

The Magpiper

May, 2010

Page 1

May Calendar

May 1
Field Trip-La Grande Area
6:00 a.m.

May 13
Board Meeting
7:00 p.m.
219 Newell Street

May 20
Membership Meeting
7:30 p.m.
Whitman College

May 22
Field Trip—Jasper Mountain
8:00 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 house_wren@charter.net

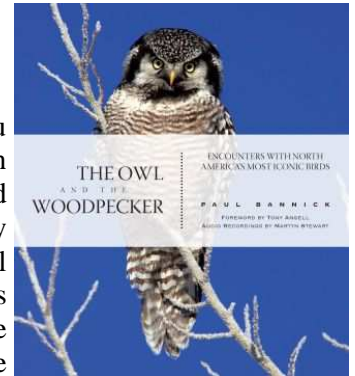
Meetings

Membership Meeting: May 20—7:30 p.m.

Gaiser Auditorium, Hall of Science, Whitman College

PROGRAM: The Owl and the Woodpecker

Award-winning photographer Paul Bannick will take you on a visual journey of eleven key North American habitats through the needs of North America's owl and woodpecker species. This stunning photographic study will be accompanied by field stories, and rich natural history derived from thousands of hours in the field. His talk will look at the way owls and woodpeckers define and enrich their habitat and how their life-histories are intertwined.



Paul's work has appeared in Audubon, Sunset, Pacific Northwest Magazine, and in many books including the recently published Smithsonian Guide to Birds, the National Wildlife Federation Guide to North American Birds, as well as in many parks refuges and other places in North America and Europe. He works full-time for Conservation Northwest, a conservation organization dedicated to protecting and connecting wild areas from the Pacific Coast to the Canadian Rockies and the biodiversity of these areas.

Field Trips

SPRING CREEK AND LADD MARSH

Saturday, May 1—6:00 a.m.

Joint trip with Pendleton Bird Club to look for great grey owls, woodpeckers, marsh birds, and more. This is an all-day trip and there will be some walking so plan accordingly. **See April Magpiper for details.** Call Ginger Shoemake if you plan to attend. [525-2963](tel:525-2963)

JASPER MOUNTAIN BIRDS

Saturday, May 22—8:00 a.m.

Join Mike and MerryLynn Denny for a trip to the mountains to look for bluebirds, nuthatches, woodpeckers, warblers, vireos, flycatchers and other Jasper Mountain nesting birds. Mike will also show us butterflies, wildflowers and more. This all-day trip is one you won't want to miss. Bring a lunch, lots of water and your walking shoes. Call the Dennys if you plan to attend. [529-0080](tel:529-0080)



President's Corner

THE \$165 OWL

by *BMAS President, Tom Scribner*

How much would you pay to see a burrowing owl? Granted, they are cute little buggers and you'd probably drive, what, 40 or 50 miles to see one. Maybe more if it was going to be a life bird. But \$50? Would you pay 50 bucks to see a burrowing owl? How about double that? Do I hear 100 bucks to add a burrowing owl to your list? I paid \$165 and I never got to see the damn thing. At this rate, I would need to be Bill Gates to have a life list to match Mike Denny's. With a few dollars from Warren Buffett for the exotics. Not to mention the possible jail time. Here's what happened.

At a recent BMAS meeting, I overheard talk about an accommodating burrowing owl on US 12 near Pasco. Something about taking the Kahlotus exit, then immediately getting back on the entrance road for US 12 and, if I got it right, there it was. How hard could that be? And since I drive to the Tri-Cities fairly often for work, heck, let's swing off and have a gander. So I did. Except things didn't turn out as planned.

I exited to Kahlotus, got right back on the entrance road and pulled off on the wide shoulder to look for the owl. Not much to see except dirt, gravel, some rabbit brush and lots of highway litter. Mostly paper and plastic. But, since burrowing owls are not real epicureans when it comes to where they live, I shut off the engine and got ready to do some serious owl hunting. Except, no sooner am I in owl mode, than a state patrol car pulls up behind me, lights flashing. Out of which state patrol car lumbers a big guy, in uniform, wearing a gun.

"There is no parking here," he tells me. *"What are you doing?"*

So I told him. Or at least I tried to. But I guess the context or the karma or something was wrong and things turned sour - - rather quickly. Now you don't have to believe me about this, but I carry a small battery powered Dictaphone when I am out of town so I can dictate stuff for my secretary while I am driving. I know. I know. If you can't use a cell phone while driving, you shouldn't use a Dictaphone. But the statute refers to cell phones, not Dictaphones. So there. Anyway, given my long criminal history, I am suspicious of cops. So I turned on my Dictaphone and slipped it into my shirt pocket. The better to have evidence if needed. Here, in part, is how it went down.

"I'm not parked, officer, I just stopped to look for an owl."

"To look for a what?"

"An owl."

"Yeah, right. And an elephant, I suppose. There ain't no trees here and it's day time. Last I checked owls lived in trees and come out at night. Let me see your license and registration."

"For your information, officer, I'm looking for a burrowing owl. They live in the ground. The owl I'm looking for is diurnal."

"You stopped here to pee?"

"What?"

"You said you were looking for a urinal."

"Diurnal! Meaning active during the day. I didn't stop here to . . ."

"Listen, old man, you can't park here and you certainly can't pee here. I'm writing you up."

Granted, I am old, but being called "old man" by this gun-toting idiot put me over the edge. So I got all lawyerey with him. And he, understandably, got all state patrolley with me. And he did write me up, for illegal parking and urinating in public. Neither of which I did, of course, but it would be his word against mine and I would have to travel to Pasco to appear in municipal court, and I'm sure some of the Tri-City attorneys I know would be there. And I sure as heck did not want word to spread among my fellow members of the Bar that Scribner got busted for peeing in public. Besides which, what would I tell the judge?

"Well, your honor, it's like this. I heard that there was a burrowing owl near the US-12/Kahlotus exit, so I pulled over for a look-see . . ."

At which point the judge would interrupt me and say something about,

"But, Mr. Scribner, there are no trees there and it was day time."

In response to which I would try to explain about diurnal and . . . well, I didn't see my situation getting any better. So I sent a check to the court for \$165, which is what you have to pay these days for not illegally parking and not urinating in public.



As for the feathered critter who started all of this, I have not been back since my initial unsuccessful attempt to see him/her/it. And I will not go back. I like owls, and burrowing owls are maybe my favorite, but let's just say that I have 165 reasons for by-passing this particular

ground dwelling, diurnal member of the owl family. I trust you can understand.

Photo by Rodger Shoemake (near Othello—not the Kahlotus exit)

Spotlight on Nature

MIGRATION

Excerpts from *The Birders Handbook*

The arrival of birds in the spring and their disappearance at the end of the breeding season is one of the most familiar aspects of North American bird biology. Seasonal migration enables birds to avoid the physiological stresses of unfavorable climates and to exploit food supplies that are available for only limited periods each year. Thus, many species can breed at high latitudes during the brief but insect-rich arctic summer, and then fly south to a more hospitable climate. While we may think of them as “our” birds that go south for the winter, it may be more logical to think of them as southern species that make a relatively brief foray north to breed.

Physiological preparation for migration includes the accumulation of fat to provide fuel for prolonged flights. Behavioral changes are especially prominent in nocturnal migrants, which alter their activity rhythms during darkness and begin to preferentially orient in the direction that they will soon be flying.

Most long-distance migrants fly at night; they may travel continuously or land daily around sunrise to rest and forage. When traveling over water or unsuitable habitats, birds that normally stop each day may fly without a break for long periods. Migrants that move only relatively short distances within our region usually travel during the day, generally spending only a few hours of the morning in migration. Aerial foragers, such as swallows and swifts, do not stop but simply feed in flight as they are migrating.

Migration in North America is essentially north-south along four principal routes of “flyways”; Pacific, Central, Mississippi and Atlantic. About 150 species of land and freshwater birds that breed in North America winter to the south in Central and South America and the West Indies.

Different species characteristically migrate different distances between wintering and breeding areas. The Arctic Tern breeds in the high Arctic and winters near the southern tip of South America and the Antarctic. In contrast, Clark’s Nutcracker often migrates only a few miles to move from its high-elevation feeding site to lower elevations within the same mountain ranges.

Just as many species show strong fidelity to breeding sites to which they return each year to nest, many migrants show some degree of site fidelity to wintering areas.

Bird of the Month

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT *Icteria virens*



Size: 7.5 inches

Description: Large thick billed warbler-like bird with a deep yellow throat and breast, grayish olive back, white spectacle around eye whitish belly and a long olive/gray tail.

Photo by Rodger Shoemake

Chats can be found in dense riparian thickets and undergrowth, forest edges, brambles in low wet areas, swamps, pond edges and old pastures. They are fairly common but are shy and secretive. They have a wonderful rich song which consists of chatters, rattles, caws and whistles. They are easy to hear, but not as easy to locate once they are nesting. During courtship the male often sits on top of branches and sings loudly, so this is the best time to see them.

Although the yellow-breasted chat is considered to be part of the New World warbler family, there is long-standing suspicion that it does not actually belong there. Their placement is not definitely resolved.

Chats eat insects, lizards, frogs, seed, nectar and berries, and will forage in dense vegetation, occasionally gripping food with their feet.

Their nest is a large, well concealed cup of leaves, straw and weed stems and is built by the female. Clutch size is 3-6 eggs. Incubation is done by the female and normally takes 11 days. Young chicks are fed insects by both the male and the female and they fledge is about 8 days after hatching.

Yellow-breasted chats nest several places in the Walla Walla Valley. Bennington Lake and South Fork Coppei Creek are two good places to look for them. At Bennington Lake they can be found on the west side of canal along the lower trail.

Conservation

TIME TO GET OUT IN NATURE

By Mike Denny, BMAS Conservation Chair

Folks it is SPRING!! This is the season when you are to abandon your inside life style and go outside. Outside is good for you. You were meant to be outside whether you want to or not. The sun is a necessary part of health, growth and defense against illness. So please put down the remote control to that TV or game console, yes just step away from it and go outside. Grab a book, a walking stick, a friend or two and start exploring the great outdoors. It is true that what you understand you appreciate and protect. So get on those comfortable walking shoes, call a friend, grab your water bottle, binoculars and hit the trail. We live in an area where there is no reason to ignore the outdoors, it is beautiful here. Health, general happiness and stress relief are all by products of a great relationship with the outdoors.

Please consider these locations to start your outdoor experience.

- There is the walking path that starts right behind K-Mart along Mill Creek and goes all the way east to Rooks Park.
- There are the trails that go all the around Bennington Lake.
- There are the hundreds of miles of Forest Service roads and trails on the Umatilla National Forest just east of Walla Walla. Make a visit to the good folks at the Walla Walla Ranger District and get a map of the National Forest.
- Out in the west end of this county is McNary National Wildlife Refuge which also has all kinds of exploring opportunities.

I must bring up a very important concept when out exploring the great outdoors and that is you must get out of the car, pick-up or van and walk. Park off the road and turn off the key and get out and listen, walk and try to learn how the great outdoors functions and where you fit in this great big world of thousands of other life forms. Please use common sense when exploring the outdoors. If you are new to the great outdoors and are much more knowledgeable about the layout to the interior of your home then go walk the trail between K-Mart and Rooks Park. This outdoor experience will teach you to listen, observe and gain a huge appreciation for the giant value of the great outdoors. I am not speaking of sports here I am speaking of personal and shared time with others in nature that will add to your life and bring rewarding experiences and never forgotten adventures unless of course you once again recline in that lazy boy turn on the TV and a stop going outdoors,

at which time your mind will turn to mush, your disposition will falter and you will have little contact with your fellow live living creatures. The lone ant hauling off a crumb of food you left behind just should not represent a wildlife adventure. So please get up and go outdoors. Enjoy it and work to understand it. Conservation needs you very badly and as already stated "You will protect and value that which you understand" So please come to an understanding of the Great Outdoors and please do it soon. So put this newsletter down and head outdoors, I think I just heard some Evening Grosbeaks in your back yard and a distant call to follow a wild country path.

WATER CONSERVATION

Spring is here, and soon the weather will turn warm and dry. It's time to be thinking of ways to conserve water during the hot days of summer. Following are a few suggestions for the yard:

- Water your lawn only when it needs it. Step on your grass. If it springs back when you lift your foot, it doesn't need water.
- Set your sprinklers for more days in-between watering. You can save 750-1500 gallons per month by doing this.
- Put a layer of mulch around trees and plants. Chunks of bark, peat moss or gravel slows down evaporation.
- Water during the cool parts of the day. Early morning is better than dusk since it helps prevent the growth of fungus.
- Don't water the lawn on windy days—there is too much evaporation
- Cut down watering on cool and overcast days and don't water in the rain.
- Set lawn mower blade one notch higher. Longer grass means less evaporation.
- Xeriscape—replace your lawn and high-water-using trees and plants with less thirsty ones. But make this change in a wet year. Even drought resistant plantings take extra water to get them going.

Water conservation is the most cost-effective and environmentally sound way to reduce our demand for water. This stretches our supplies farther and protects places that are vulnerable such as lakes, streams and wetlands. Using less water also puts less pressure on our sewage treatment facilities and uses less energy for water heating.

Miscellaneous

BIRDS TO LOOK FOR IN MAY

(see website for complete list)

Western wood peewee
 Warbling vireo
 MacGillivray's warbler
 Yellow-breasted chat
 Wilson's warbler
 Western tanager
 Black-headed grosbeak
 Lazuli bunting
 Bullock's oriole
 Willow flycatcher
 Dusky flycatcher
 Eastern kingbird
 Gray catbird
 Common nighthawk
 Veery
 Swainson's thrush
 Long-billed dowitcher
 Wilson's phalarope
 Wilson'

THE HAPPY BIRD

*The happy whitethroat on a sweeping bough,
 Swayed by the impulse of the gadding wind
 That ushers in the showers of April, now
 Carols right joyously; and now reclined,
 Crouching, she clings close to her moving seat,
 To keep her hold; and till the wind for rest
 Pauses, she utters inward melodies,
 That seem her heart's rich thinking to repeat.
 But the branch is still, her little breast
 Swells out in rapture's gushing symphonies;
 And then, against her brown wing softly prest,
 The wind comes playing, an enraptured guest,
 This way and that she swees—till gusts arise
 More boisterous in their play, then off she flies.*

by John Clare

Books

Living on the Wind by Scott Weidensaul

Did you know that neither temperature nor hunger sparks bird migration? That many species migrate at night? That some birds migrate more than 5,000 miles in a single, uninterrupted flight? To think of crossing thousands of miles under our own power is an incomprehensible as jumping the moon. Yet even the tiniest birds perform such miracles.

For anyone curious about the lives of migratory birds, this book is a great wealth of information. The author has traveled all over the world banding and observing birds and talking to the experts—amateur and professional who have made many of the important discoveries about bird biology. From Alaska to Lake Erie to the limestone forests of Jamaica, Weidensaul reaches not only for the scientific particulars but for the universal stories and humanizing, descriptive turns of phrase that keep this book from bogging down in statistics and jargon. By book's end the reader is unable to resist the heart of its compelling story, a plea for the conservation of habitat to keep these miraculous creatures on the earth. *Living on the Wind* is a book you will want to read and keep in your library as a reference guide for the future.

Remarkable Creatures by Sean B. Carroll

One hundred fifty years ago most of the world was an unexplored wilderness. Our sense of its age and origins was vastly off the mark, and our own species' history was a set of myths and fairy tales. This book celebrates the pioneers who replaced our fanciful notions with the amazing true story of how our world evolved. Carroll recounts the most important discoveries in two centuries of natural history—from Darwin's trip around the world to Charles Walcott's discovery of Precambrian life in the Grand Canyon; from Louis and Mary Leakey's investigation of our deepest past in East Africa to the trail-blazers in modern laboratories who have located a time clock in our DNA. The book will leave you with an overwhelming sense of awe and respect for the men and women who searched for the origins of species and in doing so gave us a profound sense of place among life on Earth.

Sean Carroll was this year's speaker for the Rempel Lecture at Whitman College. He is a professor of molecular biology and genetics and an investigator with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute at the University of Wisconsin.

In the Field

Birds continued to return or move through all during the month of April. On March 30, Mike Denny saw 22 evening grosbeaks on Spring Creek Road. The next day MerryLynn had several in their yard and others reported seeing them throughout the month.

Jon Lundak took Rodger and I up Mill Creek on March



31 to show us an American dipper nest under a bridge. While we were there we were able to watch both of the adults feeding young.

We have black-capped chickadees building a nest in our back yard. It has been fun to see them take nesting material into the nest and then remove some of it and bring more in. I'm not sure why they are rejecting some of the material once they get it into the nest box, but they seem to know what they are doing.

Mike and MerryLynn, Jeff Fredsen and I birded the west side of the county on April 3. We saw some new year birds—Swainson's hawk, Caspian tern and black-necked stilt. Other highlights were Wilson's snipe, a dunlin in breeding plumage, long-billed curlew, Eurasian wigeon, prairie falcon. We saw great horned owls and barn owls in several locations.

On April 3, Pam Fisher found baby canada geese on Mill Creek. She also saw a hermit thrush, common mergansers and common goldeneye along with the regulars seen in the area.

On April 13, while Rodger and I were in Texas birding with Mike and MerryLynn and MerryLynn's relatives,

Paul Treman, Priscilla Dauble, Susan Albee, and Kim Hallett-Jones walked Bennington Lake. They saw some great birds including a snow goose, two osprey, two great-horned owl chicks, a western meadowlark, barn swallows, and yellow-rumped warblers.

Markie McRae had a great encounter with two short-eared owls on April 14 while walking her dog near the Milton-Freewater golf course. One flew right at her several times trying to scare her off. She sat down and watched it hunt for about 30 minutes. Twice it came down and caught a small animal. Then she heard the owl clapping its wings together four times as it was flying. (later she looked in a bird book and learned this is a courtship display behavior). She could also see and hear another owl sitting on a large sagebrush behind her.

Kathy Wildermoth emailed on April 15 to let me know that a nesting pair of Swainson's hawks returned to the nest they have used for the past several years. How nice to be able to watch them for the next few months as they nest and raise their young.

Earl Blackaby sent me a series of photos from his yard on April 15. He had American goldfinches, red-winged blackbirds, robins, quail—and then a sharp-shinned hawk that cleared the yard in a hurry.

Kevin Black found two northern rough-winged swallows on Dodd Road at the blood ponds on April 15, and Nancy Mitchell noticed that eleven bank swallows had returned to their nesting sight along Cottonwood Creek on April 16. All of our swallows are back now and will be very busy and visible for the next couple months.

Pam Fisher saw the American dipper on Mill Creek near the Rooks Park bridge on April 17. Could it be that they are nesting there? She also reported the Vaux's swifts had returned to College Place on April 18.

We had a female rufous hummingbird come to our feeder on April 19—the first of the year for us. I had reports from several others that they were at their feeders. If you haven't put out your hummingbird feeders, it's time to get them up!

Bennington Lake was much busier on April 20. Cliff swallows buzzed around the concrete tower in the lake, northern rough-winged swallows flitted in and out of the cliff at the parking lot, goldfinches were singing everywhere and a black-capped chickadee was already

feeding young. The arrival of several singing house wrens added to the noise level.

Patty Froke sent me a report from their home on Jasper Mountain Road on April 20. They had four evening grosbeaks, a pair of dark-eyed juncos, a killdeer, a great horned owl and a barn swallow, along with their usual finches and chickadees.

Timothy Parker saw 110 sandhill cranes fly over his house on April 20. That's getting pretty late to see cranes.

On April 21, Pam and Wally Fisher found several long-billed curlews on Dodd Road. It's nice to know that there may still be more nesting in the county.

Another hummingbird has returned—MerryLynn had a calliope come into her coral bells while she was working in the yard on April 22. She also had a beautiful male Cassin's finch.

John Lundak saw a western kingbird along the high trail that leads from Rooks Park to Bennington Lake on April 22.

The Audubon Field Trip on April 24 was a lot of fun despite the windy conditions. Swainson's hawks were the most prevalent raptor seen by far. We had several good looks at them, including this one that was sitting on a power pole.



Other highlights included barn owls, great horned owl chicks, long-billed curlews, yellow-headed blackbirds, American avocets, cinnamon teal, and ospreys. We also saw American white pelicans flying up the Walla Walla River in several places.

While our field trip group was fighting the wind south of the Lowden/Touchet area, Mike and MerryLynn were

trying to bird on the Columbia River in western Walla Walla County. They said it was like ocean birding out there with the high waves. However in the more protected areas they were able to find some nice birds including 10 Ross's geese, white-fronted geese, a nice variety of ducks, American avocets, a lesser yellowlegs, black-necked stilts, osprey, western kingbirds and a rock wren.

Nat Drumheller visited for a couple days and on April 24 reported his sightings which included new arrivals chipping sparrows and a savannah sparrow.

On April 25 I drove up Biscuit Ridge with Mike and MerryLynn. We were surprised to find several spring arrivals—yellow warbler, orange-crowned warbler, fox sparrow, Nashville warbler and red-naped sapsucker. There were a pair of mountain bluebirds on top. At Tom Lamb's we saw a male calliope hummingbird, a male rufous hummingbird, chipping sparrows, house wrens and violet-green swallows. We also saw some nice wild flowers and five species of butterflies.

Next month's Magpiper will be an abbreviated issue to announce summer fields trips and to let everyone know what birds are seen in May. Be sure to check our website during the summer to stay up-to-date on what birds are being seen during the summer and any last minute field trips that may be scheduled for later on in the summer.

Let me know what birds you are seeing. Call [525-2963](tel:525-2963) or email, house_wren@charter.net Have a great summer. *Ginger*

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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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