



The Magpiper

April, 2009

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April Calendar

April 7, 14, 21, 28
9:00 a.m.
Bennington Lake Walk
(weather permitting)

April 9
7:00 p.m.
Board meeting
219 Newell Street

April 16
7:30 p.m.
Membership Meeting
Whitman College

April 18
8:00 a.m. HJT parking lot
Field Trip: Early Arrivals

Field Trip Information

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

Bring plenty of food and water. Trips will be all-day unless otherwise stated.

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: April 16, 7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

WHALES AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN ECUADOR

Jim Lehmann, President of the non-profit Foundation for Center for Research of Whales, will present a program outlining the current situation regarding whales along Ecuador's coast, focusing on current issues regarding the environment as well as whale research. Many environmental issues that Ecuador is challenged with are identical to what other third world nations are dealing with. By educating the communities in which these challenges occur, there is hope that the next generation of community leaders will become more appreciative and aware of their rich eco-system.

The foundation's main focus is to provide resources, advice and help to encourage environmental education to Ecuador's children. Their second focus is to support environmental research associated with the establishment of a baseline of knowledge and a preservation of this knowledge within the Ecuador ecosystem.

Jim and the other directors of the foundation all have backgrounds in education and have put this knowledge to work helping the children of Ecuador become more aware of their environment.

Field Trips

Saturday, April 18—8:00 a.m.

EARLY ARRIVALS

April brings a big change in bird activity for the Walla Walla area. Joe Corvino will lead a trip to look for spring birds that have returned to the county. Will the ospreys be on the platform on McDonald Road and along the Walla Walla River? Will the red-tailed hawks leave the Swainson's hawks some of the good nest sites? Will we find all six species of swallows that nest here? Will American avocets, black-necked stilts, greater yellowlegs and cinnamon teal be on the mudflats and wetlands along the Columbia River? Will we find great horned owl chicks? Join Joe for the answers to these questions and more. Call if you plan to attend. [529-8567](tel:529-8567)

Saturday, May 2—8:00 a.m.

BLUEBIRDS AND MORE

Tom Scribner will lead a trip to check on the bluebirds south of Pomeroy. More information will be available in the May issue of the *Magpiper*.



President's Corner

GULL ABLE

As told by Tom Scribner

A recent BMAS field trip, led by uber-birders Mike and Merry Lynn, proved two things. **First**, you can have too much of a good thing. **Second**, ain't no way an average birder can ever identify gulls with the same degree of confidence that you can identify, say, hawks. (And I have been known to call a Swainson's a red-tail. Heck, I call every buteo a red-tail. Ninety-five percent of the time I'm right. Makes me look like I know what I'm talking about.) Come to think of it, the Mike and Merry Lynn field trip proved three things. The **third** being that we should never believe everything we're told. Even if the teller is Mike Denny. Let us examine these three proofs in order.

First, too much of a good thing. As in 40, count 'em, 40, people showed up for the Denny-led field trip. Granted, some of them were members of a local photography club, but still, 40 people means that even with car pooling (which didn't really happen), you are going to have one helluva long line of cars heading west on US 12 toward the Walla Walla River delta and the poop piles. (More about the poop piles later.)

Now I know that to facilitate communication between cars when on a field trip, two-way radios are used. But when 15 cars get stretched out over two miles or so of road, ain't no way Wal-Mart special two-way radios are gonna work. There is gonna be distortion, the message is gonna get garbled, and folks are not gonna understand what is being said - - or seen - - up ahead. To wit, and this, I am told, is a true account of one such failed attempt to convey the message "down line."

Car 1: "On the telephone pole to the right, a red-tailed hawk."

Car 2: "Did he say he heard a squawk?"

Car 3: "Walk? We're gonna walk? Where?"

Car 4: "A bear! They saw a bear? Wow!"

Car 5: "A cow? They're telling us they saw a cow? This is supposed to be a birding trip. What about that red-tail on the pole back there?"

So it went, all day. Someone saw a say's phoebe, and the third car in line heard someone say he needed to pee. Yes, you can have too much of a good thing.

Second, gulls. Don't go there. Don't even try to go there. Sibley, Peterson, National Geographic, it doesn't matter, you are not going to be able to identify gulls. Okay, small hooded gulls (as in their heads are black) I can distinguish from those gulls without hoods. But how about we bet, say, \$100, you can distinguish a first-year Herring gull from a first-year Thayer's gull from a first-year California gull? Or how about a glaucous-winged gull from a glaucous gull? Not hard enough? How about a second-year western gull from a second-year slaty-backed gull from a second-year yellow-footed gull? And who's to say you could bat even .250 distinguishing a Laughing gull from a Franklin's gull from a Sabine's gull? You can't. And when the buggers are all grouped together, flying and spinning and diving and twisting in a white/gray/black feathery mass of blurred shapes, you might as well put away your binoculars and go home for the day. There is a reason some people are couch potatoes, and it has nothing to do with the love of baseball.

Which takes me to proof the **third**. Some of us are pretty "gull-able." As in, while at the poop piles (trust me, we're getting to the poop piles) a huge congregation of the aforementioned gulls were seen swirling and swirling in a clockwise fashion. Which led someone to comment on this phenomenon: "Look, they're all rotating in the same direction. Why is that?" At which point, uber-birder Mike, never one to pass up an opportunity to see just how much he can get away with, explained to the assembled multitude that these were northern hemisphere gulls and, like water escaping a toilet bowl, rotated clockwise. "If we were in South America," he said, "they would rotate counter-clockwise." And here's the thing. Most everybody believed him. Until, that is, some of the gulls decided to fly against type (and the pull of the earth's rotation, I guess) and started to swirl counter-clockwise. Which led someone to comment on this phenomenon. Which led Mike to act all excited, explaining that maybe these birds were recent arrivals, hence exotics, from South America. Forty pairs of binoculars were instantly raised to forty pairs of eyes, and forty bird books got opened to the gull section seeking to find if maybe, just maybe, there was some new life bird to be seen. A rare visitor from Argentina or Chile, perhaps. Mike played it for as long as he could, but pretty soon folks figured out they were not getting all the truth. At least some of them did. Rumor has it that there were, at various dining room tables around town that evening, some newly minted bird experts who regaled friends and family with an explanation of how North America birds, at least those at the famous poop piles, circle clockwise, just like water going out of a toilet bowl. All of this over the dining room table, mind you.

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Spotlight on Nature

MONARCH BUTTERFLY MIGRATION

From <http://enature.com>



Monarch butterflies are famous for their annual migration. Some of these insects travel thousands of miles each fall—an astonishing distance for such fragile creatures.

Yet few people realize that the monarchs we see in the spring are not necessarily the same ones that fluttered past in the fall.

After wintering in Mexico by the millions, the monarchs become active again in February. Mating begins and the first warm days of late March trigger their northern flight. These butterflies are now eight months old. They fan out across the southern United States looking for milkweed plants on which to deposit their eggs. Four days later the eggs hatch, producing small caterpillars that immediately begin to feed on the milkweed leaves. Within 10-15 days each caterpillar stops feeding and forms its chrysalis. In another 10-15 days the chrysalis splits open and a new monarch emerges.

This generation of butterflies mates, lays eggs, and dies within a span of a few weeks. During this time it moves north, following the progress of spring and the emergence of milkweed. By the end of summer, two more of these short-lived generations will have repeated the process, ultimately coming to inhabit the milkweed patches in the far north latitudes.

Thus the monarchs born in the far north are the great grandchildren of the last monarchs to inhabit the area. These are the ones that will head south in the fall. They are significantly larger than the three generations that preceded them and still sexually immature. Rather than mate and lay eggs, they seek out nectar-producing flowers. The nectar serves two purposes: some of it fuels the southward migration, and some of it is converted to fat reserves that sustain the butterflies through the winter.

This incredible annual cycle applies to all monarchs in North America. Populations east of the Rockies fly from southern Canada to central Mexico at the rate of approximately 50 miles per day. The population west of the Rockies moves from the Great Basin to overwintering sites along the Pacific Coast.

Bird of the Month

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*



Size: 23 inches

Wingspan: 54 inches

Photo by Rodger Shoemake

The osprey, sometimes known as the sea hawk, is a large fish-eating bird of prey. It is brown on the upperparts and predominantly white on the head and under parts with a dark mask across the eyes.

Osprey are found in a wide variety of habitats, nesting in any location near a body of water providing an adequate food supply. They are found in temperate and tropical regions of all continents except Antarctica, although in South America they occur only as a non-breeding migrant.

An osprey's diet consists almost exclusively of fish. Prey is first sighted when the osprey is anywhere from 20 to 130 feet above the water, after which the bird hovers momentarily then plunges feet first into the water. It is able to dive to a depth of over three feet. After catching the fish considerable effort is needed to get airborne again. As it rises back into flight the fish is turned head-forward to reduce drag. Occasionally, they may prey on other wetland animals.

The nest is a large heap of sticks, and other materials built in the fork of a tree, utility pole or artificial platform. They begin breeding around the age of three or four years and they usually mate for life. In the spring the pair begins a five-month period of partnership to raise their young. The female lays 2-4 eggs and relies on the size of the nest to conserve heat. The eggs are incubated for about five weeks. The young fledge in 8 to 10 weeks. The typical lifespan of an osprey is 20-25 years.

North American osprey migrate to South America in the winter. However, some now stay in the southernmost states such as California. April will bring them back to the Walla Walla Valley. They nest along several rivers and creeks in our area. There are several man-made platforms along the Walla Walla River and on McDonald Road where they have nested in the past. Although they do not nest at Bennington Lake, it is a favorite fishing spot for them and they can be regularly viewed there, especially in the spring and early fall.

Conservation

FERRUGINOUS HAWKS IN DEEP TROUBLE IN JUNIPER DUNES

By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair

I recently learned that the BLM is attempting to start protection of the 7,700 acre Juniper Dune Wilderness in southern Franklin Co.. In 1980 when this wilderness was designated there were 17 nesting pair of Ferruginous Hawks. Today there are 4 nesting pair left. This wilderness area is a BLM Wilderness set aside to protect the Ferruginous Hawk population.

Between 1982 and now this once beautiful dune complex has been completely demolished by ATV riders who do not and will not police themselves. They will not stay out of this wilderness area. The BLM has completely buckled to the ORV/ATV users demands and has utterly failed to protect the Ferruginous hawks in the area or the habitat of this dune system. That is until this March when a very brave BLM biologist actually was able to get part of the limited access area closed from March 15 through August 30, 2009 so that the Ferruginous Hawks can nest undisturbed peace.

The Spokane office of the BLM needs to hear from all of us about upholding protection for this rare and amazing place.

So please take the time to leave a message with the BLM in Spokane about their responsibility to uphold and protect the natural resources of the Juniper Dunes Wilderness. Please do it for the Ferruginous Hawks and the northern most Western Juniper trees in The Pacific Northwest.

For more information on the internet go to the BLM Spokane Office:

<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/spokane>

VICTORY FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES

By a vote of 52-42 the U.S. Senate voted to include language in the omnibus appropriations bill that helps restore protections for endangered species. As you may recall, in an 11th hour rule change, the Bush Administration removed important scientific safeguards from the Endangered Species Act. The provision will make it easier to overturn the ill-conceived Bush-era rule. Most importantly, this signals that Congress has reaffirmed its support for a strong Endangered Species Act.

GARDENERS' GUIDE TO GLOBAL WARMING

Excerpts from NWF website

Although the predictions for global warming are dire, they are not inevitable. Global warming and its impacts will be significantly lessened if we start now on a path to reduce our global warming pollution.

As gardeners, we are both guardians and stewards of our environment, and it is important for us to realize that there are many simple and thoughtful ways we can work with nature to solve the problem.

Some of the actions recommended by NWF are :

1. Reduce the use of gasoline-powered yard tools.
2. Reduce the threat of invasive species expansion.
3. Incorporate a diversity of native plants in your landscape.
4. Reduce water consumption.
5. Compost kitchen and garden waste.
6. Plant lots of trees to absorb carbon dioxide.

Global warming means far more than hotter temperatures. Left unchecked, it will rapidly and irreparably disrupt our planet's climate system, causing average temperatures and precipitation patterns to change and exacerbating weather extremes such as heat waves, heavy downpours, storms and droughts.

Changes in climate due to global warming will no doubt create some enormous new challenges for gardeners, given the strong relationship between our garden plants and climatic variables such as temperature and rainfall. As numerous studies show, any potential benefits from a longer growing season will only be out-matched by a host of problems—from watering restrictions and damaging storms, to the expansion of unruly weeds, garden pests, and plant diseases.

Fortunately, solutions are readily at hand. Everyone can play an important role in combating global warming, restoring and protecting native species and habitats, and ensuring that the plants, animals, and other wonderful things our natural world provides us will endure for our children's future, and in fact, generations to come.

For more information go to National Wildlife Federation's website <http://www.nwf.org/gardenerguide>

Miscellaneous

CONDOS FOR BURROWING OWLS

Bird Watcher's Digest—Mar/Apr 09

At the U.S. Army's Umatilla chemical Depot in northeast Oregon, the Army environmental staff, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and local volunteers have partnered to construct artificial underground nesting sites for burrowing owls, a species of conservation concern in the region.



*Photo by
Rodger Shoemake*

New owl burrows are made from modern materials (wide plastic pipes, barrels, and buckets) that mimic desirable features of abandoned badger dens, including the prerequisite darkness and dirt floors. Six clusters of three "condos" each—18 units—have already been created with the owls immediately responding favorably to over two-thirds of them.

A similar project at the U.S. Department of Energy's Hanford Site inspired this effort, and it is hoped that these examples will encourage others to do likewise.

U.S. STATE OF THE BIRDS REPORT

From Audubon Advisory March 19, 2009

The Interior Department unveiled its first ever U.S. State of the Birds report in March, building upon years of Audubon's own State of the Birds reports. It tracks sobering declines in bird populations and calls for improved conservation measures that have proven to work for birds rescued from extinction.

Data from three continent-wide monitoring programs were gathered to create bird population indicators for all the major U.S. habitats, reflecting the health of those habitats and the environmental services they provide.

Audubon is encouraged by the U.S. government's stepped-up emphasis on bird conservation. We welcome the report's call for improved habitat conservation and policy measures that will diminish the negative impacts of global warming.

Books

PRISCILLA'S PICKS

John Muir And His Legacy by Stephen Fox

Stephen Fox's book is a biography of perhaps the most legendary woodsman in American history, John Muir. It was the first work to make unrestricted use of all of Muir's manuscripts and personal papers. In addition, it is a history of the century-old fight to save the natural environment. Fox traces the conservation movement's diverse, colorful, and tumultuous history, from the successful campaign to establish Yosemite National Park in 1890 to the movement's present-day concerns.

The book is both a fascinating biography of America's foremost wilderness defender and a penetrating historical examination of the impassioned individuals and vigilant organizations that have carried on the movement he began.

Refuge by Terry Tempest Williams

In the spring of 1983 Terry Tempest Williams learned that her mother was dying of cancer. That same spring, Great Salt Lake began to rise to record heights, threatening the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge and with it the herons, burrowing owls, and snowy egrets that Williams, a poet and naturalist, had come to gauge her life by. One event was nature at its most random, the other a by-product of rogue technology: Terry's mother, and Terry herself, had been exposed to the fallout of atomic bomb tests in the 1950s. As it interweaves these narratives of dying and accommodation, *Refuge* transforms tragedy into a document of renewal and spiritual grace.

Refuge has become one of the most significant environmental essays of our time, as well as a record of loss, healing grace, and the search for a human place in nature's large design.

SAGE AND SUN BIRDING LOOP

On February 19, the latest loop of the Great Washington State Birding Trail was unveiled in Olympia. This loop covers the entire southern portion of Eastern Washington from the Cascades on the west, to the Columbia River on the south and the Blue Mountains on the east. There are 53 sites on the route including 15 sites in the Tri-Cities/Walla Walla area. The map contains information about habitat, bird species, access and best seasons bird birding.

The Sun and Sage Loop of the Great Washington State Birding Trail was developed and funded by Audubon Washington, the Washington State Department of Transportation and individual contributors. The new map can be ordered online at wa.audubon.org.

In the Field

Earl Blackaby emailed me on February 27 to tell me about his busy back yard. He saw house finches, black-capped chickadees, red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, pheasants, juncos, white-crowned sparrows, varied thrush, robins and red-winged blackbirds. He also mentioned that a great blue heron often is around checking out his covered fish pond.

Our walking group saw western bluebirds at Bennington Lake on March 3. They were right along the trail on the east side. More flew over March 10.

On March 4, MerryLynn Denny saw a merlin checking out the birds at her feeders.



I think one of the prettiest birds we have here during the winter months is the male hooded merganser. John Lundak took this photo of one on Mill Creek

near Rooks Park on March 7.

George and Deanna Jameson saw a yellow-shafted flicker while walking their dogs at the Sports Park on March 7.

A sure sign of spring is seeing sandhill cranes. On March 7, Melissa Webster watched about 40 of them flying high above her while walking Mill Creek. Over 200 of them were spotted by a Seattle birder the same day flying over the Walla Walla River Delta.

Mike and MerryLynn found an Iceland gull and a Bonaparte's gull at the Delta on March 8.

There were 8 great blue herons near the rookery at Rooks Park on March 12. Some of them were on nests. On March 13, Jon Lundak saw an unusual sight—a pair of great horned owls nesting in the middle of the heron rookery at Rooks Park.

Mike and MerryLynn found violet green swallows, trumpeter and tundra swans and gray-crowned rosy finches while birding the west part of the county

on March 14. They also saw two ferruginous hawks on Byrnes Road.

On March 15, four of us tried to go up Jasper Mountain to work on the bluebird boxes. We were not able to reach the area where the boxes are due to deep, wet snow in the road. After our failed attempt to reach the boxes, we retreated to Patty and Clint Froke's place for some hot cider. We enjoyed watching birds at their feeders from the warmth of their home. Thank you Patty and Clint for your hospitality. Hopefully we will get up the mountain later in the month to clean out the boxes before the bluebirds start to nest. We did see three great horned owls, several red-tailed hawks and a pair of spotted towhees in route.

Paul Rossi had three red-crossbills fly over his house on March 17.

Also on March 17, George Jameson saw a Say's phoebe near his house when he went out to the mailbox.

Pam Fisher saw a pair of pileated woodpeckers along Mill Creek near Rooks Park on March 18. She also saw a mink scurrying along the rocks.

On March 19, Sharon Cline reported the violet-green swallows had returned to downtown Walla Walla. It's a sure sign of spring when the swallows return!



Photo by George Jameson

MerryLynn and I went out looking for new arrivals on March 19. We found three long-billed curlews on Lamdin Road.

We also saw three trumpeter swans at McNary NWR.

On March 23, MerryLynn walked the Natural Area and reported many down trees from the recent wind storms. She saw a Cooper's hawk chasing five red-tailed hawks, three wood ducks and a spotted towhee—plus the usual chickadees and Bewick's wrens.

Patty Froke reported on March 25 that the barn swallows have returned to their place on Jasper Mountain Road. Also, she found a dead coot in her pasture. It appeared to

have just dropped out of the sky—no signs of it being shot or taken by a predator.

Our Bennington Lake walk on March 25 was cold and rainy. New arrivals were a **Say's phoebe**, four **violet-green swallows**, and two **meadowlarks**. A male **northern harrier** put on a great courtship show—soaring, twisting and diving in mid-air. Four **wild turkeys** were foraging along the tree line on the east side of the lake. They are rarely seen at Bennington.

Migration is on so April will bring more birds back to nest. Let me know what you are seeing as spring comes to the Walla Walla Valley. Email me at housewren@blumtn.org or call [525-2963](tel:525-2963).

Thanks! *Ginger Shoemake*

SPRING MIGRATION DATES

Arrival dates for all of the spring migrants in Walla Walla County have been compiled by MerryLynn Denny. Below is a partial list of the birds and their *average* arrival date. The complete list can be found on the Blue Mountain Audubon website www.blumtn.org

March 16-31

Northern rough-winged swallow
Cliff swallow
American avocet
Black-necked stilt

April 1-15

Osprey
Swainson's hawk
Cinnamon teal
Barn swallow

Calliope hummingbird

April 16-30

Bank swallow
House wren
Black-chinned hummingbird
Rufous hummingbird
Western kingbird
Yellow warbler

May 1-15

Yellow-breasted chat
Black-headed grosbeak
Lazuli bunting
Bullock's oriole
Western wood peewee

May 16-31

Eastern kingbird
Gray catbird
Willow flycatcher
Veery

GULL ABLE *continued from Page 2*

Which takes us to the poop piles. Wanna know one of the best places in Walla Walla County to look for birds? Yup, the poop piles, those long windrows of offal, and blood, and manure, and ground up body parts from Tyson Foods, mixed together with who knows what from the Boise plant, left to ferment, and age, and turn into soil conditioner. Not to mention food for lots of birds, particularly gulls. You've seen them, while on your way to the Tri-Cities (out shopping at Columbia Center Mall), hundreds, if not thousands, of gulls flying over (clockwise, remember) and perched on the long rounded piles of poop. A birding mecca. Granted, not the sort of thing you'd advertise if you were going to sell birding trips for the unsuspecting. But if you want to see birds, ya gotta go where the birds are. And if you are crazy enough to want to look at and try to identify gulls, it is the poop piles. Walla Walla County's answer to the Salton Sea (which, I am told, ain't much to look at, and smells even worse).

We lived in Tucson, Arizona before moving to Walla Walla. Want to guess what one of the best places in the Tucson area was to look for birds? You got it, the Tucson sewage treatment plant. Human poop piles. My first, second, fourth and sixth vermilion flycatchers were seen at the Tucson sewage treatment plant. My first and third phainopeplas were seen there. I met Ted Parker, the Ted Parker, at the Tucson sewage treatment plant. Not to mention one Christmas count when we saw a rufous-backed robin. Or at least that's what I thought I heard the guy in the car ahead of me say while using his two-way radio.

All of which proves, I guess, that if ya gotta go, be first in line.

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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