

Blue Mountain Audubon Society

# The Magpiper

November, 2009

## November Calendar

November 12

Board Meeting

7:00 p.m.

219 Newell Street

November 14

Field Trip—Turkey Trot

9:00 a.m.

November 19

Membership Meeting

7:30 p.m.

Whitman College

November 26

Thanksgiving Day Bird Count

## 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](mailto:housewren@blumtn.org)

## Meetings

### Membership Meeting: November 19—7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

### PROGRAM: NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

George Jameson has been interested in photography and nature for many years. Over the years he has shared with us the beauty of the natural world through his many photographs. We are already familiar with his bird photos, but he recently began using video photography as a way to help us better understand bird behavior.

George's program will include a recent trip to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and Steens Mountain, as well as videos of a wide variety of birds seen in their natural habitat.

How does George get those great photos? He will share with us some of his tricks, including digiscoping (a popular way to get close up photographs of wildlife without a camera that has a large telescopic lens) and the video capabilities of digital cameras. Come to the meeting to learn more about photography, and enjoy nature through the eyes of the camera.

## Field Trip

### TURKEY TROT

#### Saturday, November 14—9:00 a.m.

Yes folks, it's time again for the annual Turkey Trot led by our esteemed President Tom Scribner. Once again we will scour the foothills of Walla Walla and Columbia counties in search of wild turkeys. Since their numbers continue to increase, it shouldn't be hard to find them, especially south of Dayton. We'll also be on the lookout for rough-legged hawks, northern shrike, pileated woodpeckers, pygmy owls and great horned owls. It will be a all-day trip so bring a lunch, snacks and something warm to drink. Dress warm because it can be cold and windy the middle of November. This trip is always a lot of fun and one you won't want to miss. Call Tom at [529-8628](tel:529-8628) if you plan to attend.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19**  
**WALLA WALLA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**  
(details in next Magpiper)



## President's Corner

### YOU SAW A WHAT?

*By Tom Scribner*

I have decided that while there is no larceny in the hearts of birders, there is, how do I say this without giving offense, a tendency to jump to conclusions. To push the envelope. To call the election before all the votes are counted. They do not do it, I am sure, for any malicious purpose or to gain a competitive advantage. Okay, maybe for those participating in a big year or big day there may be some incentive to fudge, but for most birders it is, I have decided, simply the nature of the activity.

That is, you go birding to identify birds, as in a particular species, not a genus. You want to know that it is a white-crowned sparrow, not a sparrow sp. A ring-billed gull, not a gull sp. And it is this expectation that forces birders to make the call, to identify a specific bird, to (pardon the pun) go out on a limb. Which going out on a limb is sometimes met with a legitimate "You saw a what?"

Which I think is an appropriate question, particularly when the bird at issue is uncommon or rare. In fact, to keep our uber-birders honest, I think it is, or should be, incumbent on those of us who are, well, of more pedestrian bird identification skills to challenge all ids of those hard-to-be-sure birds. Two recent examples warrant comment.

First, in the June issue of the "Magpiper" there were, as you may recall, two full pages listing bird sightings. Impressive bird sightings, let me add. I spent several evenings in my favorite recliner, cold beer on my right, big bowl of nachos on my left, "Sibley" on my lap, looking up each of the birds listed, trying to improve my identification skills. I know, I know, it is no substitute for actually going out into the woods, the fields, the swamps, the heat, the rain, the cold, the whatever, to see real birds. But for those of us who are, well, lazy, sitting at home in a comfortable chair is the next best thing in birding. I do it a lot. Don't knock it if you haven't tried it.

So here is the thing. One of the birds reported was a Cassin's vireo. Ever see one? I thought not. Well, maybe you have. But if you did, I bet money (money hard earned chasing ambulances, let me add) you didn't recognize it as such. Why? Cuz a Cassin's vireo is indistinguishable from three or four other vireos. Don't believe me? Look at page 349 of your "Sibley Guide to Birds." On this page are two vireo

species: Cassin's and Blue-headed. They are identical. Oh sure, Sibley points out several diagnostic markings that, he says, you can use to positively identify one or the other. Weak contrast between throat and auriculars (what is an auricular?) or greenish edges on secondaries in the Cassin's compared with the Blue-headed. Bunk! Don't believe it.

First, the so-called diagnostic markings are exaggerated generalizations. They are emphasized for emphasis. Real birds don't all look like that. Second, even if the birds did look as shown, you ain't gonna notice cuz, unless they are dead and you are holding it in your hand, the real thing is gonna be up in a tree, maybe 30 or 40 feet away, jumping and twitching and flitting and flying from branch to branch, never staying in the same place for more than five seconds. And did I mention all the leaves that obscure your vision and the fact that before you get your binoculars up to your eyes the little bugger has flown away?

Now you tell me, looking at those two identical birds, do you really believe that in the field you could positively distinguish one from the other? Be honest now. Of course you couldn't. Sure, you may know you are looking at a vireo, as opposed, say, to a warbler, but, really, do you honestly believe you are going to be able to say this is a Cassin's vireo as opposed to a Blue-headed vireo or a Plumbeous vireo (Plumbeous? Where do they come up with these names?) or a Hutton's vireo or a Bell's vireo? Yeah, right, and he will respect you in the morning, and this car was owned by an old lady who never drove it over 50 mph.

My second example is from the October "Magpiper." This time the birds at issue were an American golden-plover and a Pacific golden-plover. Back to "Sibley," this time page 163. Look at the two birds and tell me, honestly, could you really distinguish one from the other? Be honest, now. These birds, remember, have a permanent twitch. They are always moving. And you are probably, what, 75-100 yards away. And the bugger is only ten inches tall. The Pacific golden-plover has spotted under coverts and the white on the shoulder is more narrow (at least the male in breeding plumage). Juveniles and non-breeding adults? Furgedaboutit! As far as I am concerned, they are indistinguishable.

But in both situations calls, as in identifications, were made. The "Magpiper" did not report that vireos sp or plovers sp were seen. Heck, even I would want to know: What vireo? What plover? We want, expect, demand a positive identification. Even if it ain't always positive. So on one hand our expectations force our uber-birder

*Continued on Page 7*

## Highlights on Nature

### FALL FOLIAGE

The turning leaves of deciduous trees are a sign of autumn and its longer, cooler nights. Vibrant reds, yellow, and oranges make up the color scheme of all, and they are all part of the cyclical nature of the seasons. Leaves on trees, shrubs, and plants turn colors when they begin the process of going dormant for the winter.

Leaves are the parts of the plants and trees that make the food necessary for sustaining life. Trees use sunlight, water, and *carbon dioxide* taken from the air to produce energy. The carbon dioxide and water are converted to *glucose*. The glucose is then used as energy for the tree to live and grow. The entire process is known as photosynthesis. Leaves are green because they contain *chlorophyll*, which facilitates *photosynthesis*. Once daylight shortens and temperatures cool down, trees sense that fall and winter are approaching. In the trees' preparation to go dormant circulation to the leaves is cut off. The production of chlorophyll is reduced so the green will eventually disappear.

Some of the pigments that cause the vibrant colors in the leaves, such as *carotenoids*, are already present in the leaves, but are obscured by the green chlorophyll. Carotenoids are responsible for yellows, oranges and browns. The pigments that cause bright reds, purples and russets are called *anthocyanins*. They are produced in the leaves of some species in the fall due to excessive amounts of glucose in the leaves, along with the bright light of fall.

Maples are known for their range of autumn palettes. Oaks tend to produce browns and reds due to the waste in their leaves. Aspens and poplars turn yellow and dogwoods turn reddish-purple. Elms usually turn brown and fall off without a big show.

The best place in the world for viewing fall colors is probably the Eastern United States. This is because of the climate there, and the wide variety of deciduous trees. The brightest colors are seen when late summer is dry, and autumn has bright sunny days and cool (low 40's) nights. Then trees make a lot of anthocyanin pigments. A fall with cloudy days and warm nights brings drab colors. And an early frost quickly ends the colorful display.

## Bird of the Month

### DARK-EYED JUNCO

#### **Oregon Junco**

*Junco hyemalis oreganus*



Size: 6.25 inches

Description:

Very dark grey head and breast, brown back and wings, buffy flanks and white belly. Females are somewhat duller than the male. All

have a pink conical bill and a dark tail

with white outer feathers.

The Oregon subspecies of the dark-eyed junco is a familiar sight during the fall and winter months in our backyards. It forages on the ground eating mainly insects and seeds. It breeds in the Blue Mountains, but returns in September and remains here until spring. Juvenile juncos have pale streaks until they acquire their adult plumage at 2-3 months. By the time they come back to our yards, they have their adult plumage.

#### **Slate-colored Junco**

*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*



Description:

Dark gray head, breast and upperparts with a white belly. Females and

immature birds are somewhat browner than males.

Slate-colored juncos breeds in in North American taiga forests but can be found here in the winter. They forage with Oregon juncos and can be easily missed without taking a closer look at individuals birds in the flock.

All juncos nest in a shallow depression, usually on the ground and well hidden by vegetation. Normally two clutches of 3-5 eggs are laid during the breeding season. Incubation by the female takes 12-13 days. Young leave the nest after 9-13 days. During that time they are fed by both sexes.

## Conservation

### MALHEUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

*By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair*

I am sitting here thinking about a subject near and dear to my life. The subject is Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County Oregon, 32 miles south of Burns, Oregon off SR 205. This refuge has been a very important part of my life. I first saw this awe inspiring place April 1971 as guests of Clay and Violet Brown of McMinnville, Oregon. What I saw was wild and magnificent. There were birds, antelope, lizards and this huge snow covered mountain off to the south that was pointed out to me by Clay Brown. It was the Steen's Mountain and as far as I could see through those 14 year old eyes was birds, sage and a huge area to explore. As my life would have it I ended up getting to explore this massive landscape all through the rest of my teen age years and all of my adult life. Malheur NWR is the largest in the Pacific Northwest and hosts many rare and common species of plants, animals and insects.

As I grew to understand this huge region and the refuge I grew to also understand that this amazing place was under constant assault by man. Despite it being a refuge for our nation's wildlife, it was being grazed to a nub by thousands of cattle. There was constant killing of native predators and introduction of non-native birds and plants. I have witnessed many poor management decisions on this refuge as well as some very good and brave choices. And yet despite this Malheur NWR remains a spectacular place to visit.

Once again Malheur NWR needs your voice to be heard. The Refuge is beginning to plan for their new Comprehensive Conservation Plan which will guide refuge management for 15 years.

If you have been there and enjoyed it and understand how important this place is to many wildlife communities, plants and people; or if you have yet to have the opportunity I still urge you to get your comments into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this week. This is no time to be a wilting pansy and decide your input really in no way matters. It is important what each of you think about this Grand Old Wildlife Refuge.

Here is the address to send your comments:

U.S. Dept. of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
Malheur National Wildlife Refuge  
36391 Sodhouse Lane  
Princeton, OR 97721

### **Comments must be to them by October 31, 2009**

You may also make comments online by going to their website: <http://www.fws.gov/malheur> Please let these employees of ours understand what you want to see going on at this very special place on earth. Thank-you very much in advance for sending your comments to Malheur NWR.

Do it and thank-you!

### TRANSFER OF DOE LANDS TO HANFORD REACH NATIONAL MONUMENT

*Excerpts from Audubon Council of Washington*

The Hanford Reach National Monument was designated to protect the incredible fish, wildlife and native plant communities of the Hanford Reach of the Columbia River and shrub steppe habitat on adjacent Department of Energy lands. When President Clinton designated the monument in June of 2000, he realized that large tracks of DOE land outside the monument had high wildlife resource value but would be essential to DOE's mission for sometime to come. President Clinton directed the Secretary of Energy to consult with the Secretary of the Interior on managing these lands for wildlife and adding them to the monument in the future.

DOE is in the process of reviewing its nationwide landholdings in an effort to divest itself of any property not essential to its mission. ACOW calls upon the Secretary of Energy to intensify its partnership with the Secretary of Interior to manage Hanford lands for wildlife. ACOW ask that any Hanford lands under consideration for transfer or sale be reviewed by both the DOE and US fish and Wildlife Service to determine the suitability of those lands for inclusion in the Hanford Reach National Monument. ACOW further calls for the Secretary of Energy to offer any and all Hanford lands determined to be excess or surplus to the Secretary of Interior for transfer to the Hanford Reach National Monument **prior to any other agency, government or entity either private or public.**

## Miscellaneous

### INITIATIVE I-1033 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

*Excerpts from The Nature Conservancy in Washington*

Initiative 1033 is a statewide measure headed for the November ballot. This measure could have a devastating effect on Washington's precious landscapes. I-1033 would limit the growth of revenue each year for state, county and city general funds through an arbitrary formula based on inflation and population growth. At face value, it many sound reasonable, *but the impact of this radical proposal is anything but reasonable.*

Because of today's poor economic conditions, spending for natural resources in Washington has already been cut severely. I-1033 would permanently lock in place those dramatically low funding levels at both the state and local levels. It would also make it nearly impossible to restore funding to earlier, higher levels, even when economic times improve.

You'll likely hear a great deal about this measure's damaging effects on education, health care and Washington's economy—all very real issues. We also want you know what this initiative would do to Washington's natural areas:

- It will lead to more park closures, as parks agencies are forced to cut costs.
- It will lead to reduced quality of air and water as dollars to enforce important rules protecting our rivers, lakes, streams and Puget Sound will be harder to come by.
- It will lead to reduced conservation of natural areas and open space around the state, with fewer funds to protect important fish and wildlife habitat and working farmlands, as well as less money to care for the places we treasure.

**PLEASE BECOME INFORMED BEFORE CASTING YOUR BALLOT IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTION**

#### **THANKSGIVING BIRD COUNT**

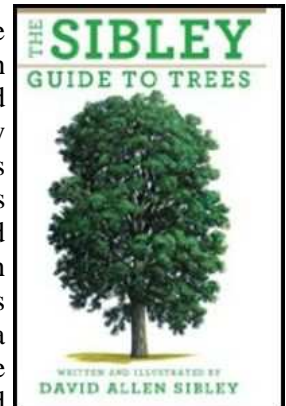
The Thanksgiving Day bird count was begun in 1966 in Virginia. It is now a national event. The count last ONE HOUR and includes birds within a 15-foot diameter circle. Time of day and location are chosen by you. Someplace in your yard that includes a feeder and can be seen from inside works well. It's fun and easy to participate. Forms will be available at the November Membership Meeting.

## Books

### The Sibley Guide to Trees

by David Sibley

More than six hundred of the native and cultivated tree species in North America are identified and illustrated in a new field guide by David Sibley. This guide differs from many other tree guides because species are arranged taxonomically rather than by such features as leaf shape. This enables the user to browse images to find a match for an observed tree in the same way a birder uses the bird guide. All the pages follow the



same format with beautifully detailed paintings to illustrate the cycles of annual and lifetime development, bark, leaves, needles, cones, flowers, fruit, twigs and silhouettes. There are range maps for nearly all of the native and cultivated trees in the book. Key identifiers in the guide are shape, color and size of leaves, color and shape of twigs, color and texture of bark, and the tree's overall size and shape as well as habitat, any fruit or flowers, and the timing of seasonal changes. Sibley worked seven years on the book, traveling to study and photograph different species, reading about trees, working out his painting technique and planning the book page-by-page.

Sibley's love for trees began when he was a youngster living near Muir Woods in California. As his interest and focus turned to birds, he became more aware of trees and began to notice their twigs, leaves and bark. As a naturalist, even when studying birds he was also observing habitat since they are all connected. When asked how trees fit into our environmental future he replied: "It could be argued that trees play a bigger role in our lives than any other living things.... In natural ecosystems trees are important on their own. Their leaves and branches provide food and shelter to countless species of animals. Even more critical is the habitat that trees create. The air under a forest canopy can be 15 degrees cooler, and much more humid, than air over an open field. This microclimate and the leaf litter on the forest floor create an entire secondary ecosystem of other plants and animals which can only exist with a healthy forest canopy. Trees filter pollutants from the air, turn carbon dioxide into oxygen, and create rich soil. On top of all that, trees are pleasing and relaxing to be around."

## *In the Field*

Fall is here. We are lucky to live where there are so many deciduous trees that grace us with their magnificent display of colors. With the change of the season we also saw a gradual change in bird species. Migration continued the first half of the month but then the wintering birds began to appear.

MerryLynn, her mom Shirley, and I drove up Lewis Peak Road and across the top on Dent Road then down N. Fork Coppei Creek Road on October 1. Red-breasted nuthatches were abundant. We also saw Cassin's finches, both western and mountain bluebirds, hermit thrushes, Steller's jays, red crossbills, hairy woodpeckers and all the other usual mountain birds.

Michael Woodruff was out exploring Walla Walla County on October 1. He saw a pair of American dippers at Kooskooskie, and a Hammond's flycatcher, ruffed grouse, and chestnut-backed chickadees on Klicker Mountain Road. Later he saw a merlin at Walla Walla College, where he is a student.

Pam Fisher watched two turkey vultures soaring over her house on October 2.

On October 3, Michael Woodruff was at the Delta and spotted a new Walla Walla County bird—a buff-breasted sandpiper.



*Photo by MerryLynn Denny*

Mike and MerryLynn joined him shortly after and saw the bird, plus a red phalarope and many of the shorebirds and gulls usually seen there. A peregrine

falcon put all the birds up at one point, but they returned. Later Mike found a second buff-breasted sandpiper at the Tyson blood ponds. They returned the next day and the sandpiper was still at the blood ponds. While they were looking at the shorebirds they also saw 7 sandhill cranes and a snow goose fly over.

Joe and Carolyn Corvino watched a merlin eating a bird on a utility pole west of Nine Mill Hill on October 4.

Late afternoon on October 4, I walked Bennington Lake with Mike and MerryLynn and Priscilla Dauble. There were 9 great egrets in the cottonwoods in the southeast corner of the lake. Shorebirds were abundant—56 killdeer, 2 pectoral sandpipers, 10 long-billed dowitchers, 4 greater yellowlegs, and a least sandpiper. There also was a great variety of waterfowl—common mergansers, American wigeons, northern shovelers, lesser scaup, western grebes, mallards, canada geese, green winged teal, northern pintails, a blue winged teal, a piebilled grebe and a ring-necked duck. It was very windy so we saw very few passerines—a few robins, American pipits and flickers. There was a varied thrush in the trees by the parking lot. Jon Lundak also saw one on the Whitman College campus the same day.

On October 4, Pam Fisher had a sharp-shinned hawk in her yard. While looking for it in the bushes she found a ruby-crowned kinglet.

Anna's hummingbirds were seen at several feeders in September and October. Pam Fisher and George and Deanna Jameson had them at their feeders in late September. One and then two showed up at Priscilla Dauble's feeder in October and are still there. The Dennys have had one since early October and one finally showed up at our feeder the middle of October. It looks like they might stay around, so I would urge you to put a feeder out for them now that their natural food source is gone. These are post breeding wandering birds and could spend the winter here.

Shirley saw 3 white-crowned sparrows in her yard on October 4. These little sparrows are very special to her because they remind her of their summers in Alaska where they sang all through the night.

The field trip to McNary Educational Center in Burbank was very interesting. It's well worth a visit when you are over that way. On our way home we drove south of Touchet. There were red-tailed hawks galore—including one very black dark-morph bird. We also saw a prairie falcon and a northern shrike.

As usual, the Denny's yard is a magnet for unusual birds. Besides the hummingbird, the first two weeks of October they had visits from **hermit thrushes** and a **white-throated sparrow**.

On October 11, Mike and MerryLynn found two **snow buntings** on Sheffler Road near Clyde, north of Walla Walla. They also saw a **rough-legged hawk**, and on the Eureka flats they found a **loggerhead shrike**. The next day they saw a **rusty blackbird** in with a large flock of mixed blackbirds on Dodd Road.

We saw 3 **surf scoters**, a pair of **bufflehead**, a **ring-necked duck**, a **western grebe** and 23 **long-billed dowitchers** on our Tuesday walk around Bennington Lake on October 13. Several **Townsend's solitaires** called from the treetops and an **osprey** was circling the lake. There were also over 200 **robins** and large numbers of **flickers**, **white-crowned sparrows**, **cedar waxwings** and **red-winged blackbirds**.

Kim Hallett-Jones saw a **northern goshawk** soaring overhead at the golf course on October 15.

MerryLynn saw a **merlin** near her mom's place in College Place on October 17.

Sixteen people enjoyed an afternoon walk around Bennington Lake on October 18. Highlights were several **long-billed dowitchers**, a **greater yellowlegs**, two **western grebes**, three **common mergansers** and a very cooperative **Townsend's solitaire**.



*Bennington Lake—there is still a little water*

Rodger and I saw eight **wood ducks** and a **kingfisher** on South Wilbur ponds October 19.

Keep current on what is being seen by visiting the Blue Mountain Audubon website [www.blumtn.org](http://www.blumtn.org) and don't forget to call me at [525-2963](tel:525-2963) or email me at [housewren@blumtn.org](mailto:housewren@blumtn.org) with your sightings. Thanks!

*Ginger Shoemake*

## *President's Corner cont....*

colleagues to make the call; while on the other, we reserve the right to confront their identification with a "You saw a what?"

I know, I know, it ain't fair. But as my former secretary used to say: Life is not fair and then you die. So go ahead, stick your neck out, be daring, push the envelope. We expect you to do it. We want you to do it. But don't expect us to roll over and play dead. We reserve the right to challenge your call.

YOU SAW A WHAT?

## ADOPT A HIGHWAY COORDINATOR NEEDED

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

### **Board of Directors**

President: Tom Scribner	529-8628
Vice President: Melissa Webster	529-6023
Secretary: Joe & Carolyn Corvino	529-8567
Treasurer: MerryLynn Denny	529-0080
Conservation: Mike Denny	529-0080
Education: Priscilla Dauble	529-7939
Membership: Holly Howard	522-2770
Programs: Tom Scribner	529-8628
Publicity: Jonathan Webster	529-6023
Jack Taylor	
Important Bird Areas: Mike Denny	529-0080
Nature Trail: Robson Newbold	525-3771
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Webmaster: George Jameson	526-4609
	<a href="mailto:nuthatch@blumtn.org">nuthatch@blumtn.org</a>
Field Trips: Ginger Shoemake	525-2963
Newsletter Editor: Ginger Shoemake	525-2963
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Bird Sightings: Ginger Shoemake	525-2963
	<a href="mailto:housewren@blumtn.org">housewren@blumtn.org</a>

BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON SOCIETY  
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Walla Walla, WA 99362

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Walla Walla, WA 99362

**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: \_\_\_\_\_