



Blue Mountain Audubon Society

The Magpiper

September, 2009

September Calendar

Sept. 10

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

Sept. 17

Membership Meeting
7:30 p.m.
Whitman College

Sept. 19

Field Trip—Hawk Watch
8:00 a.m.
Harper Joy Theatre
Parking Lot

Field Trip Information

Trips depart from Harper Joy Theatre parking lot on Whitman College Campus unless otherwise specified.

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: September 17—7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

PROGRAM: BIRDING THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

In April of 2009, Mike and MerryLynn Denny spent five days birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. They visited such “hot spots” as Estero Llano Grande State Park, Frontera Audubon, Laguna Atascosa State Park and South Padre Island. They saw over 250 species of birds including easy to find painted bunting, great kiskadee, buff-bellied hummingbird and black-bellied whistling duck. They also saw several rare birds including Aplomado falcon and blue bunting.



Mike will share their experiences with all of us who dream of visiting this birding paradise and those lucky ones who have already been to south Texas. He will show us some of the many photos that they took to further entice us to make the trip.

Black-bellied whistling ducks standing on a roof in Weslaco, TX

Photo by MerryLynn Denny

Field Trip

Saturday, September 19—8:00 a.m.

HAWK WATCH ON BALD MOUNTAIN

You’ve probably heard about hawk watches in the fall at places like Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania. Well, Blue Mountain Audubon is going to hold our own hawk watch—on Bald Mountain (which is north of Tollgate on the road to Jubilee Lake). Bring a chair, your binoculars, plenty of food, and join us in our search for migrating hawks. We are hoping to see and count red-tailed hawks, Cooper’s hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, turkey vultures, kestrels, goshawks, and more. Since this is the first time we’ve tried this, we are not sure what we will actually see, but it should be a fun day in the mountains even if we don’t see that many hawks. And, if we are successful, it could become an annual event! Call Ginger Shoemake if you plan to attend. 525-2963



President's Corner

JIZ WHIZ

By Tom Scribner

If you have ever had the pleasure of birding with Shirley Muse, you have been introduced to the concept of Jiz. According to Shirley, Jiz is or means . . . well, it is a difficult term to define. Nevertheless, different birds have different and identifiable Jiz, depending on which, we can better distinguish one species from another. All of which reminds me of Potter Stewart, a former Justice on the United States Supreme Court, who famously said, in a case involving pornography, that he could not define it, but he knew it when he saw it. Jiz, I guess, is something like that.

Except I recently did some research and have found, at least according to one author, what Jiz means or is. The term comes from the expression: "general inferences from size and shape." The acronym of which is: GISS, which, of course, is pronounced "Jiz."

So there you have it. We have different general inferences about a bird's size and shape (and probably habitat and behavior, not to overlook color) and use such to help us identify birds. Which, in certain situations, works pretty darn well, thank you. But not in all situations. Therein lies my problem with the utility of Jiz as an identification aid. Let me explain.

A great blue heron has an unmistakable Jiz. So does a California quail. And without needing the actual bird in hand, we can use their respective Jiz to assist in our identification. Well, duh! Who couldn't? But what about, say, sparrows? Ain't no general inference from size or shape (or habitat or color) that is going to help you to distinguish among or identify a Brewer's sparrow from a Grasshopper sparrow from a clay-colored sparrow. As for flycatchers, you need Jiz, David Allen Sibley, and a lot of self-confidence. And you'd probably still be wrong half of the time.

So that is my critique of the utility of Jiz in bird identification. It is okay, even useful, with

species that are easy for even us novice birders. But for birds that are pretty close in size and shape, Jiz just doesn't cut it. Not only that, it has similarly limited utility with other animal identification, particularly with *Homo sapiens*. I mean, if this Jiz thing works with birds, why not with humans? Except it doesn't, at least not all the time.

Now before you dismiss my argument, consider this. If Jiz is a useful tool in bird identification, and Shirley swears it is, why wouldn't/shouldn't it serve a similar purpose in picking out your friend, or your kid, or your spouse in a crowd? Why can't we make general inferences about somebody's size and shape and use that to help us pick out the real perp in a police lineup? "Yes, officer, that's the one. I can tell by his Jiz."

I suppose this would work if the five guys (or gals) in the lineup were markedly different in their shape or size, but if they all looked pretty much the same, Jiz is not gonna get the job done. Let me illustrate. (Guys, you are going to like this illustration.)

Let's say two women are walking across the street a hundred yards or so in front of you. Let's say that one is Dolly Parton and the other is Twiggy. Using Jiz, are you going to be able to tell them apart? Of course you are. Dolly Parton has an unmistakable and much appreciated Jiz. And what a Jiz it is. But let's say that you've got a roomful (you lucky dog, you) of Miss America contestants and you need to find, oh, Miss New Jersey. These women are all going to look (and act) pretty much the same. Heck, they are all members of the same species: *Bimbosus siliconenia*. Jiz ain't gonna help. Relying on general inferences from size and shape will leave you with a roomful of look-alike beauty queens and, at least in my situation, fogged up glasses. (At this point I have to tell one of my favorite sexist jokes. Q: How do you tell he prostitute at the Miss America pageant? A: She is the one with the sash that says "I DA HO.")

So there you have it: what Jiz is and how it is and is not useful in bird identification. You can use it on your next field trip. I plan to spend my time looking for Dolly Parton.

Spotlight on Nature

MIGRATION

Excerpts from Scott Weidensaul's book

Living on the Wind

Bird migration is the only truly unifying natural phenomenon in the world, stitching the continents together in a way that even the great weather systems, which road out from the poles but fizzle at the equator, fail to do. It is an enormously complex subject, perhaps the most compelling drama in all of natural history. That such delicate creatures undertake these epic journeys defies belief.

Because they travel such extraordinary distances, often with differing requirements for food and shelter along the way, migratory birds pose one of the stickiest conservation challenges in the world. In the past, preservation programs focused on saving breeding areas, but experts now realize they must also save wintering grounds and migratory stopovers if this global web isn't to unravel.

Today the biggest threats to migratory birds do not come from the barrel of a gun, nor are they easily cured by passing laws. They arise from habitat loss and the wholesale environmental changes we have imposed on the natural world. Laws like the federal Endangered Species Act provide last-ditch support for almost-extinct birds, but conservationists now realize the smartest approach is to recognize the trouble early and try to stabilize populations while they are still relatively common. This recognition, coupled with an impending sense of crisis, has sparked an unprecedented international conservation effort, involving virtually every county and North, Central, and South America in research, education, and habitat protection.

As we say good bye to the summer birds in the Walla Walla Valley, I hope you will all take time to marvel at the journey they are about to begin to reach their wintering grounds far to the south. We wish all of them a safe journey and we'll look forward to seeing them all again next spring.

Bird of the Month

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER

Dendroica coronata



Photo by George Jameson

Size: 5.5 inches
Description:
fairly large, full-bodied warbler with a large head, sturdy bill and long, narrow tail.

One of the first migrants to arrive in the spring are yellow-rumped warblers. Although they breed in the Blue Mountains' coniferous forests, by early September they will return to our valley (sometimes in large flocks) and will remain throughout the fall before migrating south. A few even winter over here if the weather is not too severe.

Of course the easiest field mark for these pretty little warblers is their yellow rump patch. They also can be identified by their yellow throat patch and broken eye ring. The male in breeding plumage is a dazzling mix of bright yellow, charcoal gray, black and bold white. Females and juveniles are a dull brownish-gray with brown streaking on the front and back. Non breeding birds are also somewhat drab in color. In the fall they forage in shrubby habitats, parks and even residential areas. Their distinctive sharp chip is easily recognizable and is a good way to help locate them in the trees and shrubs.

Until recently the yellow rumped warbler was divided into two species—Audubon's warbler and Myrtle warbler. The easiest way to tell the difference in these two sub-species is by the Myrtle's white throat patch. The Myrtle subspecies of the yellow-rumped warbler is more commonly seen west of the mountains—particularly along the coast.

Conservation

WIND TURBINES ACROSS THE WESTERN FACE OF THE BLUES

By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair

Blue Mountain Audubon has been evolved in attempting to stop development of wind turbines proposed for the western face of the Blue Mountains. We are very concerned over the potential of high native protected bird and bat mortality on the proposed sites due to the fact that the western face of the Blue Mountains are a major migration route for hundreds of thousands of native protected song birds and bats. There are major erosion issues to consider on these steep hill sides as well.

The industrial wind industry has decided that they will no longer stay within the energy production overlay zone created by Umatilla County which precludes the western face of the Blue Mountains from wind turbines. This is because sites on the western face of the Blue Mountains have very poor wind energy resources and the wind companies have decided that they will determine where they build and not the people of the region in which they are guests.

There are many folks that do not want 400' high wind turbines all across the face of the Blue Mountains for aesthetic reasons. BMAS has never opposed wind energy sites for that reason. We are strongly opposed to these proposed wind sites because of the huge probability that the bird mortality will be large. We are very concerned with the long term cumulative impacts to migratory and resident native bird populations. It is illegal to knowingly kill native protected birds. This is not a suggestion, but the law! To get involved please contact Tamra Mabbott at the Umatilla Co. Planning Department in Pendleton.

INVASIVE NON-NATIVE FISH SPECIES IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER DRAINAGE

By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair

In the coming months you will hear more and more about the long term cumulative impacts of introduced non-native fish on ESA listed fish survival. The Washington State Biodiversity Council considers these introduced none natives to be a huge stumbling block for the long term survival of our native salmon and steelhead. Introduced fish species like Carp, Black Crappie, Walleyed Pike, Yellow Perch, Small Mouth Bass and many more have and are devouring many hundreds thousands of juvenile salmon and steelhead smolt annually. Many folks are urging an unlimited catch on these species to greatly reduce their numbers as a measure to secure our salmon and steelhead numbers for survival. We will have a short discussion on this issue at our first meeting of the year in Sept.

FEDERAL APPEALS COURT UPHOLDS ROADLESS AREA PROTECTION

From Audubon Advisory, August 12, 2009

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals last week affirmed protection for almost 50 million acres of national forests and grasslands from new road building, logging and development.

Audubon joined four states and 18 other national and regional environmental and conservation groups in successfully challenging the 2005 Bush Administration rule that would have opened millions of acres of national forests and grasslands to development.

The Roadless Rule, one of the most popular environmental rules, was originally adopted at the end of the Clinton Administration; however, the Bush administration sought to repeal it and adopt instead a rule that would have allowed the states to permit development in national forests and grasslands. Due to this recent court victory, these areas will again be off limits to development.

Miscellaneous

WANTED: ADOPT A HIGHWAY COORDINATOR

Blue Mountain Audubon Society participates in Washington State Department of Transportation's Adopt a Highway litter control program. We are responsible for a two mile section of Highway 12 from Wallula Junction east. The coordinator is responsible for recruiting BMAS members to take part in litter pick-up two times a year. WSDOT provides all the required supplies and signs. The coordinator is a member of the BMAS Board of Directors, so this is an opportunity to get more involved in the chapter in addition to doing something for the environment.

Contact **Tom Scribner** if you are interested
529-8628.

VAUX'S SWIFT FALL ROOST SURVEY

Vaux's swifts are unique to western North America. During spring and fall migration, they use communal roosts for flocks of dozens, hundreds, or even thousands. Historically these roosts were mainly in large-diameter hollow snags. With the disappearance of most ancient forests, Vaux's swifts have become more reliant on chimneys. This makes them vulnerable to disturbance of these roosting sites.

A roost survey that started with a few Audubon Society chapters in the northern Puget Sound region of western Washington has now expanded to include all of the states along the Pacific Coast. The aim is to identify and monitor as many Vaux's swift roosting sites as possible, in order to improve understanding of their population (and whether it might be declining).

If you know of a roosting site and would like to participate in this project please contact Ginger Shoemake [525-2963](tel:525-2963) or housewren@blumtn.org.

Counting will be done on Saturday evenings through the middle of September.

Books

Afield by Alan Contreras

For forty years Alan Contreras has been interested in birds and the natural history of the West. This book recounts his relationship with birds and nature from his childhood to the present time. Contreras is one of Oregon's premiere birders, so the book is primarily about his experiences in Oregon. However, it also covers trips to Alaska, Arizona, California and Texas. His love of the natural world and his unhurried observations of the land and its inhabitants gives the reader a vivid picture of the places he visits.

Contreras records his observations largely from the perspective of a lifelong birder, but he also acquaints the reader with other people including ornithologists and early explorers of the West. Those inspired to visit the locations described in his stories will be pleased to find useful information about each place. Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is one of these places, and his description of the refuge explains why it is such a special place to many of us. If you haven't experienced Malheur, you will want to go after reading his book. *Afield* will appeal to birders—and to anyone who loves the outdoors.

Prairie Spring by Pete Dunne

Life on the prairie comes to life in Pete Dunne's narrative of the journey he made with his wife Linda into America's grasslands. As spring unfolds, the Dunes move about America's heartland, stopping in Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico and South Dakota. Against the dramatic backdrop of half a million migrating cranes' cries filling the air and storms darkening the skies, he explores the natural world of the prairie and the people who inhabit it. His poetic account reminds people of their alienation from the natural world, making the case that who and what we are is grounded in the world around us, wherever we are. Birds figure prominently into the account, but *Prairie Spring* also encompasses the entire ecology and history of the American prairie. Topics range from birds to buffalo, farms to fire, wildflowers to weather.

Pete Dunne has devoted his life to connecting people with nature and is the author of numerous books. He is an avid birder and is Vice President of the New Jersey Audubon Society as well as Director of its Cape May Bird Observatory.

In the Field

It was a busy summer for birds and birders in the Walla Walla Valley. I hope you all got out to see some of the summer birds in their natural habitat. Now birds are on the move - they have nested, raised their young and are ready to head south for the winter months. Although it is time to say goodbye to the summer birds, we can look forward to welcoming birds that are here in the winter months such as white-crowned sparrows, dark-eyed juncos, Townsend's solitaires, rough-legged hawks, prairie falcons and bald eagles.

On August 4, Bennington Lake was abuzz with young birds—western wood peewees, Bullock's orioles, cedar waxwings, black-headed grosbeaks, house wrens, yellow warblers and more. And the sunflower patch on the east side of the trail was covered with house finches, goldfinches and red-winged blackbirds.

Rodger and I walked Mill Creek from K-Mart to Rooks Park on August 6. There were almost as many spotted sandpipers as killdeer on the cement. There were also both greater and lesser yellowlegs and a solitary sandpiper. Six common mergansers and one hooded merganser were the only waterfowl we saw besides mallards and canada geese. Four kingfishers stood watch along the trail and there were numerous swallows—all species. Eastern kingbirds and western wood peewees were plentiful. In Rooks Park we watched a young grey catbird being fed. The choke cherries and elderberries are loaded so this fall should bring many birds in to enjoy the bounty.



Lunch on Jasper Mountain

Mike and MerryLynn Denny led a field trip up Jasper Mountain August 8 to look for birds on the move. The cool/sunny weather was perfect - a nice change from the 100+ degree days we'd been having. We saw 59 species including some surprises. The biggest surprise was finding a solitary sandpiper at a mud hole high in the mountains. There were pygmy nuthatches at another water hole near our bluebird boxes along with western and mountain bluebirds. We saw a total of 10 species of flycatchers - western wood peewee, olive-sided flycatcher, willow flycatcher, Hammond's flycatcher, dusky flycatcher, least flycatcher, western flycatcher, gray flycatcher, eastern kingbird and western kingbird. WOW!

There were many Great Spangled Fritillary butterflies including this beautiful female that MerryLynn photographed.



We also saw MacGillivray's warblers, Wilson's warblers, orange-crowned warblers, Townsend's warblers, yellow rumped warblers and yellow warblers, red crossbills, chestnut backed chickadees, turkey vultures - the list goes on..... A great trip

I joined Mike and MerryLynn at the Northshore millet ponds on August 9 to look for shorebirds—there were lots of them! When there is water in the ponds, this can be a great spot to check for shorebirds. We saw Lesser and greater yellowlegs, solitary sandpipers, spotted sandpipers, Wilson's phalaropes, red-necked phalaropes, least and western sandpipers, long-billed dowitchers, killdeer and a Wilson's snipe. We also saw great egrets, lazuli buntings, a lark sparrow, a great blue heron, two Eurasian collared doves, a Caspian tern, western and eastern kingbirds A great horned owl startled a doe and two fawns in the cottonwoods and there was another doe and a very young fawn along the edge of the water. We stopped briefly at the Walla Walla River Delta. The water was high but we saw a sora and a Wilson's snipe

along the edge. Our last stop was the “blood pond” at Tyson Beef. There were **Baird’s sandpipers**, **semi-palmated plovers** and **killdeer** in the muck.

House finches, **goldfinches** and **red-winged blackbirds** were swarming all over the sunflower patches at Bennington Lake on August 11. There were still plenty of **western wood peewees**, **yellow warblers**, **house wrens** and **black-headed grosbeaks**, but the **Bullock’s orioles** and **western kingbirds** have already raised their young and left. **Barn swallows**, **bank swallows** and **Vaux’s swifts** were plentiful. We were pleasantly surprised to find some migrating birds. There was a **western tanager**, a **Wilson’s warbler** and a **solitary sandpiper**. However the best bird of the day was a **red-naped sapsucker**.



Red-naped sapsucker

Jon Lundak spotted a **great egret** on Mill Creek near K-Mart on August 15. Look for them along Mill Creek, the Walla Walla River and at Bennington Lake this fall.

On August 16 while riding his bike on Five Mile Road, George Jameson came across a **wild turkey** with seven very small youngsters.

More migrants were seen at Bennington Lake on August 18 including a **great egret**, six **Wilson’s warblers**, a **MacGillivray’s warbler**, a **red-eyed vireo**, a **least sandpiper**, a **Hammond’s flycatcher** and two **dusky flycatchers**.

We had another heat wave just in time for our last evening walk of the summer—this time to the Natural Area. The birds were smarter than we humans and stayed hidden in the shady tree tops and undergrowth. We heard several species but

didn’t see them. We did find three **great horned owls** in the barn and watched a **Cooper’s hawk** flying through the canopy looking for birds. It didn’t have any better luck at finding them than we did! A couple **western wood peewees** were seen flycatching and **goldfinches** flitted around. Mike Denny familiarized us all with the plants and trees and told us about the history of the Natural Area.

The three evening walks held over the summer were a great success. Many new people came out to see some of our great birds, and some of our regular members also enjoyed the leisurely evening walks. We will certainly consider doing this again next summer.

On August 23, Rodger and I watched a young **Cooper’s hawk** try to catch one of the chickens in a pen next door. The chickens made a huge racket and the hawk finally gave up. There was also a young **sharp-shinned hawk** in our brush pile waiting for little birds that were hiding from the Cooper’s hawk.

Call me with your sightings [525-2963](tel:525-2963) or email housewren@blumtn.org. And don’t forget to check the Birding Blog link on Blue Mountain Audubon’s website www.blumtn.org to keep up to date on what birds that are being seen during the month.

Ginger

Board of Directors

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Non-Profit Organization
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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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____