

Volume 52 Issue 4

April 2022



# Calliope Crier

*Newsletter of the Yakima Valley Audubon Society*

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## YVAS April Program

*The Yakima Valley Audubon Society is people dedicated to the enjoyment and preservation of the natural world. Through birding, education, and conservation activities in our community, we raise awareness and promote the cause of global environmental protection.*

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*The ecology and conservation of alcids in the waters of Washington State*

Speaker Peter Hodum

**Thursday, April 28th on Zoom.**

Sign in to visit with others at 6:45 pm, program begins at 7:00 pm

The very striking Tufted Puffin is no doubt the most well-known bird in the alcid family, also known as auks. Some alcids have been dubbed the penguins of the north, though they are not at all related to that family of birds of the southern oceans.

This program will introduce you to the alcids of Washington. Relatively little is known about the ecology and conservation status of many of these species, of which 15 have been recorded in Washington. Eight of these are regular in occurrence, one of which is iconic Tufted Puffin, a species listed as Endangered by Washington State. Moving between islands, seascapes, and species of the waters of Washington, our speaker, Peter Hodum, will provide an overview of the collaborative research programs focused on improving our understanding of Tufted Puffins, Rhinoceros Auklets, and Marbled Murrelets, and other Washington alcids and their conservation status.



**Photos** *Left:* Rhinoceros Auklet. *Right:* Tufted Puffin. *With bio:* Dr. Peter Hodum. All photos courtesy of Peter Hodum.



**Speaker Bio:** Dr. Peter Hodum is a professor in the Biology Department and the Environmental Policy and Decision-making Program at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, WA, and the Chile Program Director for Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge, a conservation non-profit organization. His research focuses primarily on the conservation and ecology of threatened seabirds and island ecosystems in Chile and Washington State. His work also has a strong focus on community-centered conservation, including how communities can be more effectively and authentically involved in conservation.

## How to View YVAS Zoom Programs

**Zoom event name:** Yakima Audubon March Program

**Event link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85751241932?pwd=K0lseGlvbng4WG1KN3NaeEdaL2VTQT09>

**iPhone one-tap :** US: +12532158782 **Telephone:** +1 253 215 8782 **Webinar ID:** 844 2557 6656

## Events Calendar

<b>Thursday, April 28th, 7:00 pm (Zoom)</b>	<b>YVAS April Program</b> <i>The ecology and conservation of alcids in the waters of Washington State</i> with speaker Peter Hodum.
<b>Friday, May 13th</b>	<b>May Calliope Crier deadline</b> (send articles, questions to <a href="mailto:newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org">newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org</a> )
<b>Friday, May 13th–Monday, May 16th</b>	<b>Birdathon/Yakima County Migration Count.</b> Coordinated by Scott Downes, email <a href="mailto:downes@charter.net">downes@charter.net</a> for information.
<b>Saturday, May 21st</b>	<b>Wenas Lake &amp; Valley Spring Migration,</b> Leader: Andy Stepniewski, <a href="mailto:steppie@nwinfo.net">steppie@nwinfo.net</a> . Contact Andy for more information and to sign up.
<b>Friday, May 27th–Sunday, 29th</b>	<b>Tentative: Wenas Audubon Campout.</b> Contact Richard Repp, <a href="mailto:bbirder247@gmail.com">bbirder247@gmail.com</a> , for information.
<b>Saturday, June 4th</b>	<b>Conboy Lake Wildlife Refuge.</b> All-day event. Birding the numerous trails and habitats of the Conboy Refuge, Glenwood, WA. Expect to see Sandhill Cranes, many species of songbirds, and woodpeckers. Contact Sarah Shippen at <a href="mailto:ses1440@outlook.com">ses1440@outlook.com</a> to sign up.
<b>Saturday, June 11th</b>	<b>Second Saturday Bird Walk.</b> Tieton River Nature Trail. Meet at Oak Creek Wildlife Recreation parking lot. Bird for approximately two hours. Discover Pass required. Co-leaders: Kathy Howell and Sarah Shippen, contact <a href="mailto:ses1440@outlook.com">ses1440@outlook.com</a> .

## Membership – Joy McKinney

### Welcome New Member!

Leslie McClure, Yakima

### Thank You for Renewing Your Membership

Jim and Patty Christiansen, Alexander Conley, Dale and Terry Critchlow, Bill Drenguis, Cowiche Canyon Conservancy, Martha Fleming, Joseph and Kathy Howell, William Jacobs, Cathy LeCompte, Richard and Deb Mains, Jackson and Cheryl Mayes, Joy McKinney, Cathy Reed, Kathleen Ross, Tyler Shepard, Fern Sule, and Kathy Tierney.

## Field Trips – Sarah Shippen

### Wenas Lake and Spring Migration

**Saturday, May 21st, 6:30 am – 3:00 pm**

Meet at 6:30 am in Yakima.

This trip is timed to experience the high species diversity along the lower east slopes of the nearby Cascades, justly famed for its spring birds. The Wenas Valley includes a remarkable array of habitats, including shrub-steppe, brushy slopes, riparian woodland, Ponderosa Pine forests transitioning into mid-elevation Douglas-fir and mixed-conifer zones. We'll visit a number of these distinct vegetation communities and especially seek out the wonderful array of bird species, many having just migrated north from the tropics to breed here. We'll hope to encounter a nice selection of somber-hued flycatchers and sparrows along with more colorful swallows, vireos, warblers, orioles, and tanagers.

**What to bring:** Dress for weather, bring lunch, fluids, sunscreen, hat.

**Leaders:** Andy and Ellen Stepniewski

**To sign up and for further details,** email Andy Stepniewski at [steppie@nwinfo.net](mailto:steppie@nwinfo.net).

### Yakima County Migration Count

**Friday, May 13th – Monday, May 16th**

YVAS's annual "Birdathon" will be a county-wide bird count, as we try to tally species from different sectors in the county. Scott Downes will be putting teams together to cover all the best areas to bird

around Yakima including the White Pass, Chinook Pass, Lower Valley, Ahtanum, Yakima Training Center, Toppenish, and Wenas areas. Some teams start before dawn with owling, while most teams go all or most of the day.

In addition to cheering on teams on their long journeys around the various habitats of the county, you can contribute as well! If you see an unusual species of bird while out birding during May 13-16, email Scott Downes, [downess@charter.net](mailto:downess@charter.net) to have your unusual species added to the team effort. You can also contribute by helping YVAS to raise money for important conservation actions in the chapter. See the article in this Crier on how to contribute a donation to the Birdathon effort.

—Scott Downes

### Field Trip Report: Sunnyside Wildlife Area **Saturday, March 19, 2022**

The Yakima Valley Audubon Society trip to the Sunnyside Wildlife Area was assisted by Sarah Huerte from WDFW accompanying us. Sarah introduced the 14 trip participants at the outset with an overview of this 2,700-acre preserve bordering the Yakima River south of Sunnyside. Too, she led us to a peek of nesting Great Horned Owls, a nice finale, indeed.

We hiked around the "rice ponds," a series of diked ponds south of Giffen Lake. There was lots of water, so much so, we couldn't complete the usual walk due to high water overflowing the trail on the eastern pond.

March is in the middle of the migration of northbound waterfowl (geese, swans, and ducks), so it was no surprise our list of 33 species was highlighted by this clan. We tallied 12 species of this group, beginning with nice scope views of the very striking Wood Duck on Giffen Lake's west side. Tundra Swan was a "heard only bird," calling as it flew unseen high overhead. Other common species were Northern Shovelers, Mallards, and Northern Pintails. Besides waterfowl, raptors were conspicuous, especially Northern Harriers and Red-tailed Hawks. Off to the south along the Yakima River, we scoped a Bald Eagle nest with an adult's brilliant white head peering

above the nest. In the cattail and tule marshes, Marsh Wrens were singing everywhere but close looks at this secretive bird mostly eluded us. Virginia Rails were calling up a storm from the marshes, too. Perhaps even more secretive than the Marsh Wren; with a little coaxing, a rail scurried across an opening in the marsh, giving us fleeting views. Yellow-headed Blackbirds were back from the south, also, singing their most unpleasant squeaky gate song. Tree Swallows, early spring migrants, were hawking insects over the ponds.



**Photo** Field trip to Sunnyside. Photo by Ellen Stepniewski.



**Photo** Black-necked Stilt. Photo by Steve Moore

Heading back to Yakima, we stopped briefly at Kerry's Pond along the Yakima Valley Highway in Outlook. We added two more waterfowl species to our trip list: Redhead and Lesser Scaup. We also added lots of “feedlot” type species such as Brown-headed Cowbird and Brewer’s Blackbirds. No doubt, what we’ll remember most here was a Black-necked Stilt, a most striking black-and-white shorebird, with gaudy pink legs. Aptly named on account of its very long legs, we admired this early returning individual, the very first noted in Washington (in eBird, anyway) this spring. Participant Steve Moore snapped a nice photo of this elegant shorebird.

—Andy and Ellen Stepniewski

### Species Observed

Canada Goose	30
Tundra Swan	1
Wood Duck	2
Northern Shoveler	25
American Wigeon	15
Mallard	60
Northern Pintail	40
Redhead	8
Lesser Scaup	4
Green-winged Teal	30
Ring-necked Duck	2
Bufflehead	10
Ring-necked Pheasant	2
Rock Pigeon (feral pigeon)	2
Eurasian Collared Dove	1
Mourning Dove	4
Virginia Rail	5
American Coot	100
Killdeer	4
Black-necked Stilt	1
Wilson’s Snipe	6
Great Blue Heron	3
Northern Harrier	2
Bald Eagle	3
Red-tailed Hawk	4

### Species Observed (continued)

American Kestrel	1
Black-billed Magpie	3
Common Raven	2
Tree Swallow	40
Marsh Wren	15
Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)	3
White-crowned Sparrow	5
Song Sparrow	1
Yellow-headed Blackbird	10
Red-winged Blackbird	100
Brown-headed Cowbird	45
Brewer's Blackbird	150

## Bluebird News – Karen Zook

### Bluebird Box Cleanout Report

*"Oh, how the waiting countryside thrills with joy when the Bluebird brings us the first word of returning spring. Reflecting heaven from his back and the ground from his breast, he floats between sky and earth like the winged voice of hope."*

—W.L. Dawson



**Photo** A female Western Bluebird greets us in the parking lot before the cleanout.

On April 8, a hardy and fun group of volunteers gathered for the annual cleanout of the boxes. It was a great day.

The weather was cool but otherwise cooperative in the morning, but as we got toward our lunch gathering the wind picked up. That did not hinder our group's efforts. We had all of the boxes cleaned when we met for lunch.

While cleaning, we discovered that several bluebirds are getting a head start on the season. Twenty-eight of the 132 boxes had nests or nest starts in them, and eleven of those boxes had eggs! Twenty-one eggs were counted.

We saw plenty of Mountain and Western bluebirds, and also found some other spring migrants: Sage thrashers, Brewer's and Vesper sparrows were on the scene (to name a few). Cassin's finches and Red Crossbills were abundant.

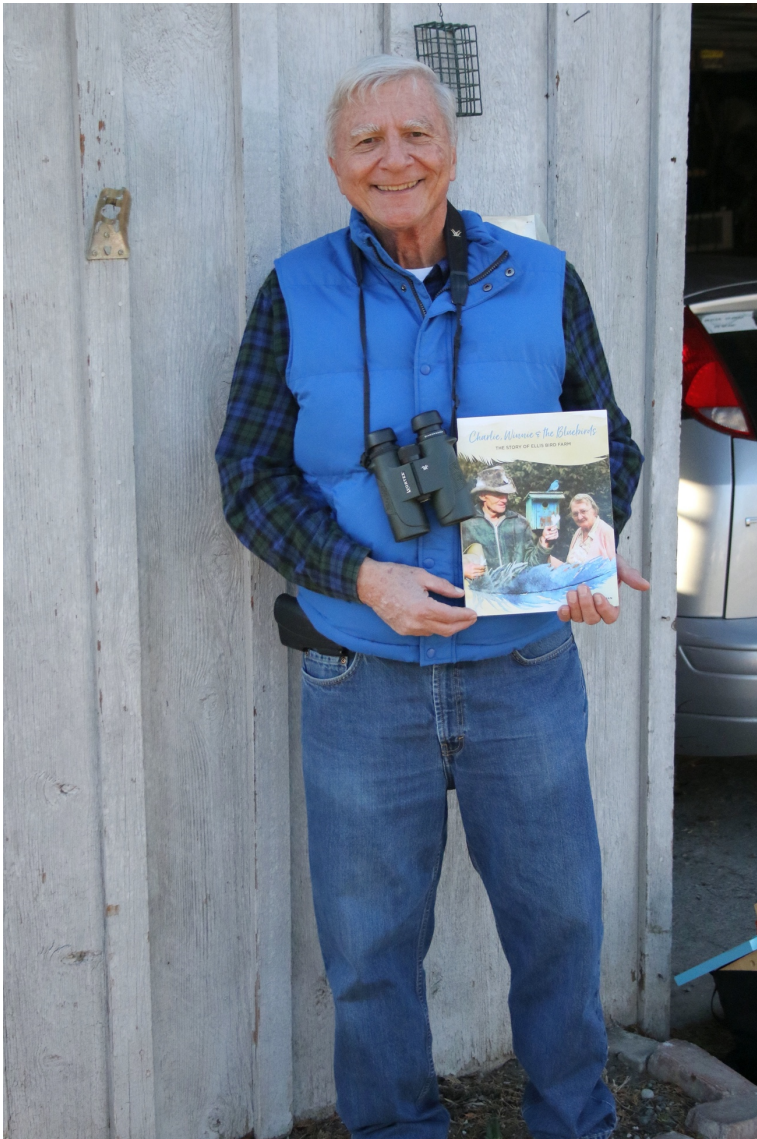
After lunch, Richard, Joe, and I stayed for a little maintenance and repair of boxes. The wind had really picked up and we were briefly showered with rain and snow. It's definitely springtime in the Wenas.

Many thanks to our cleanout volunteers: Martha, Carol, Dale, Kathy and Joe, Sara and Ron, Richard and Joe (Zook).



**Photo** Volunteers gather (and do a little birding) before starting out. Photos by Karen Zook.

## YVAS and the Bluebirds Thank You, Richard Repp!



**Photo** Richard shows us one of his favorite bluebird books.  
Photo by Karen Zook.

boxes along North Wenas Road and in Hardy Canyon, and he helped his granddaughter establish a trail on Cleman Mountain, which Joe and I now monitor and maintain.

Richard has recently stepped down as Bluebird Chair, but he is not going to stop being “the Bluebird Guy.” He will still be here helping with the trail and contributing to the success of bluebird families. We are thankful for his years of service, for his patience in teaching us the ropes, for his humor, and for sharing his extensive knowledge about the trail and bluebirds.

It would not be possible to include everything Richard has done for bluebirds and bluebird enthusiasts in one short article. Twenty years of taking care of the trail is most impressive, and we just want to say thank you.

—Karen Zook

For more than twenty years, Richard has been “the Bluebird Guy” in Yakima County. Even his email address—Bbirder247—indicates his enthusiasm for the birds and the trail. He took over management of the Vredenburgh Bluebird box trail from some of its pioneers. Richard has been a devoted caretaker of the trail which has fledged over 17,000 chicks.

Richard has always had the best interests of the Bluebirds at heart. In addition to monitoring the trail, keeping track of the data, taking care of box sponsors, and recruiting and training volunteer monitors, he is always on the lookout for ways to improve the trail. He has added boxes and moved boxes around, made sure the boxes are in good working order by repairing and replacing parts when needed, and been vigilant in working to keep invading species (such as House sparrows) at bay. He has worked on the trail during rain, snow and the heat of summer, seen fire and flood, battled snakes, chipmunks, and weasels and has kept on going.

Richard has introduced monitoring the Bluebird trail to the campers at the annual Wenas Campout, held over Memorial Day weekend, making the trail and monitoring accessible for campers from all over the state. And of course, he has introduced many of us locals to monitoring as well. He taught us to monitor, explaining the hows and whys, patiently answering questions, and helping us understand the birds and their nesting habits.

In addition to the Vredenburgh trail, Richard cares for



**Photos** (Clockwise from upper left) Richard and Elizabeth relax after a box cleanout. Richard shows a group of Campfire Girls how to install a bluebird box. Richard and Rich at the Wenas Campout, May 2019. Cleanout volunteers gathered to head for the boxes, April 2019. Photo with Campfire Girls by Jan Gano. Other photos by Karen Zook.

## **Birdathon 2022: 24 Years of Support for YVAS – Dan Kinney**

Spring is the season for great birding throughout the Yakima Valley. It is also the time for the Yakima Audubon’s BIRDATHON, the chapter’s annual appeal to members for financial support. This year’s BIRDATHON is May 13th –16th, in conjunction with the Yakima County Migration Count. (See Field trips for more about the Migration Count.)

Since 1998, YVAS has conducted a spring Birdathon to raise money for our general operations and conservation issues. We hope to return to regular chapter activities next Fall and your generous donations will help support our chapter programs and community outreach events.

Will you join us by making a contribution? You can send your donation to Yakima Valley Audubon Birdathon, P.O. Box 2823, Yakima WA 98907, or you can donate online at [yakimaaudubon.org](http://yakimaaudubon.org). To donate online, click on the Join tab next to the hummingbird logo, then click on Join/Renew/Donate. Enter your amount, type Birdathon in the comment field, then click the blue Donate button. Both you and the Treasurer will receive a receipt.,

As a thank you, Birdathon sponsors will receive a special report written by Scott Downes with the results of this year’s Yakima County Migration Count.

## Conservation – *Stan Isley*

### Travel, Tourism, and Eco-tourism

My friend and fellow Yakima Valley Audubon Society member Anita Osterhaug and I recently had a discussion about the environmental impacts of our travels. I thought I'd offer everyone some of my thoughts on this topic.

Mark Twain, circa 1869, said "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." One hundred fifty-three years later, I agree wholeheartedly with Mark Twain.

Today, in 2022, we live in a world of challenges, with bird and insect numbers and global biodiversity, in general, declining dramatically and troublingly. In this era that some refer to as the Anthropocene, an era dominated by humans, we are experiencing the 6th mass extinction of life on Earth, and we humans are the cause of it. And climatologists tell us that our use of, and addiction to, fossil fuels to power our lives and economy, is heating the entire planet to the detriment of species across the world. We have an ever-increasing human population on a planet that can only support so many of us, with ever-diminishing wildlife and wild places. We must do what it takes to contain our human population at a level that the Earth can support. I worry that we humans will never find a way to live sustainably on Planet Earth.

So, in this stark reality, how can we justify our travel? That's a good question, indeed. Our methods of transportation, our cars, planes, and ships, are largely powered by burning fossil fuels in internal combustion engines that pump large quantities of carbon dioxide into our atmosphere, causing global warming. And once we get to our destinations, travel can have other negative environmental impacts. So, what can we do? Should we simply stay home and not travel in order to minimize our impact on Planet Earth? I say no. Life is precious and way too short. There's a big world we want to see and experience.

And travel is good for us all, as Mark Twain famously noted. Let's travel, but let's travel wisely.

Throughout the year in our daily lives, live as sustainable a life as you can. Reduce your consumption of consumer goods. Reuse and recycle. Let's do everything we can, individually and collectively, to support the rapid shift of our transportation system and our entire energy system away from fossil fuel consumption to electrical power systems – powered by electricity that is generated by sustainable solar, wind, and other renewable energy sources. This will help us enjoy travel, without feeling a lot of guilt about it, during our world's transition period to sustainable energy sources.

Then when we're traveling, let's do it smartly and limit our environmental impact as much as possible. What does this mean?

Perhaps taking that cruise ship vacation you've dreamed about isn't such a good idea. Perhaps supporting the conspicuous consumption and waste generation associated with such a vacation isn't justifiable.

Going on a vacation to the beaches of the crowded Caribbean Islands also might need careful scrutiny. So many of those tourist destinations are overtaxed by the hordes of visiting tourists, and native island species suffer. Islands are perhaps the most conspicuous examples of fragile ecosystems where human impacts are decimating natural systems and causing native species to go extinct.

And chasing Africa's iconic wildlife around in a Land Rover, with hordes of other tourists doing the same, also might not be 'best for the wildlife', interfering with the animals' ability to survive.

But instead, look to ecotourism as your option. Research carefully to find ecotours that minimize negative impacts to the environment. Recognize that ecotourism actually encourages the local people to conserve their wildlife and wild places. Why? Because it's a great way for them to make money and earn a living. Tourists want to see the birds, wildlife, and wild places, and pay good money for that privilege. So, often this translates into local people stopping their poaching and hunting, and instead



establishing and protecting nature preserves, and preventing the further clearing of forest land for cattle pastures, “sun coffee” groves, and palm oil plantations. Ultimately, it fosters the emergence of a new generation of local ecotourism guides who love nature and love their work.

So, by all means, travel but travel wisely and be an ecotourist. That way your travel can have positive impacts that outweigh the negative environmental impacts. Go see this wonderful world. And meanwhile let’s all support our transition to real human sustainability on this planet.

*For more information about the Yakima Valley Audubon Society, or to join, visit our website, [yakimaudubon.org](http://yakimaudubon.org).*

*To contact us, email [info@yakimaudubon.org](mailto:info@yakimaudubon.org).*