



# The Magpiper

January, 2010

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## January Calendar

January 14  
Board meeting  
7:00 p.m.  
219 Newell Street

January 21  
Membership meeting  
7:30 p.m.  
Whitman College

January 23  
Field trip—Raptors  
9:00 a.m.

## Field Trip Information

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

Bring plenty of food and water

Plan to carpool whenever  
possible and reimburse for gas

Contact trip leader if you plan to  
attend

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

Have questions? Contact Ginger  
Shoemake at 525-2963 or  
[housewren@blumtn.org](mailto:housewren@blumtn.org)

## Meetings

### Membership Meeting: January 21—7:30 p.m.

*Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College*

### PROGRAM: BOOKS AND BIRDS

“Lordy, lordy, lordy”, guess who’s going to be our speaker for our Books and Birds presentation? None other than Walla Walla’s own Sam McLeod. He will be regaling us with stories about writing, his new book and the Say’s phoebes that have taken over his farm.

Steve Johnson, aka Sam McLeod, grew up in Nashville, Tennessee. After college and graduate school, he worked as a banker, lawyer, and venture capital investor before retiring to Walla Walla with his wife Annie in 2004. He has written four books—*Welcome to Walla Walla*, *Bottled Walla*, *Blue Walla*, and his new book *Big Appetite: My Southern-Fried Search for the Meaning of Life* which will be published in 2010. He also writes a column for the Walla Walla Union Bulletin called “View from the Porch”. Join us at our January meeting and be entertained by this very gifted storyteller.

In addition, David Cosby from Earthlight Books will bring a table with a variety of bird and nature books to peruse and buy, so bring all your extra Christmas cash....

## Field Trips

### RAPTORS IN THE WALLA WALLA VALLEY

#### Saturday, January 23 - 9:00 a.m.

Joe Corvino will lead a field trip to areas south of Walla Walla where raptors can be found during the winter months. Expect to see red-tailed hawks, northern harriers and kestrels. Other raptors that could be seen are rough-legged hawk, prairie falcon, Cooper’s hawk and sharp-shinned hawk. Great horned owl, great blue heron or northern shrike would be an added bonus. Scopes will be available for close-up viewing. This will be a driving trip, so plan to carpool. Call Joe at 529-8567 if you plan to attend.



*Rough-legged hawk  
photo by Rodger Shoemake*



## *President's Corner*

### **ON BEING DON DAVIS' DOG (PART II)**

*By Nora the Schnauzer as told to BMAS President Tom Scribner*

Last month I gave five reasons why being Don Davis' dog is not all fun and games. Believe it or not, there are more than five reasons why the next dog who auditions for this role may want to consider withdrawing his/her application. Ticks, no privacy, too much exercise, candid photos ad nauseum, and his obsession with gear are all irritating and can and often do outweigh the good stuff. But there are yet more problems with being Tonto to Don the Lone Ranger Davis.

A sixth complaint is fishing. I hate fishing. And Don, in case you haven't noticed, really likes to fish. With his 8 ft, 2 lb. test leader, on his 7 ft. Orvis one-piece split bamboo rod, using a size 20 elk hair yellow caddis fly. With, of course, the barb crimped down. Okay, maybe you like to fish also. But try being a dog while old Don-o is up to his belly button in the middle of a very cold, fast-moving stream. Not much to do for poor old Nora here, except to look for the deliciously smelling rotting carcass of anything dead. Except Mr. Davis frowns on that kind of stuff. Which means that for hours and hours and unending long hours, I get to sit and do nothing, while he waves his arm back-and-forth, and back-and-forth, sometimes catching a fish but more often getting his fly tangled in a tree branch. And on the rare occasion when Don actually catches something, I do not like fish. I hate fish. He should try catching a succulent cow. Steak I like.

Seven is car sickness. Ever wonder why dogs like to ride in a vehicle with his/ her head stuck out the window? Cuz we get car sick, that's why. Human types may think that riding in a car is okay, we dog types ain't so enamored of being entombed in steel and plastic and glass, cut off from the real world. And you humans can't drive anywhere in your car without the radio or CD player blaring at high decibels. Don likes country and western music. At any decibel level, that stuff is noise, and I don't like it. If our numerous trips were short, I suppose I could put up with this gotta travel stuff. But they are not short. One more boring trip to the Deschutes River and Don will have perforations in his casting arm - - which perforations will match exactly my dental profile. And the Deschutes is only halfway to the Oregon Coast. Don't get me started on the cold wind on the Oregon Coast. Seven hours held captive in Don's auto with the radio on high volume and Don signing along, off key, with Willie Nelson, and I am nauseous, headachy and plain tired out from too much

driving. And you wonder why I run and run and run on the beach. Don thinks it is due to my doggy enthusiasm to be back again on the sand. In my opinion, it is the joy of a condemned man let out of prison.

But all of the above is nothing compared to number eight. You see, I've been talking to some of the other dogs in our neighborhood. As you can imagine, they, or at least some of them, are jealous of my notoriety. And, if I am honest here, I guess sometimes I get a little uppity. Last week when I was telling Spike, a mongrel two doors down, about our latest adventure, he tried to get in the last put down by asking me, "So where are Homer the Bassett Hound and Sadie the Dalmatian?" I honestly did not know what he was talking about. So I started asking around. What I learned has taken the joie out of my de vivre. Homer the Bassett Hound and Sadie the Dalmatian used to be Don's dogs. Homer and Sadie have both gone to that great dog heaven in the sky. Which, I know, we are all going to join. Even small cute dogs like me don't live forever. But they both went there very young. Heck, Rollo, a not-too-old German Shepherd across the street, knew both of them. And Rollo is still with us.

Which got me thinking. Does Don just tire of his doggy playthings? Does he wear them out? So physically exhaust them that they die young? Or do they just get so frustrated with the lack of privacy, tick-o-meter stuff, nonstop techno babble, fishing, fishing, fishing, that they do themselves in? Jump off a high cliff or intentionally run in front of a big truck, anything for a little relief.

We dogs don't last as long as you humans. I know that. A dog's year is seven human years, and all that. Heck, I'm already pushing late middle age. I've heard of trophy wives, but trophy dogs? Do you really think that Don would trade me in for a newer model? Is this what he did with Homer and Sadie? Ok, so their going to meet their maker probably had nothing to do with Don. Still, it's an idea that sometimes chases my dreams. And it's an idea that has, you gotta admit, a dark side to it.

All things considered, ya gotta admit that being Don Davis' dog is not without its associated pressures and low spots. Including, just maybe, the ultimate low - - death before our time. Until then, if you can handle the above, the lack of privacy, the ticks, the fishing, the car sickness, etc., being Don Davis' dog has a lot to recommend it. Particularly if being famous is your thing. What price vanity, huh?

## Spotlight on Nature

### HOW BIRDS COPE IN WINTER

Birds have evolved the ability to maintain their body temperature at a somewhat lower level during periods of inactivity or in response to food deprivation. This "regulated hypothermia" achieves significant energy savings for many species ranging from passerines to raptors. For example, when deprived of food in winter, Red-tailed Hawks drop their nocturnal body temperature by 5 to 7 degrees Fahrenheit below their daytime temperature.

Hummingbirds enter a state of *torpor* in which body temperature may drop as much as 50 degrees Fahrenheit for several hours during the night or for days during extremely inclement weather. Although the energy savings are great in birds that enter *torpor*, they face increased danger of predation because they are unable to respond quickly. There is also a substantial metabolic cost incurred by arousal from *torpor* that demands immediate payback in food intake.

Nevertheless, recent studies indicate that the ability to enter shallow torpor for short periods may be much more widespread among birds than previously believed.

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## Bird of the Month

### HOODED MERGANSER *Lophodytes cucullatus*



**Male hooded merganser**

Photo by  
George Jameson

Size: 18 inches

Description: Small, thin-billed, long-tailed diving duck. The male has a black head with a large white fan shaped patch behind its yellow eye that becomes a crest when puffed up. It has a white breast with diagonal black line. Flanks are brown and back is black with white bars on the wings. The female is grayish brown with a tawny brown crest and a white belly.

#### **Female hooded Merganser**

Photo by  
Rodger Shoemake



Hooded mergansers breed on secluded small lakes, ponds, swamps, and fast-flowing streams and rivers in wooded areas. They prefer to nest in tree cavities near water but will use nesting boxes if available and unoccupied. Their flight is swift and silent. They feed by diving and swimming under water to collect small fish, crustaceans and aquatic insects.

They are short distance migrants and winter wherever winter temperatures allow for ice free conditions on ponds, lakes and rivers. During the winter they are usually found in pairs or small flocks. They can be found quite regularly in the winter along Mill Creek near Rooks Park.

## Conservation

### **FOR CONSERVATION'S SAKE**

*By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair*

Beautiful birds have been attracting the attention of humans for a very long time. Primitive tribesmen the world over still adorn their heads and bodies with the feathers of numerous bird species. Starting right here in North America with Native American tribes and their spiritual need to have and wear the feathers of eagles, hawks and turkeys. In Central America the Resplendent Quetzal was the provider of great tail feathers that denoted stature and leadership within the tribal structure of the Inca and Maya. The Polynesians of Hawaii wore great tunics and capes all made of huge numbers of bright bird feathers. In Africa it was a toss up between mammal parts and bird feathers that adorned many tribal warriors and chiefs.

So with this in mind I hoped that there were still birds left as we moved to Africa. Upon arrival in Cape Town, South Africa in August 1965 I began looking for birds, bugs, butterflies and reptiles. Unfortunately a *chipperony* ( a winter cold front out of Antarctica ) was blowing in across South Africa the week we arrived so I saw very little in the way of wild birds. It was not until we boarded a Portuguese run coal burning train headed out across the Transvaal and Botswana and north towards Malawi that I saw wildlife. My first wild animals that I saw was after a night on the train in mornings first light were herds of Springbok antelope running and pronging out on the seemingly endless grasslands. The Springbok is the emblem for South African Conservation. As we pulled into southern Botswana it became obvious that the region was in the grips of a drought. Nothing was green and the ground thousands of begging Africans stood on was parched. At every stop made by the train many hundreds of people would mob the tracks with hands held out high pleading and begging for food. They were starving and everyone on the train gave what they could to these poor folks. This was a personal eye opener for me. To see humans that have no food and very little water was a first, but not the last. As we left this drought stricken area I saw my first pairs of large black Ground Hornbills.

All of these thoughts caused me to be very appreciative for all we have and in looking down the road at our country and society and all of the huge challenges we

face only one issue looms to the front and that is conservation of our natural resources. We are all dependant on education, clean water, living soils, clean air and food. If we lose any one of these we are finished. So this coming year of 2010 please make it a priority to do something for conservation that will make a change for the better.

**Happy New Year!**

### **CHEAT GRASS: WHY IT'S SO BAD**

*From Nature Conservancy—Washington State*

Western sagebrush and grasslands are burning more than ever before, and cheat grass is mainly to blame. Cheat grass, a non-native weed, grows faster than native bunchgrasses and becomes established earlier in the growing season, using up water and nutrients before native grasses and plants begin to grow. It also dries out earlier in the summer, and creates a carpet of fine fuel, ready to ignite in those 100-degree days. Once the land has burned, cheat grass comes back stronger than ever, while sagebrush is destroyed by these hot fires. Land managers have tried digging it out, spraying herbicides, and other methods to control cheat grass, but it has been a losing battle.

Now there is new hope. The Nature Conservancy is teaming up with Dr. Ann Kennedy, a U.S. Agriculture Research Service scientist working at Washington State University, to test the effectiveness of a native soil bacterium in inhibiting the growth of cheat grass. Kennedy has been studying the bacterium, *Pseudomonas fluorescens* strain D7, in wheat lands for years, and this new project will expand her work into the sage and grasslands. She identified the potential biological control agent during research on weed-suppressive bacteria. The bacterium is native to Washington soils and has been shown to inhibit germinating cheat grass seeds in laboratory, greenhouse and field trials while not harming other species. "This is the most promising tool I've seen in more than 20 years of working on this problem," said Chuck Warner, director of the Conservancy's arid lands program in Washington.

## Miscellaneous

### VALLEY TRANSIT on “THREATENED” LIST

*By Barbara Clark*

**Valley Transit is going to the polls on February 9** with a ballot measure requesting an increase of three-tenths of one percent in our sales tax – an additional three cents on a ten dollar purchase.

**Without a Yes vote, our community transit system will be forced to reduce services by 30% immediately**, including routes and frequency, and 50% at the end of the biennium, which would eliminate most or all fixed routes. Passing the ballot issue will allow all existing services to be preserved.

**Valley Transit serves a large number of our citizens, and our entire community benefits.** Valley Transit’s fixed route and Dial-a-Ride services provide about 800,000 rides a year. People from all walks of life need Valley Transit to get to work or job searches, pursue educational opportunities, get to medical services, shop at our local businesses, visit family and friends, and attend social functions – all of which are critical to our quality of life and economic vitality.

**Public transportation is also a habitat issue.** It saves significant energy and produces substantially less pollution than comparable travel by private vehicle.

For more detailed information and to help save Valley Transit, please visit [www.transitcampaign.blogspot.com](http://www.transitcampaign.blogspot.com).

### 2009 CONSERVATION VICTORIES

*From Audubon Advisory, December 11*

National Audubon announced the following conservation success stories for 2009 in a recent publication.

1. Progress has been amazing this past year on the critical issue of climate change and energy.
2. Endangered Species Act wins back protections.
3. Neotropical migratory songbirds singing a sweeter tune thanks to Congress
4. Record funding for conservation programs and ecosystem restoration
5. Sage grouse works sets new standard for habitat and species protection.

For more in-depth information check out the National Audubon webpage [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)

## Books

### *African Silences* by Peter Matthiessen

This book is an account of three trips to Central and Western Africa. However, it is more than just a travel book. In it Matthiessen reports on the almost total devastation of wildlife in Senegal, Gambia, and the Ivory coast. He also describes an expedition searching for the rare Congo peacock and gorillas in the Virunga Mountains of Zaire.

His disgust for the government, ruined landscape and many of the people he found in these countries makes for uncomfortable reading. However his delight in the Mbuti Pygmies of the Ituri Forest and his cautious optimism about the effects of the recent ban on ivory trafficking somewhat softens his otherwise grim message about the fate of the people and wildlife of Africa.

This is not a “feel good” book, but one that needs to be read by anyone interested in the state of the environment in Africa.

### *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*

**By Jamie Ford**

The author explores the history and attitudes of Japanese and Chinese Americans during World War II in Seattle. The novel is a sweet and poignant story about two young people, one Chinese and the other Japanese during the 1940s.

The book begins in 1986 with the unveiling of recently discovered belongings left behind in the basement of the dilapidated Panama Hotel by Japanese families that were interred during World War II. The author switches the narrative from 1986 to the 1940s and vice versa in a story with many layers. Ford’s portrayal of Seattle’s ethnic neighborhoods in the 1940s is well written. His portrayal of the sentiments that pervaded the years after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the acts and events that we would rather forget today is honest and enlightening.

“Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet” is a story about human nature at its worst and at its best. It looks at human relationships - the way we regard others, the way we find ourselves re-enacting our relationships with our parents, with our own children, and the choices we make along the way.

## *In the Field*

December 3 was cold and foggy, but MerryLynn and I headed for the west end of the county to see what we could find. Along Highway 12 just north of Hanson Loop Road, we came across a flock of over 12,000 canada geese feeding in a field. With them were 60 snow geese. We watched more and more geese fly in until a man drove a pickup into the field and Whoosh... the birds all took flight. It was amazing to see and hear their take-off flight. We saw many other interesting birds including hundreds of various species of ducks, some shorebirds including a very late pectoral sandpiper, great horned owls and barn owls, great egrets, black-crowned night herons, a prairie falcon, two rough-legged hawks and LOTS of red-tailed hawks.

On December 4, Mike Denny saw 24 western bluebirds on Cottonwood Creek

Pam Fisher walked Mill Creek on December 5. The American dipper was still there—doing its little dance. She also saw two golden crowned kinglets, a pair of hooded mergansers and a coyote.

On December 7, Jon Lundak found and photographed a ringed teal at Whitman College in the pond on Park Street. It is an escapee from Pioneer Park Aviary, but they have been unsuccessful in recapturing it and have decided to let it make it (or not) on its own. It is a beautiful bird from South America, and hopefully will stay around Walla Walla. It was still there for the Christmas Count on December 19.

George and Deanna Jameson saw 9 male and several female hooded mergansers on South Wilbur ponds on December 11. There were also several wood ducks on the ponds and a ring-necked duck a few days later.

Jon reported seeing baby ducks at Whitman College on December 11. Bad timing.....

The extreme cold weather the second week of December brought very large numbers of little birds into our yard - dark eyed juncos, house finches, goldfinches, pine siskins, white-crowned sparrows and of course house sparrows. About 20 California quail, two song sparrows, four black-capped chickadees, two downy woodpeckers, several cedar waxwings and robins, a flicker and a couple magpies added to the mix. Our neighborhood sharp-shinned hawk had an easy time getting its meals on those days.

On December 13, Mike and MerryLynn, Rodger and I spent the day counting raptors in Northern Umatilla County. The weather conditions were perfect—snow covered fields, no wind or fog, cloudy skies, temperatures slightly above freezing. We weren't disappointed and ended up with 329 raptors. 239 of those were red-tailed hawks, but we also saw both a bald eagle and a golden eagle, 52 American kestrels, 23 northern harriers, 3 rough-legged hawks, 2 prairie falcons, 2 Cooper's hawks, a sharp-shinned hawk, 2 northern goshawks and three great horned owls. Add to that a northern shrike, three Eurasian collared doves, 54 wild turkeys, a tree full of western meadowlarks, several flocks of cedar waxwings, lots of California quail and ring-necked pheasants, four great blue herons, and oodles of finches, sparrows and robins.

Dan and Susan Leathers have had a beautiful Anna's hummingbird coming to their feeder on Biscuit Ridge Road since October. They have kept their feeder thawed, even through the very cold weather so it would have something to eat. It was seen on the Christmas Count on December 19.



On December 17 five of us finally walked around Bennington Lake. The zero degree temperatures and freezing rain kept us away the previous two Tuesdays. The trails were muddy and slick and the lake was still frozen, but we still managed to see some nice birds including a long-eared owl and two northern shrikes. Robins and dark-eyed juncos were abundant. 16 canada geese and 3 common mergansers flew over the lake, hoping for some open water. Two American kestrels and a red-tailed hawk were the only raptors we could find. Townsend's solitaires and Bewick's wrens were singing - enjoying the 50 degree weather I'm sure.

Nat Drumheller birded Scenic Loop to Mormon Grade on December 18 and found some great birds—a hermit thrush, a ruffed grouse, two winter wrens, a pygmy owl, a brown creeper, a ruby-crowned kinglet, juncos, chickadees, golden-crowned kinglets, and a golden eagle.

December 19 was the Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count. Thirty five people scoured the 15 mile circle in the rain and the fog or watched their feeders to find 66 species of birds. With the addition of count week birds (birds seen 3 days before and 3 days after count day), the total species reported for the Count was 75.



*Getting instructions from Mike*

**Walla Walla Christmas Bird Count Results.** Species listed with numbers were seen on count day; those with "cw" were found during count week.

Snow goose	cw	
Canada goose	1038	
Wood duck	cw	
American wigeon	233	
Mallard	453	
Northern shoveler	2	
<b>Northern pintail</b>	<b>1</b>	1st for count
Green-winged teal	20	
Ring-necked duck	8	
Lesser scaup	cw	
Common goldeneye	2	
Hooded merganser	18	
Common merganser	25	
Ring-necked pheasant	65	
Ruffed grouse	2	
<b>Wild turkey</b>	<b>343</b>	high number
California quail	398	
Double-crested cormorant	1	
Great blue heron	13	
Northern harrier	6	
Sharp-shinned hawk	5	
Cooper's hawk	8	
Red-tailed hawk	116	
Rough-legged hawk	5	
<b>Golden eagle</b>	<b>1</b>	uncommon
American kestrel	74	
<b>Peregrine falcon</b>	<b>1</b>	uncommon
Prairie falcon	1	
Hawk species	12	
<b>Wilson's snipe</b>	<b>2</b>	uncommon
Ring-billed gull	cw	
Rock pigeon	139	
<b>Eurasian collared dove</b>	<b>5</b>	1st for count
Mourning dove	104	

Western screech owl	1	
Great horned owl	1	
Northern pygmy owl	cw	
<b>Long eared owl</b>	<b>1</b>	uncommon
<b>Anna's hummingbird</b>	<b>1</b>	1st for count
Belted kingfisher	5	
Downy woodpecker	18	
Hairy woodpecker	2	
Northern flicker	173	
<b>Northern shrike</b>	<b>3</b>	uncommon
Steller's jay	7	
Black-billed magpie	427	
<b>American crow</b>	<b>836</b>	high number
Common raven	30	
Horned lark	cw	
Black-capped chickadee	123	
Red-breasted nuthatch	4	
Brown creeper	cw	
Bewick's wren	25	
Winter wren	6	
<b>American dipper</b>	<b>2</b>	uncommon
Golden-crowned kinglet	2	
Ruby-crowned kinglet	6	
Townsend's solitaire	12	
Hermit thrush	7	
American robin	773	
Varied thrush	4	
European starling	6938	
Cedar waxwing	101	
Yellow-rumped warbler	cw	
Spotted towhee	cw	
Song sparrow	85	
White-crown sparrow	151	
Dark-eyed junco	1425	
Red-winged blackbird	73	
Western meadowlark	2	
Brewer's blackbird	60	
Brown-headed cowbird	12	
House finch	678	
Pine siskin	23	
American goldfinch	390	
House sparrow	927	



*Relaxing after a long day and a tasty supper....*

BLUE MOUNTAIN AUDUBON SOCIETY  
Ginger Shoemake, Editor, **The Magpiper**  
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Walla Walla, WA 99362

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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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