



Calliope Crier

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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A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

February 2016



FEBRUARY PROGRAM

BILL DRENGUIS



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

ANDY STEPNIIEWSKI

Warm Up with Costa Rica

If you want to take interesting pictures, stand in front of something interesting! Our speaker for the February meeting has obviously followed that advice. Firstly, he is one of our chapters top bird photographers. Secondly, he has been fortunate to be able to travel to exotic locations with fantastic birds. I am referring to our own George Vlahakis.

To appreciate his work, you should visit his galleries online (pbase.com/photon180). You will be able to see some amazing pictures of our local birds. Now take that skill to Costa Rica, and you are getting an idea of what our program will be like. George has made several recent trips to Costa Rica with his primary goal being to capture the birds (with a camera) in their natural settings.

Come join us on a chilly February evening for an escape to the tropics! You will be astounded by the poses, plumage and personality of the birds of Costa Rica. Plus the evening will be mosquito free and completely lacking of creepy crawlers.



Common Potoo - Photo by George Vlahakis

Mark your calendar for Thursday, February 25, at 7:00 to see this presentation at the Yakima Area Arboretum

This message marks my last one as President of the Yakima Valley Audubon Society, with my two-year term as President ending March 1. I've enjoyed my term helping guide YVAS in its mission celebrating "The World of Birds," through chapter programs, fieldtrips, bird census activities, educational classes on birds, and engaging in environmental issues.

Now it's time to welcome Kerry Turley who assumes the role of President of YVAS March 1, a doubly important date for him. Kerry retires the end of February from a career in management of the Sunnyside Catholic Church and assumes Presidency of YVAS! Longtime YVAS members know Kerry well as this will be his second term as President. Newcomers will want to know Kerry's vocational career involved a management role in a large organization so he brings proven managerial skills in guiding our society. Welcome back Kerry!

Reflecting on our mission to celebrate the world of birds and nature, I would be remiss if I didn't thank Jim Christensen for his fabulous presentation on "The Mammals of Africa" at the January chapter meeting. We were all treated to stunning images of African wildlife, including a sampling of its spectacular birds, and some of the Jim's adventures on obtaining the photos. We counted 147 members and guests at this program, with many people standing out in the hall. This record crowd is clear testament to the enormous impact and influence Jim has made in our community. Many attending were Jim's students from his long career as a high school biology teacher in Naches. A number of his students are now scientists and teachers who work to further environmental goals. Others in the audience were admirers of Jim's masterful and very beautiful artwork, on sale at the meeting. Jim donated half the proceeds from the sales of these drawings of African wildlife to YVAS, bringing over \$ 400 into the YVAS treasury. Thank You Jim!

Though record attendance at our January meeting featuring Jim is proof of the importance society in general values natural habitats and their beautiful flora and fauna, occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge by militants seeking to take back this landscape for commercial purposes is clear evidence not everyone shares these values. Environmental organizations all across

President's Column (continued on page 2)

Visit the Yakima Valley Audubon Society's website at: <http://www.yakimaaudubon.org>

President's Column (continued from page 1)

America are rallying against this occupation, among them many of the 550 or so chapters in the National Audubon Society lobby for protection of our priceless natural heritage, which the refuge system is a key element. Birders and conservationists across the United States are working passionately to defend and preserve America's incredible wildlife legacy.

Though I'm not an overly political kind of guy, I found the occupation by militants of Malheur particularly disturbing and offensive. I chose to impart my perspective on the issue by devoting my monthly "Wildlife Moment" article (Yakima Herald-Republic, Feb 2) on the conservation legacy of Teddy Roosevelt, who established Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 1908. I firmly believe the 560 or so national wildlife refuges countrywide protect some of the most important samples of our nation's wildlife and natural habitat and the vast majority of Americans treasure this critically important part of our natural heritage. In case you missed the article and wish to catch up on it, here's the link:

http://www.yakimaherald.com/sports/outdoors/wildlife-moment-teddy-roosevelt-wouldn-t-like-what-s-going/article_ab81cff4-c97b-11

The Education Committee, chaired by Ellen Stepniewski has met and announce two classes by Jeff Kozma, one coming soon in March "Cavity Nesters and other wildlife dependent on snags." Along this theme, the Yakima Area Arboretum Arborfest event in April has chosen as its theme the role of fire in the forest. Our participation will certainly involve an activity for schoolchildren that focuses on the role of fire in the forest ecosystem as not one of destruction but rather the critical mechanism fire plays in rebirth and renewal of the forest, especially in those on the east slopes of the Cascades. See the class announcement, hosted by the Yakima Area Arboretum elsewhere in this Crier. The other class by Jeff is scheduled for May and will focus on "Bird banding."

Fieldtrips! Remember to check the Crier or the YVAS website and make plans to attend our fieldtrips, offering a great way to learn bird identification in our region's impressive array of natural habitats.

In closing, let me thank each and every one of you who has helped YVAS in its many activities over the past two years and let me urge you all to volunteer and assist in chapter activities during Kerry's term as President.



MEMBERSHIP

JOY MCKINNEY

Welcome New YVAS Members!

Yakima: Cheryl Meenach
Zillah: Harold Thornton

Thank you for renewing your YVAS Membership!

Moxee: Debie and Ron Brown
Naches: Dotty Armstrong
Seattle: Mary Williamson
Selah: Sally Rodgers and Steve Emhoff
Toppenish: Frank Brown
Yakima: Eileen Gavin, Jennifer Parsons, John and Elaine Pigion, and Karen Ramey
Zillah: Robert Bischoff

Please note that the above membership renewals are for Yakima Valley Audubon membership. Renewals to National Audubon are separate and are not listed here.



THIS MONTH'S YVAS CALENDAR

- Feb 25** Audubon Chapter Meeting at the Yakima Area Arboretum at 7:00 pm.
Mar 8 Board Meeting at Elizabeth Bohn's house (10810 Tieton Drive.. Yakima, WA) at 7:00 pm.

Bluebird Sponsors



Is your bluebird box due for renewal? Not sure? Check pages 6-7 of the October 2015 Crier and look at the Paid Thru column for your box. If that column states 2015 or earlier, payment for the 2016

season is due. Make your check payable to YVAS and mail it to P.O BOX 2823, Yakima, WA 98907.

Questions? Contact Richard Repp - at rich712@aol.com or 509-965-1134

The Yakima Valley Audubon Society meets on the fourth Thursday of January, February, March, April, May, August, September, and October at 7 pm at the Yakima Area Arboretum, located at 1401 Arboretum Drive, Yakima, WA. Guests are welcome at these meetings. The Annual Meeting of the Society is held the first Thursday of December at 6 pm. The Board of Directors meets each month except December at 7 pm at locations announced in the Calliope Crier. Members may attend Board meetings; however, please notify the host because of possible space restrictions.



FIELD TRIPS
SCOTT DOWNES

- Mar. 6 (Sunday) - Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge.** This is a trip to the Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge right at the beginning of spring. The refuge is a great place to bird at this time of year, with waterfowl migration just kicking off, and early spring birds of the shrub steppe and riparian areas arriving. Possible species could be Eurasian Wigeon, Trumpeter Swan, Cinnamon Teal, Say's Phoebe, Swallows, Sagebrush Sparrow, and Yellow-headed Black bird. Of course, we'll always be looking for rare birds; this is always a great place for something out of the ordinary to show up. This trip should take most of the day as we thoroughly bird the area, so bring a lunch and beverages. We may pop over to Fort Simcoe briefly for birds like Lewis's Woodpecker and Western Scrub-Jay. It should be a fantastic trip with lots of bird diversity; I would think that around 70 species should be possible. I hope to see you there! Please contact the leader Eric Heisey at magicman32@rocketmail.com if you have questions or for the meeting place and time if you will be going on the trip.
- Mar. 19 (Saturday) - Sandhill Cranes near Othello** -- Thousands of Sandhill Cranes stop in the Othello area on their way to their breeding grounds in Alaska to feed in the cornfields. We will visit that area, concentrating on cranes and will also visit Lower Crab Creek to look for other migrants. The crane migration is one of Washington's top wildlife spectacles. Please contact Denny Granstrand (dgranstrand@gmail.com) if you have questions or for the meeting place and time if you will be going on the trip.
- Mar. 26 (Saturday) - Snag/cavity-nesting wildlife class.** Class is through the Arboretum, headed by Jeff Kozma and assisted by other YVAS leaders. See article in this Crier.
- Feb. 25, Mar. 3, 10, 17, 24 - Thursday Morning Bird Walk.** Meet the group at the Poppoff Trail/ Jewett Pathway parking lot at the east end of Valley Mall Blvd., at the north side of the easternmost roundabout at **8:30am**. These walks include a sparrow feeding area and a fourth pond with diving ducks. There is a small change this year for Poppoff walks. There is a commitment to have a leader for the first Thursday of the month (March 3rd for this newsletter), but the remaining walks will be group-led. Group-led is whoever shows up at the meeting time, start the walk, don't wait for a designated leader. Contact Karen Zook if you have questions – gadzooks7@charter.net

Learn the Burn - A Class for You

"Dead trees in the forest: not wasted wood but Creators of life."

Dead trees in our forests serve critically important roles in ecosystem processes. Snags are standing dead trees and provide nest sites and homes for woodpeckers and other species of birds, small mammals, bats, and insects. Woodpeckers are the primary group which creates cavities in snags, which are in turn used by species which cannot create the cavities themselves. Due to the extraordinary diversity of eastern Cascade forests, an amazing 13 species of woodpeckers nest nearby, which is among the highest count anywhere in North America. Chickadees, nuthatches, and bluebirds are among other birds that use these cavities.

As a snag decomposes, it falls to the ground, but its importance in the ecosystem has not diminished. As a fallen tree, the dead wood returns nutrients to the



soil, provides soil stability, and aids in maintaining fish habitat, among other benefits.

Jeff Kozma, a wildlife biologist with the Yakama Nation who has undertaken extensive research on creatures that depend on dead wood in our nearby Cascade forests, will be the instructor for this class. A gifted teacher, Jeff will bring to life the critical role snags and fallen dead wood perform in keeping eastern Cascade forests healthy.

After the indoor session, Jeff will lead you out to the arboretum natural area where riparian forest displays snags and fallen dead wood and hosts lots of wildlife including Western Screech-Owls, Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and Black-capped Chickadees.

Saturday, March 26th

Time: 9am-11 am, followed by an optional field trip.

Register with the Yakima Area Arboretum 248-7337

Cost will be \$20 for Arboretum or YVAS members, \$25 for non-members.

An Old Bird Can Hatch A New Chick — Even At Age 65

Posted on the National Public Radio website by Bill Chappell

Wisdom, a Laysan albatross that researchers first tagged in 1956, has hatched what could be her 40th chick, leading the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to call her "an iconic symbol of inspiration and hope."

Born at the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge (which is part of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument), the new (adorable) chick has been named K kini — the Hawaiian word for messenger. The chick was first seen coming out of its shell on February 1.

Wisdom is the oldest known bird living in the wild, the agency says — for years now, she's been mapping out new territory in our understanding about the upper limits at which animals can rear their young.

It takes around seven months for a Laysan albatross to incubate and raise a chick — but the animals aren't exactly known for staying put: In fact, researchers don't think they set a foot on land except during the breeding season. They can travel hundreds of miles in a day and log thousands of miles in the air each year, using a massive wingspan of more



Wisdom, a Laysan albatross that's believed to be 65 years old, and her mate have welcomed a new chick at the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. Here, a week-old chick peeks out from its nest.

than 6 feet to soar on air currents above the ocean. They can even sleep in the air, the Fish and Wildlife Service says.

Every year, the birds return to their breeding grounds for a chance at producing one egg — and, if a recent video from Midway is any evidence, to catch up on albatross gossip and generally preen around.

"Wisdom has raised at least eight chicks since 2006, and as many as 40 in her lifetime," the Fish and Wildlife Service says. "Just as astonishing, she has likely flown over 3 million miles since she was first tagged on Midway Atoll in 1956."

That's enough mileage to account for up to six trips from Earth to the moon and back again, says Bruce Peterjohn, chief of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center's National Bird Banding Laboratory.

Wisdom isn't the only one in this story to show astounding longevity, Peterjohn says: "What is also miraculous is that biologist Chandler Robbins, who banded her as a breeding adult in 1956 on Midway Atoll, sighted her 46 years later near the same nesting location."

Public Lands Are For All Americans

Birds and people depend on our shared spaces.

By David Yarnold CEO/President, National Audubon Society January 22, 2016

Some places are so special—because of their value, because of their beauty, because of their history, because of the wildlife they sustain—that they truly belong to all of us. We call these places national parks, wildlife refuges, monuments, state parks, wildlife management areas, and county and city parks and preserves. Each of them, including the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which has been in the news a lot, is held in trust for the benefit and enjoyment of all Americans, and on behalf of the birds and wildlife with whom we share this great world.

Here at Audubon, we know that birds depend on public lands. Public lands are nurseries and wintering grounds and buffet sites during migration for millions upon millions of birds who couldn't survive without them.

We also know how deeply our members and supporters value public land. We value public lands because we know they provide homes for the birds we love, and we value public lands for the opportunities they give us to enjoy birds and spend time in nature, which restores us and brings us joy.

This idea runs deep in Audubon's DNA. We worked with Republican President Teddy Roosevelt to establish America's first National Wildlife Refuge at Pelican Island, Florida, in

1903. Roosevelt went on to establish hundreds of public lands, including Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, which he created with the support of an early Audubon group that became today's Audubon Society of Portland, one of our largest and most active local chapters.

America's public lands are America's treasure. The public employees and volunteers who care for them do a great service to all of us—and to the birds who cannot vote and depend on us for their protection. Our public lands are part of what makes me proud to be an American, and I know that vast majorities of Americans from every conceivable political stripe feel the same way.

When you next visit a refuge, park, or other public land near your home, please celebrate that you have the opportunity and freedom to do so, and don't forget to thank the dedicated staff and volunteers who protect and manage the land and make your visit possible.

And what do the birds think about public lands? Well, from the trumpeting of Sandhill Crane swarms in the winter to the trilling of colorful warblers in the spring, I like to think America's birds are saying "thank you."

McNary Dam Field Trip, January 23, 2016

Today I was joined by Andy and Ellen Stepniewski as we embarked on a full day trek to Umatilla, Oregon, working our way back up the Columbia River through Walla Walla County. The weather was pleasant for most of the day, with temperatures reaching the 50s. Intermittent showers in Umatilla were the only brief interruption, as it was partly cloudy with periods of sun for the rest of the day.

We started the day by driving around the town of Umatilla and by scoping the calm slack-water above McNary Dam. Here we had a number of good birds, including a lone Snow Goose, flyover flocks of Cackling Geese, two Barrow's Goldeneyes (the first of many), an Eared Grebe, and a large number of other waterbirds. From here, we drove below the dam to the small park there. This park had many conifers, and as has been the case in the Columbia Basin this fall, this meant Mountain Chickadees! We saw and heard three, it was the first time I had seen this species away from the mountains. Here, we also had one of the most exciting finds of the day, a Black-legged Kittiwake! The bird was perched over the spillway, literally a matter of feet away from the state line, just barely in Washington. We got good looks at the bird, it didn't move in the time we were there.

After this excitement, we drove west to the McNary Dam Nature Trail. This trail system takes one around several ponds and through varied other habitats, making for a nice walk with good species diversity. We saw lots of birds that were new for the trip, including such birds as a lone Trumpeter Swan, a male Eurasian Wigeon, 37 Black-crowned Night-Heron, beautiful Townsend's Solitaire, and a Western Scrub-Jay. We spent about two hours walking around most of the ponds, seeing 51 species.

Continuing upriver and into Washington, we stopped at the grain elevators just west of the intersection for Walla Walla. These elevators are typically great for diving ducks, and it did not disappoint today. There were huge numbers of diving ducks, the most numerous of all were Lesser Scaup, we estimated 1,000 of them. This is unusual, seeing as it is typically Greater Scaup seen in these



A Male Tufted Duck
Photo by Eric Heisey

large numbers along the Columbia River. In amongst the Lesser Scaup were small numbers of Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Canvasback, Greater Scaup, Mallard, American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Northern Pintail, Hooded Merganser, Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Gadwall, and even two Wood Ducks. Out of all of these birds, Andy was able to spot our other really good bird for the day, a gorgeous male **Tufted Duck!** This is a rare European duck, occurring in Washington most years, but very rare in Walla Walla County.

Nearby at the Tyson Road Blood Ponds on Dodd Road we saw a nice "Black" Merlin, the Pacific race of Merlin. Looking at the range maps on eBird, there are very few reports of this subspecies east of the Cascades. This race is much darker than the regularly occurring Taiga subspecies that is most common in Eastern Washington. Next, we decided to go up the Snake River to Ice Harbor Dam, a great spot for Gulls and Ducks. Not surprisingly, there were lots of both here. Maybe the most spectacular occurrence was 23 Great Egrets, a species I had not before seen in such numbers along the Snake River. There were also tons of ducks here, with over 1,000 Mallards, 80 Common Goldeneyes, 10 Barrow's Goldeneyes, and 150 Common Mergansers. In with the Mallards, I picked out a beautiful Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid, a hybrid I had not seen before. There were also tons of Gulls here, the most exciting of which being a second cycle Thayer's Gull, and an oddball large Gull that appeared to be a Nelson's (Glaucous x Herring Gull hybrid) Gull. It started to get dark, so we decided to go and end the day by watching the dusk goose flocks at the McNary NWR headquarters. This can be quite the spectacle if you stay until dark, as all the geese and other ducks flow into the pools, sometimes sheeting the water. We didn't stay late enough to observe this, but did witness some large flocks of Canada, Cackling, and Snow Geese, as well as 65 Tundra Swans, 35 Canvasbacks, and 28 Ruddy Ducks. This was a nice end to a fantastic day of birding, and we headed home happy. We finished the day with 87 species, pretty darn good for one day in January!



Little Gull and Black-legged Kittiwake, adults in winter Plumage
Photographer unknown



BIRD SIGHTINGS
DENNY GRANSTRAND

**Winter is when we hope for rare visitors to our valley —
 and this winter, they came!**

A few years ago, my mother asked me what I did during the winter when I couldn't watch birds. I told her winter can be the most exciting time to chase birds. It is when many of the rarest species show up in unusual places. It is the time when the rarities from the north visit us, such as Snowy Owls, Gyrfalcons, Bohemian Waxwings, and White-winged Crossbills. I am not saying that all of these species we birders love to chase have shown up, but some of them have favored us with their presence. And a quite rare wanderer also came to Yakima!

On January 21, after driving through the Gregory Ave. neighborhood in Yakima looking for the Band-tailed Pigeon that Tracy Lycins had found in her yard a few weeks earlier, I saw two Bohemian Waxwings in a tree with a large flock of Cedar Waxwings near the corner of S. 40th Ave. and Logan Ave. Two days later, Jeff Kozma stopped by and found 80 Bohemian Waxwings! It was the most impressive waxwing show in the valley in many years.

What attracted the waxwings to that intersection were two mountain ash trees full of berries. The waxwings pretty much stripped the trees clean in a week or so.

The Wenas Cemetery has a large number of introduced Norway spruce trees with full crops of cones. On Jan. 23 Kevin Lucas discovered two White-winged Crossbills picking seeds out of some of the cones. Birders have searched our entire area looking at spruce trees hoping to find more White-winged Crossbills but only the more common Red Crossbills have shown up.



Bohemian Waxwing
 Photo by Denny Granstrand

The prize discovery so far this winter was found by Michael Hobbs, a birder from the Western Washington, who, when searching for Bohemian Waxwings on Jan. 31, discovered a Northern Mockingbird! There haven't been very many sightings of mockingbirds in Yakima County. This one was quite cooperative and stayed in the neighborhood around Parsons Ave. and W. Walnut Ave. for at least a week. There were numerous fruiting trees, mostly crabapples, in that neighborhood on which it was feeding. The last report to eBird was dated Feb. 7.



White-winged Crossbill (above)
 Photo by Kevin Lucas



Northern Mockingbird (right)
 Photo by Karen Zook

Yakima Valley Audubon Society Membership

Join or Renew my annual membership to the Yakima Valley Audubon Society to receive 10 issues of the Calliope Crier and all chapter benefits. National Audubon membership and Audubon Magazine are not included.

Yakima Valley Audubon Membership\$ 25.00 per household
 Yakima Valley Audubon Senior (62+) OR Student Membership\$ 15.00 per household
 (please circle which apply)
 Yakima Valley Audubon Society Life Membership\$ 500.00 per household

New Member Renewing Member (Please check one)

I do not want to receive any solicitations or communications from NAS (please check if applicable)

I prefer to read the Crier online and not receive my copy by mail (please check if applicable)

Please make any corrections to your contact information as needed.

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Please return this form and your check payable to: YVAS Membership
 P.O. Box 2823
 Yakima, WA 98907

*** If you have any questions on membership, please call Joy McKinney at 698-4110**

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Some of the birds seen on the President's Weekend field trip to Okanogan County



We watched an immature Northern Goshawk chasing a Eurasian Collared-Dove, which Lamont McLachlan photographed at quite a great distance



**Northern
Saw-whet Owl**



Pine Grosbeak



Northern Pygmy-Owl



Townsend's Solitaire



Rough-legged Hawk



Wild Turkey

Other photos by Denny Granstrand