



The Magpiper

April, 2010

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April Calendar

April 8

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

April 15

Membership Meeting
7:30 p.m.
Whitman College

April 24

Field Trip
8:00 a.m.

May 1

Field Trip
6:00 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

Meetings

Membership Meeting: April 15—7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

PROGRAM: HOW WE DID IT; WHAT WE SAW: FOUR WEEKS BIRDING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND ARIZONA

Have you ever...

1. Experienced a flash flood in Joshua Tree National Park?
2. Hiked in a forest of blooming ocotillo?
3. Found your "target" bird after 10 days of searching?
4. Observed a total eclipse of the moon at night in the desert?
5. Enjoyed a nice long look at an Elegant Trogon?
6. Stood next to a giant man lying on the rocky ground?
7. Been stopped by the border patrol every day?

Jonathan and Melissa Webster claim to have experienced all but one of the above and invite you to attend the April membership meeting to hear the exciting details and to challenge their adventures and bird sightings. Hopefully educational *and* entertaining, their program will be a photographic presentation of their birding trips to parks, refuges, and farm fields of the Southwest in February, 2008, and April, 2009. Come to relive your own experiences in the southwest, or to sense a taste of this great birding region.

Field Trip

APRIL IN WALLA WALLA COUNTY

Saturday, April 24—8:00 a.m.

In April more birds return to nest in Walla Walla County. Rodger and Ginger Shoemake will lead a trip to search for osprey, Swainson's hawks, American avocets, black-necked stilts, yellow-headed blackbirds, a variety of swallows and more. Pack a lunch and join the fun. Call [525-2963](tel:525-2963) if you plan to attend.

SPRING CREEK AND LADD MARSH

Saturday, May 1—6:00 a.m.

We will be joining the Pendleton Bird Club for a trip to the LaGrande area. Our first stop will be Spring Creek where we will look for nesting great gray owls. In the afternoon we will continue on to Ladd Marsh, just south of LaGrande for a tour of the marsh led by Cathy Nowak, ODFW's Manager of Ladd Marsh Wildlife Area. Join us for a full day of birding and a chance to meet some fellow birders from Pendleton. There will be some walking so dress appropriately and bring food and water. Call Ginger Shoemake if you plan to attend. [525-2963](tel:525-2963)



President's Corner

SETTIN' THE WOODS ON FIRE

By BMAS President, Tom Scribner

Okay, last month we talked about a misleading advertisement for the state of New Hampshire in the Audubon magazine, which ad featured a lovely forest covered mountain that, according to the ad copy, was in New Hampshire. Except it wasn't. For reasons explained in last month's column, I told how I knew the mountain in question was Mt. Ascutney. And that Mt. Ascutney is in Vermont. What I didn't tell you was that I once tried to burn down Mt. Ascutney. Well, "tried to" is a bit misleading. Let's just say that my youthful stupidity, matched only by my adult stupidity, resulted in a fire that fortunately did not do too much damage to this particular part of the Green Mountain state. It happened like this.

I and my good friend John, tenderfeet Boy Scouts both, decided to hike up Mt. Ascutney to look for neotropical birds. In truth, we were not looking for birds of any kind. But since this is going to appear in the Magpiper, the monthly house organ of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society, I figured a gratuitous reference to birds was in order. Were I to return to Mt. Ascutney now I suspect I would add a number of warblers to my life list. (There, another reference to birds.) But that was then and this is now. John and I were off to explore Mt. Ascutney, birds or no birds.

It was summer, it was hot, and it was dry. We each carried a canteen but our water was almost gone by the time we got to a rocky outcropping near the summit and stopped for lunch. Lunch was typical Boy Scout grub: peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, Oreos and a badly melted candy bar, together with the rest of our, by this time, warm water. Oh, yeah, I almost forgot the key ingredient in our story of adolescent pyromania: a fire. Scouts do not do lunch without building a fire. We built a fire. Not to cook anything. Not to warm ourselves. Not because there was any valid reason for a fire. Just because. Because that is what Scouts do.

As I recall, our fire was placed in a small declivity between two large rocks. John sat on one, I sat on the other, surrounded by a thick stand of small, dry pine

trees, interspersed with equally small and dry maples. From our perch near the top of the mountain we could look down on Ascutney, a small typical Vermont town, and the Connecticut River.

After lunch we let the fire burn out. Then, since our canteens were empty, we decided to use our only other available water source to extinguish this puppy for good. You got it, our bladders were called into use. Except we were pretty dry ourselves so there was not too much water to spare. Still, like good Boy Scouts, we stirred the smelly, smoky mess with a stick into a delightfully black viscous goo. Then, satisfied the fire was dead, we put two sticks, in the form of a cross, on top of what had been our lunch-time fire, the universal symbol for "this fire is out," and, accompanied by a bluejay that followed us for quite some time (another gratuitous reference to birds), we headed down slope and home.

I know what you're thinking: So, how do we get from this to a forest fire? Bear with me. About a week later, I am in Scribners General Store in downtown Ascutney when John comes in, all excited, to tell me that the mountain was on fire. "Yeah, right." "No," he tells me, "it is. Look outside." So I did. From the corner of the porch in front of the store, up almost to the top of the mountain, I could see smoke. Dark smoke. Lots of smoke. And you know what they say about smoke and fire. And this smoke, signifying fire, was right where John and I had done our lunch thing. John looked at me. I looked at John. And we had one of those "oh #*\$@!" moments. I don't know what fire department sent in the troops, but a bunch of guys with fire fighting equipment and what had to be really heavy backpacks filled with water drove up the lone twisty road to the top of Ms. Ascutney, cut a trail from the road to the fire, and put it out before it did much damage. Thank God.

How do I know that John and I were responsible? Easy. A week or so later our scout troop drove up the lone twisty road to the top, found the trail cut by the fire fighters, and followed it to the scene of the crime. Not that it looked as it did several weeks prior. But I knew, with certainty, that this was where we had lunch. I knew because I found, on a maple tree, not too badly burned in the fire, my initials and the date of our lunch,

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President's Corner Cont...

awkwardly carved with my trusty Boy Scout knife while John and I were lunching. Which same knife I now used to hurriedly destroy the evidence.

Seems that fires are able to burn underground if the conditions are right. And the declivity where John and I built our fire was filled with the accumulation of years and years of pine needles, leaves and other combustible stuff. Which combustible stuff allowed the subterranean portion of our fire to smolder and stay alive until, voila, a week or so later it decided to check things out. And do about three or four acres of damage in the process.

There is a moral here. Don't build a fire unless you really need one. Carry lots of water - - enough to pour some on your fire. And, most important, don't carve your initials in a tree. You want to maintain maximum plausible deniability.

EARTH DAY 2010, April 22

On April 22, 1970, the first Earth Day marked the beginning of the modern environmental movement. Approximately 20 million Americans participated the first year. The movement was founded by peace activist and U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin.

By 1990 the movement had grown to 200 million people in 141 countries, and by 2007 an estimated one billion people participated in activities in thousands of places worldwide.

Forty years after the first Earth Day, the world is in greater peril than ever. While climate change is the greatest challenge of our time, it also presents the greatest opportunity—an unprecedented opportunity to build a healthy, prosperous, clean energy economy now and for the future.

Earth Day 2010 can be a turning point to advance climate policy, energy efficiency, renewable energy and green jobs. Earth Day Network is galvanizing millions who make personal commitments to sustainability.

Earth Day 2010 is a pivotal opportunity for individuals, corporations and governments to join together and create a global green economy. Join the more than one billion people in 190 countries that are taking action for Earth Day.

For more information on how you can help go to <http://ww2.earthday.net/earthday2010>

Bird of the Month

TREE SWALLOW *Tachycineta bicolor*



Size: 5.75 inches

Description: Male is bicolored with an iridescent blue back and head (including the eye) and pure white underside.



Female has a dull brown back and head.

Photos by Rodger Shoemaker

Tree swallows are migratory. They winter in Mexico and Central America and return to the Walla Walla valley in March. They can be found near water and are often seen in small flocks. They nest in natural or artificial cavities and readily use nest boxes, including those built for bluebirds. Three years ago, six nest boxes were placed on tall poles around Bennington Lake which the swallows have successfully used for nesting since the first year.

A tree swallow nest consists of multiple layers of grasses and thin twigs, and is lined with large feathers from other species. The female lays 4-7 eggs and incubates them by herself. The eggs hatch in about 14 days. The hatchlings typically fledge in 16-24 days. While there are young or eggs in the nest, adults frequently dive bomb intruders and attempt to drive them from the area. They typically only have one brood, although they may attempt a second nest if the first fails early in the season. Juvenile tree swallows are a rather non-descript brown and can be confused with northern rough-winged swallows and bank swallows.

A tree swallow's diet consists of insects, sometimes supplemented with small quantities of fruit. They are excellent fliers and take off from their perch and acrobatically catch insects in their bills in mid-air.

Conservation

LET THE SUNSHINE WORK

By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair

We all live here in eastern Washington for many different reasons. One fact remains though and that is this very unique and beautiful part of North America is in the rain shadow of the Cascade Mountains and as a result this region experiences 265+ days of sunshine. These many and long sun filled days allow us to grow over 100 crops here in the Columbia Basin. It allows us to live a life style that constantly changes as more and more natural resources are needed to sustain us. In a natural desert such as the Lower Columbia Basin and the western Walla Walla Valley we want things that make huge demands of the water and soil we are all dependant on.

As more folks start asking and wondering if our demands on our natural resources are sustainable and are coming to understand that we must curb our appetites and consumption of our natural resources in order to have a future. Is it always necessary to have everything we want? Impacts we have had on natural resources have already changed our future. There are some very important choices and options that will be coming along in the very near future that will alter our lives forever. I am speaking of solar power. There are great breakthroughs in how to harness solar power coming that will forever change how we see things and understand electrical power. In this region where the sun has gone mostly underutilized things are changing. Solar energy produces electrical energy 50% of the time in spring and fall and 70% of the time in summer and about 30% of the time in winter. 30% is the highest efficiency ever reached in the Pacific Northwest by wind energy at one or two wind farms. Only Hydro-electric is functioning at 100% efficiency day in and day out. Most wind turbine sites operate at about 18-22% efficiency, some are as low as 12%. Lots of the people's money invested for very poor output. So Hydro, solar and biomass seem to be our best shots at producing clean renewable energy.

Please as you think about sustainability, living within our means and the carrying capacity of our species in this region, seriously consider solar power. More and more folks are and now live with the cleanest energy on earth. BMAS will have a solar power field trip this coming fall where we will visit with those that are living with solar energy. This is designed to ask questions and see firsthand how solar works! I hope you will join us.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY YARD?

From National Audubon/At Home

A healthy yard is not really a "yard" at all. It's a habitat, a sanctuary for wildlife and for you and your family. A healthy habitat provides a natural haven beneficial to birds, other creatures, and people, and is an extension of your home and part of a larger ecoregion. Learn how to be a responsible caretaker of your piece of the earth.

A healthy yard teems with insect life. It is home to a diverse number of species carrying out many important functions, including the **POLLINATION** of plants

A **DEAD TREE** that is a safe distance from the house and from human activity can provide a nesting cavity for birds as well as perches to sing from.

NATIVE PLANTS have co-evolved with native birds, so they are more likely to provide the right size food and the right amount of nutrients at just the right time of year.

INVASIVE PLANT species threaten biodiversity and can displace native plants, which are better adapted to provide food and shelter for native wildlife. Thus, it's important to control the spread of such plants, which often are non-native species.

LAWNS can be a drain on your wallet, your time, and the environment due to misguided planning and maintenance. Minimize the lawn to match your needs and adopt ecologically-friendly practices.

Each year in the United States, 66 million pounds of insecticides and herbicides are applied to homes, lawns, and gardens. These chemicals kill an estimated 7 million birds a year. **BENEFICIAL INSECTS** are among the alternative methods to controlling garden pests.

What lived in your yard before you did, say 250 years ago? Was the area a grassland? A forest? What type of trees grew in the forest? Which plants and animals called it home? By knowing the **ECOLOGICAL ADDRESS** of your land and neighborhood you may be able to restore some of the fauna and flora that once thrived there.

To learn more go to the National Audubon website <http://www.audubon.org>

Miscellaneous

Financial support needed for The Magpiper Local dues will increase to \$25

The rapidly rising cost of mailing The Magpiper has put a serious squeeze on the Blue Mountain Audubon treasury. Postal rates have doubled for us this year, leading the BMAS Board at its March meeting to reluctantly approve an increase in local membership dues to twenty-five dollars a year. This increase of five dollars in the annual dues, the first in six years, will become effective with membership renewals in August 2010. Local dues support most of the work of our Audubon chapter, but go primarily to fund printing and mailing The Magpiper. While revenue from local membership dues has remained fairly constant—averaging \$1800 annually for the past five years—costs for publishing our monthly newsletter have risen by fifty percent to over \$2200 for this year and can be projected to increase further. While regional members of the National Audubon Society receive The Magpiper with their national membership (two-thirds of the newsletter's 274 recipients are NAS members), national dues contribute only a very small amount to support local activities like this newsletter. For the past five years Blue Mountain Audubon has received an annual contribution from NAS averaging \$2.50 in assistance for each national member on our mailing list.

In addition to increasing local dues, the BMAS Board is making a special appeal to all recipients of The Magpiper to support the newsletter through LOCAL membership.

While we encourage membership in the National Audubon Society and will continue to provide The Magpiper to its members, the Board urges NAS members to consider contributing directly to Blue Mountain Audubon Society as national and local members. Membership forms can be found on the back page of this publication and online at www.blumtn.org. New members can still join now for the bargain price of \$20 good through August 2011.

The Magpiper is a wonderful and invaluable asset to our organization, providing vital information on our activities, important birding news of our region, educational features on birds, nature and conservation, and the literary outpourings of our leader! The Magpiper has been continuously published in the Walla Walla Valley for 38 years and needs our continued support for the benefit of everyone interested in birds and birding in the Blue Mountain region.

BMAS Board

Books

Listening for Coyote by William L. Sullivan

The spirit of the wilderness is an elusive quarry. Author William L. Sullivan's quest for it took him on a 1,300 mile solo backpacking trek across his native Oregon in 1985. His remarkable route—now officially known as the "New Oregon Trail" - traversed four mountain ranges and eighteen designated wilderness areas.

This book, describing his two-month trek in day-by-day detail, has everything a reader looking for outdoor adventure could want: the observations of a talented naturalist, notes on both the geological and the human history of the place, demonstrations of survival skills, and encounters with some unforgettable people. These people include a political scientist who leaves his classrooms to protect Bald Mountain for the loggers, a braided and ear-ringed park ranger who takes up chewing tobacco as a political move, a camouflaged elk hunter who uses only a bow and hopes to be reincarnated as a stag elk, and an ancient widow who farms alone from a remote and rickety miner's cabin.

What all of these people share, and what the whole book illustrates, is a deep connection to the wilderness itself, that place we must preserve where man still does not control things. Changes have happened since Sullivan set out on his walk across Oregon, but the spirit of the wilderness remains.

Bright Wings Edited by Billy Collins and Illustrated by David Sibley

This is a beautiful collection of poems and paintings to celebrate the winged creatures that have inspired so many poets and writers to sing for centuries. From Chaucer to Thoreau, poets have long treated birds as powerful metaphors for beauty, escape, transcendence and divine expression.

This anthology has more than one hundred poems and is paired with around sixty original illustrations by Sibley. Part poetry collection, part field guide, part art book, *Bright Wings* presents verbal and visual interpretations of the natural world and reminds us of our intimate connection to the "bright wings" around us.

Some of the poet and bird pairings include: Emily Dickinson and the robin, Thomas Hardy and the goldfinch, John Updike and the seagull, Walt Whitman and the eagle, Billy Collins and the sparrow.

The book will inspire you to look at birds and poetry with a new appreciation for both.

In the Field

We found a **northern saw-whet** owl at Bennington Lake on March 2. It was a relatively quiet morning. The only bird on the water was a female **common merganser**.

There were six **killdeer** and a **great blue heron** on the shoreline. The **great horned owl** was in her nest hole and we had a very nice view of a noisy **northern shrike**.



Photo by Rodger Shoemake

Mike Denny saw a **mountain bluebird** and a **lapland longspur** while working along the Touchet River on March 4. MerryLynn heard **sandhill cranes** flying over their house the same day.

On March 6, Jonathan Comeau saw a **ruby-crowned kinglet** at Fort Walla Walla near the amphitheatre.

Mike and MerryLynn birded the west side of the county on March 6. They found over 4000 **snow geese** and at least 1000 **white-fronted geese** along Hanson Loop Road at McNary NWR. They also watched a pair of **prairie falcons** and a pair of **peregrine falcons** along the cliffs in Wallula Gap. Both falcon species have nested there in the past.

The **peregrine falcon** is back on its perch on top of the Marcus Whitman Hotel. Sharon Cline watched it plucking a pigeon on March 10.

Mike saw the first **violet green swallows** of the year on March 10 along the Middle Waitburg Road. Sharon Cline reported the first sighting of returning violet greens to downtown Walla Walla on March 19—the same day she first saw them last year.

Michael Woodruff watched about 60 **sandhill cranes** fly over Fort Walla Walla on March 12.

On March 14 the Dennys and the Shoemakes drove the Northern Umatilla County Raptor Route for the last survey of the season. We saw our first **great horned owl** chick—on Stateline Road. It was one of 10 great horned owls seen during the day. Our total raptor count for the day was 199. Of those 144 were **red-tailed hawks** but we also saw two **golden eagles** and one **bold**

eagle. Other interesting sightings were 8 **Sav's phoebes**, a **rock wren**, 3 **covotes**, 67 **deer** and a **raccoon**.

Jon Lundak went up Jasper Mountain on March 16 and found several pairs of **western bluebirds**. Here is a photo of one of the males.



On March 17, Pam Fisher had a **Cassin's finch** at her feeder.

Joe Corvino looked for **long-billed curlews** on Lambdin Road (off Highway 12 east of Wallula Junction) every day on his way home from work the week of March 15. On March 18 he found two of them.

At the BMAS meeting on March 18, Bev Thygeson reported she had a **varied thrush** in her yard that day.

Jim Nestler saw **red-breasted nuthatches**, **pygmy nuthatches** and **white-breasted nuthatches** all in a single tree on Jasper Mountain Road on March 20.

Larry Goodhew found an **Eurasian wigeon** on the pond along Highway 11 in Washington just north of the state line on March 20.

Mike and MerryLynn led the March Field Trip to the west side of the county on March 20. It was a great day of birding with 69 species seen.



Looking at wildflowers in Wallula Gap

Highlights of the trip were watching a displaying **long-billed curlew** on Lamdin Road, looking through scopes at a **peregrine falcon** and a **prairie falcon** on the cliffs in Wallula Gap and listening to the **canyon wrens** sing, watching a **common loon** on the Columbia River in Wallula Gap, seeing the large flock of **snow geese** at McNary NWR, looking at **tundra swans** and **white-fronted geese** at Casey Pond, marveling at a **chukar** gliding most of the way down Hatch Grade, looking at **wildflowers** in Wallula Gap and on Hatch Grade and watching a **mink** swimming on the Walla Walla River on Byrnes Road.



White-fronted geese photo by Jon Lundak

Wild turkeys invaded town again in March. Several people reported them in their yards at the March BMAS meeting, and George Jameson saw 22 of them in a field across from his yard on March 21.

March 21 was a busy day for bird sightings around the area. Melissa Cummins reported the **yellow-headed blackbirds** have returned to McNary NWR, Yancy Reser saw **lesser scaup** on the Walla Walla River near Last Chance Road and Alice Chaney called to let me know that she had a **spotted towhee** in her yard.

Tree swallows have returned. We saw eight of them at Bennington Lake on March 23. One of the poles that has a nesting box on it was unscrewed and laying on the ground. We reattached it, and before we even finished securing the pole, swallows were going in and out.

Joe Corvino saw **white-throated swifts** flying over the cliffs along Wallula Gap on March 23.

It's time to get your hummingbird feeders out. All three species of hummingbirds should be back by the end of April, or first week of May. There is always a chance that some may return earlier in the month, so you want to have those feeders ready for them. Natural food is hard to find when they first return, and they have had a long journey and will appreciate your feeders.

Katie Meadow watched a **pileated woodpecker** working a dead tree at Rooks Park on March 23.

Don't forget to let me know what you are seeing during the month of April either by calling [525-2963](tel:525-2963) or email housewren@blumtn.org

Happy birding! *Ginger*

Birds to look for this month

(see website for complete list)

- Osprey
- Swainson's hawk
- Cinnamon teal
- Spotted sandpiper
- Greater yellowlegs
- Vaux's swift
- Barn swallow
- Bank swallow
- Cliff swallow
- Calliope hummingbird
- Black-chinned hummingbird
- Rufous hummingbird
- House wren
- Western kingbird
- Yellow warbler
- Nashville warbler
- Orange-crowned warbler
- Hammond's flycatcher
- American avocet
- Black-necked stilt

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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: _____

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