over 100 students were gathered.

My plan was to show a variety of bird images on a large screen and ask the students to identify each bird. Many of them raised their hands and several of those called on provided the correct bird identification. I was amazed at how many knew the bird species. They had obviously prepared well.

After the images were presented I played a series of video clips of birds. Many of them were singing so the students got to see the birds in motion and listen to their sounds. This really got the students' attention. The discussion concluded with a brief question and answer session where some questions and issues about the birds were clarified.

A few days after the presentation I received a packet in the mail containing 21 letters of thanks from the students. Following is my response to some of the questions and comments in their letters.

- Yes Daisy and Cy Cy, I would like to come back and do a similar and perhaps even better presentation next year.
- Kris, I actually have many, many more bird pictures than you saw and I am taking more all the time.
- Cam, there are prairie falcons around here in the winter, and I have never been to Australia.
- Jesse, you be sure and keep up the good birding as well, it is a lot of fun.
- Matthew, there a lot of great blue herons around here especially in the spring and summer, although they can be found year around.
- Cora, it would be interesting to hear which song bird you can impersonate.
- Lizzie and all her classmates, I am glad that you enjoyed the discussion and pictures; I had a lot of fun as well.
- April, I was not scared when I gave the presentation, but thank you for your concern.

My thanks to all the young birders that attended the presentation. I am available to do similar programs at other schools in our area on behalf of Blue Mountain Audubon.

Bird of the Month

BALD EAGLE

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

The bald eagle was officially declared the national emblem of the United States in 1782. It was selected by our founding fathers because it is a species unique to North America. It has since become the living symbol of freedom, spirit and pursuit of excellence.



*Photo by
Rodger Shoemake*

The species is widespread, but local and usually found near water. It does not nest in Walla Walla County but is present during the winter months. It is monogamous and mates for life, only selecting another mate if its companion should die. The pair builds a large nest at the top of a sturdy tall tree. Nests become larger each year as new nesting material is added. When a nest is destroyed by natural causes it is often rebuilt nearby.

Sexes are alike in plumage; however females are generally larger than males. It takes four or five years for a bald eagle to reach maturity. During its first year the bald eagle is dark brown with very little mottling except on the upper wing area. White feathers under its wings and on its head, tail and breast appear during the second and third year. The adult bald eagle is the most recognizable with its white head and tail as shown in the photo above.

The bald eagle is a "fish eagle" meaning its diet consists mainly of fish. However, it is an opportunistic feeder that also eats small animals such as ducks, rabbits and even carrion. In the wild, bald eagles can live up to thirty years.

We found an adult bald eagle on the Christmas Bird Count along Mill Creek, so it is possible to see them close by. If you drive to the Tri-Cities during the winter months, you can often see several in the trees along the Columbia River. At Casey Pond along Highway 12, one often sits in the trees by the side of the road. They can also be seen on and around the "poop piles" just east of Boise Cascade.

Conservation

THE ONGOING TRACTOR PULL

By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair

I am sitting here on this very cold, snowy evening thinking about conservation and why 86% of Americans consider the idea of conservation so very important. The whole idea of conservation fits in perfect with sustainability and both of these concepts are cherished by those that believe in a future for this world, their friends, children and families. We are all working towards a brighter sustainable tomorrow, one where conscious living comes through education and action on individuals parts.

There are those that doubt that sustainability and conservation can succeed because it runs counter to greed, corruption and over population. The desire to drink clean water, breath clean air, work living soils, protect species diversity and defeat viral and bacterial infections are all outstanding goals that are taking time while the great weight of human population growth bears down on all these goals and threatens to derail these objectives.

I see it like a county fair tractor pull when a speeding tractor carting a long trailer with a rolling weight far to its back would start racing towards the finish line. As the tractor would race the huge weight would start to slowly, but surely move forward changing the balance and weight ratio until the tractor just no longer pull it and still move forward. The demands for exponentially more food, room, shelter and created political instability due to an exploding human population is a threat that we all must consider on this New Years eve.

So as the great Christmas song goes “So this is Christmas and what have you done?” Friends it is no longer time for piecemeal random acts of conservation, but a committed, well crafted, educated movement that sees the goals, understands the long term benefits way into the future and will cross that finish line before the growing, moving weight of human over population makes it impossible and impractical to move forward. So strive for that finish line now.

Have a Happy New Year!

NEWS FROM AUDUBON WASHINGTON

2009 Legislative Environmental Priorities

During the 2008 legislative session all four environmental priorities were a success, including the Audubon sponsored Evergreen Communities Act, which helps to preserve urban habitat vital to birds and other wildlife.

This year’s Environmental Priorities tackle some of the biggest issues of our day head on: climate change, energy efficiency, how we develop our communities, and clean water. This agenda is exciting and absolutely essential. It is also very ambitious. All four of the Priority proposals will need massive amount of public will and action to pass them. To learn more about each of the four Priority proposals go to www.environmentalpriorities.org.

Audubon Washington’s View on Windpower

By Nina Carter, Executive Director

These are dramatic times. Most of us realize that our natural resources are not limitless. We’re finding alternative ways of living that let us walk more lightly upon the earth.

The question I hear most about Audubon and energy is, “What’s your position on windpower?” We strongly support it as a clean, domestic, sustainable energy source. But we also know that alternative fuels designed to wean America off oil can cause other problems, such as habitat fragmentation and birds killed by turbine blades. Today, Audubon Washington is working with government agencies and the wind industry to minimize the impacts on birds and wildlife.



For over 100 years, Audubon has worked to protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Audubon has never walked away from challenges as we pursue our mission. Granted, we face difficult trade-offs in today’s world but one constant will remain: stewardship of our wildlife and sustainable energy production must work hand-in-hand for the future of us all.

The most important thing you can do is conserve energy, and support **bird-friendly** wind power projects.

Miscellaneous

STATE WILDLIFE AREAS FEATURED ON NEW WDFW WEBSITE

A new Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) website offers viewers quick and easy access to a wealth of information about Washington's public wildlife lands.

The website, which can be viewed at wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/, includes descriptions of WDFW's wildlife areas, maps, directions, water access sites and amenities. Each wildlife area's management plan is also posted on the site.

With its ease of use and up-to-date information, the new website is a resource for Washington citizens and visitors to the state who want to learn more about WDFW's wildlife areas and recreational opportunities.

Information on vehicle-use permits, which are required when using a designated access site on WDFW wildlife lands, is also included on the site along with the department's public conduct rules. The conduct rules were enacted earlier this year to protect fish and wildlife habitat, ensure public safety and promote responsible use of public lands.

WDFW oversees approximately 900,000 acres of public land divided into 32 designated wildlife areas across the state. The lands are managed to protect fish and wildlife species, preserve habitat and provide recreational opportunities for the public. The department also maintains more than 150 water access sites, which provide boating access to lakes, rivers and marine areas in or near state wildlife areas.

FEDERAL DUCK STAMP

Everyone who enjoys watching birds and wants to protect the land that they need can participate in conserving their habitats. The cost is \$15 a year and is one of the easiest ways for birders and those who enjoy other wildlife to protect habitat.

Since 1934, stamp sales have contributed to wetland and grassland conservation, providing habitat for waterfowl and other species that live in and visit wetlands and grasslands. Today, 90 cents of every dollar goes into a fund to purchase or lease these habitats. To date, more than \$700 million has protected more than 6 million acres in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Do your part today to make sure that birds you enjoy have the land that they need

Books

PRISCILLA'S PICKS

Wandering Through Winter by Edwin Way Teale
Edwin Teale, a literary naturalist, wrote four books about the 100,000 mile multi-year journey he and his wife took that crisscrossed America and its seasons. The series is entitled *The American Seasons* which began in the early 1950's and spanned two decades. The four books include *North With the Spring*, *Autumn Across America*, *Journey Into Summer*, and the last in the series, *Wandering Through Winter* which is the story of a 20,000 mile leisurely journey from Southern California to northern Maine during the winter months. They are just as enjoyable to read today as they were fifty years ago because unlike so many things today, natural history is not dated. In the four books, Teale takes his readers off the beaten paths and onto a grand tour of the natural history of our country.

Whatever You Do, Don't Run by Peter Allison

For a lighthearted diversion from the wintery weather, this book will make you laugh. It is a collection of true tales about Allison's adventures as a wildlife safari guide in Africa. In a place where the wrong behavior could get you eaten, he survived face-to-face encounters with big cats, angry elephants, and the world's most unpredictable animals—herds of untamed tourists and foolhardy guides whose outrageous antics sometimes make them even more dangerous than a pride of hungry lions. This book is full of humor and genuine love and respect for Botswana and its rich wildlife.

NOAH STRYCKER'S ANTARTICA BLOG

<http://noahstrycker.com/blog>

From November through February, Noah is living and working in a field camp on remote Cape Crozier, Antarctica, with two other researchers and several hundred thousand penguins. They are doing a research project focused on population dynamics of the adelie penguin. Adverse weather, cramped conditions, and isolation are usual. His blog covers day-to-day life on earth's driest, coldest, windiest, most southerly continent. Log on to his site and follow this amazing account of life in Antarctica.

Noah is a 22-year-old recent graduate of Oregon State University in Fisheries and Wildlife. He is an Associate Editor of *Birding* magazine, columnist known as BirdBoy in *WildBird* magazine, and a passionate birder, artist, and photographer.

In the Field

Sheila Zangar called me the first of December to tell me about birds she has been seeing south of Dayton. The most exciting was a **spruce grouse**. It was near the Tipi trailhead near Oregon Butte. Closer to their home, she reported flocks of 15-20 **Clark's nutcrackers** all during the month of November. She also had 20 or more **evening grosbeaks** for several days, and saw two **golden eagles** while out hiking. **Rough-legged hawks** have returned to the area. She wanted us to know that **wild turkeys** are still around in large numbers even if they were hard to come by on the November Turkey Trot.



Aletha Werner called on December 1 to report a **barred owl** in her yard. We went right over and Rodger got this great photo. Barred owls are rare in Walla Walla County, although

they are beginning to expand their territory into the lower elevations of Eastern Washington.

Patty Froke has a **barn owl** living in one of their outbuildings on Jasper Mountain Road. Also, she has seen two **great horned owls** up and down the road from their house in December.

Shirley Muse watched a **merlin** checking out the birds in her yard on December 3. It was still around during Christmas Bird Count week.

Mike and MerryLynn, Rodger and I surveyed birds of prey in northern Umatilla County on December 7. We have participated in this survey, which is sponsored by the East Cascades Bird Conservancy, for four years during the winter months. It rained most of the day so our visibility was less than ideal. We saw 150 **red-tailed hawks** (including 3 Harlan's and a Krider's), 45 **kestrels**, 4 **rough-legged hawks**, 4 **northern harriers**, 2 **prairie falcons**, 1 **ferruginous hawk**, 1 **Cooper's hawk** and 1 **great horned owl**.

On December 7, while he was out running on Mill Creek, Chris Howard watched a **pileated woodpecker** as it flew across the trail. He also came across a **sharp-shinned hawk** along the Bennington Lake trail.

Several people reported birds to me on December 11. MerryLynn found a **marsh wren** at the Wal-Mart ponds. She also saw several **yellow-rumped warblers**. George Jameson checked out the ponds on South Wilbur and found **hooded mergansers**, **wood ducks**, **wigeons**, **mallards** and a **kingfisher**. Pam Fisher's yard was full of **pine siskins**, **goldfinches**, **house finches**, **house sparrows**, **song sparrows** and **crows**. Then a **sharp-shinned hawk** came in and quickly cleared the yard.

Nat Drumheller saw two **eastern bluejays** flying between Sturm and Lowell Streets on December 10. On the 12th he walked Bennington Lake and found two **long-eared owls** in the junipers on the east side and a very late **MacGillivray's warbler** along the trail in the dense shrubs.



December 14 was the Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count. Thirty people braved the cold and deep snow to scour the 15 mile circle in search of birds

(that were in search of food!) Some areas were not covered because the roads were impassible, but total numbers for both species (79) and individual birds (16,481) counted were high. Highlights of the count were 2 **golden eagles**, 2 **bald eagles**, 74 **hooded mergansers**, 6 **merlin**, 6 **Wilson's snipe**, 1 **pileated woodpecker**, 80 **gray-crowned rosy finches**, 2 **Cassin's finches** and 10 **evening grosbeaks**. You can find a complete results for the past four years on the website. www.blumtn.org Our thanks goes to MerryLynn Denny for all of her work organizing the count and compiling the results.



December 15 was very cold so I watched birds from inside the house. Many birds were at the feeders and in the brush pile so our neighborhood **sharp-shinned hawk** had plenty to eat. Later in the day a **female northern harrier** swooped into the brush pile and took a **California quail**. We rarely have harriers in the yard, and I've never seen one take a quail before. She returned the next morning, and Rodger was able to get some nice photos.

Nat Drumheller braved the cold weather to walk Bennington Lake on December 16 where he was rewarded with two **northern goshawks**.

At least one **eastern blue jay** was still around on December 18. Pam Fisher saw it at her feeder in the morning. After that it became a regular visitor, coming in daily for a meal. She lives in the same general area where one had been spotted earlier by Nat Drumheller and Mary Patton.



Photo by Pam Fisher

Shirley's grandson (who lives near the Worm Ranch) had three **yellow-headed blackbirds** in his yard on December 18.

There was a break in the snow on December 20 so Mike and MerryLynn headed up to the Clyde area to look for **Lapland longspurs**. They found two of them in with several hundred **horned larks**. When they got home they found a **Harris's sparrow** under their spruce tree.

Sheila Zangar called on December 21 to report a young **northern goshawk** in their yard. It had been there about a week - enjoying meals of tasty quail. **Red-crossbills** have also started to come into their trees.

Brooke Davey's yard birds on December 21 included **goldfinches**, **juncos**, a **Bewick's wren**, a **song sparrow**, **mourning doves**, **house finches**, **chickadees** and of course **house sparrows**.

Mike Kearbey watched 11 **tundra swans** flying west down the Walla Walla River near Whitman Mission on December 24. In the same area he also saw 23 **quail** cozied up on a fence line trying to keep warm and a beautiful **rough-legged hawk**.

We had an **evening grosbeak** come into the yard on Christmas Day looking for something to eat. The weather in December has made it difficult for birds to find food - and difficult for us to get to our backyard feeders. The warmer weather and rain will help, but it still will be important to keep feeders full and water unfrozen.

Happy New Year to everyone.
Ginger

(Ya Shoulda Been There..... from Page 2)

At the potluck that night, the usual festive counting up of species was a grim affair. Many frostbitten appendages and not many birds to report. The most abundant species seen was northern shovelers, which, as explained, did not refer to birds but all of the people trying to clean off their driveways and sidewalks. Those birds that were seen, befitting the cold, the snow and the season, were: tundra swans, snow buntings, snowy egrets, arctic terns, snowy owl, winter wrens, northern shrikes, snowy plover, boreal owl, arctic warblers, Aleutian terns, and a red-billed tropic bird. Okay, maybe the tropic bird was a questionable call, but the others were no brainers. Which is what it took (i.e., the absence of brains) to go out in that weather to look for birds (most of whom had the good sense to be much further south).

I have it on good authority that it will be much warmer for the next Christmas count, which is scheduled for August 22. You should plan to attend.

Board of Directors

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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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