



# 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

August 2017



**AUGUST PROGRAM**

**BILL DRENGUIS**

## Quick, which is bigger, a Bald Eagle or a Golden Eagle?

Our Speaker for the August meeting is Jim Watson. Jim is a Wildlife Research Scientist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife specializing in statewide raptor studies but including work on Oregon spotted frogs and Washington ground squirrels. He has spent the past 40 years studying raptors in the western United States and

abroad. His first research experience involved working with a graduate student studying Golden Eagles in Colorado, followed by research on Rough-legged Hawks in Idaho, and Bald Eagles in Oregon. Here is the type of work he does:

### Species & Ecosystem Science — Raptor Ecology

#### Golden Eagle Contaminants, Residency, and Range Use

The Golden Eagle has been studied in Washington since the 1970s, when researchers investigated the distribution and diets of the species along the Columbia River. Though the species has never bred in abundance in Washington compared to other western states, concerns about its status resulted in a designation as a Candidate species for listing. Potential causes of Golden Eagle declines in Washington relate to changes in habitat quality during the past several years, including the presence of environmental lead and effects of reduced prey on nest occupancy and success. Necropsies performed on Golden Eagles at Washington State University between 1980 and into the 1990s indicated high levels of lead contamination in tissue samples (E. Stauber, unpubl. data). Acute and chronic blood toxicosis has been well studied in other large avian predators in recent years, particularly the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*), where population effects from lead mortality have been significant. Lead toxicosis results in impaired body functions and ultimately death.



Spent ammunition consumed by foraging eagles has been identified as a source of lead contamination in condors and eagles worldwide. However, sources of lead contamination in Golden Eagles in Washington are unknown.

Declines in prey from habitat changes may also be contributing to reductions in the Golden Eagle population in Washington. Jackrabbits, for example, were once common throughout shrub-steppe habitat in Washington, but have vanished from all but a few areas. In preparation for a state status review of Golden Eagles, we initiated this baseline study of nesting Golden Eagles to: 1) determine blood levels of lead; and 2) determine residency status and range size of breeding eagles. We initiated capture, blood analysis, and satellite tracking of Golden Eagles in 2004.

Wow, and that's his job! I think that we are all a little jealous. Come join us on Thursday August 24th at 7pm, at the Yakima Area Arboretum.

The Yakima Valley Audubon Society meets on the fourth Thursday of January, February, March, April, May, August, September, and October at 7pm 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 6pm. The Board of Directors meets each month except December at 7pm at locations announced in the Calliope Crier. Members may attend Board meetings; however, please notify the host because of possible space restrictions.

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



## MEMBERSHIP

JOY MCKINNEY

### Welcome new members!

Judith Bennett, Sunnyside  
Nicholas Mejia, Mabton  
Antonia (Toni) Soto, Grandview

### Thank you for renewing your membership!

**Naches:** John and Peggy Euteneier  
**Seattle:** Teri Martine, Jennifer Kaufmann  
**Union Gap:** Lawrence Martin  
**Yakima:** William Sable, Bill Drenguis, Bob and Carrie  
Chicken, Karen Ireland, Don Sattler, Ben Dover,  
Susan Talbott, Becky Drew, Renee Navarette  
**Zillah:** Eugene Miliczky



## THIS MONTH'S YVAS CALENDAR

- Aug 24 Audubon Chapter Meeting** at the Yakima Area Arboretum at 7:00 pm. **A great program should entertain and excite us!**
- Sept 12 Board Meeting** — Teresa Lorenz and Phil Fischer's house, 251 Rainbow Rock Lane, Naches. Car pool from Fred Meyer (near the mailbox and the bank at southeast corner of parking lot) at

View an expanded version of the August newsletter on the YVAS website at: <http://www.yakimaudubon.org>



## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

KERRY TURLEY

### Can our Federal and State Agencies simplify the maze of recreational fees?

I find it frustrating when I journey out to some distant place to do a little birding only to find out that I don't have the proper access pass. I understand that there are more than 20 different passes and permits in Washington, according to research by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center. No wonder people are easily confused about what passes they need for the public lands they want to visit and the activities they want to participate in. Of course primary reason for these passes is lack of funding by the Congress and state legislatures of outdoor recreation programs, operations and maintenance especially.

Most national parks have long had entrance fees. There are Forest Service sites where there are "parking fees," and most national forest trailheads with toilets and garbage service require passes. Because congresses and administrations prefer to put the cost of operations and maintenance on to the users there are people who think it is appropriate and others do not.

On top of all that, those of us 62 years old or older

have until August 28th to get those "senior passes" for \$10.00. Beginning August 28th, those lifetime passes cost \$80! These are available at the Naches Ranger Station.

Currently research is being done on recreation fees and passes. A public survey is online now. The goal is to improve "consistency, equity, and simplicity" in fees while accounting for the cost of managing public lands. The plan is to gather feedback this summer, weigh the options this fall and present a recommendation from the work groups to state lawmakers by Dec. 1, 2017.

The online survey asks about outdoor activities Washingtonians enjoy, passes they've purchased, passes they would like to see combined, and how much they're willing to pay, among other questions. Participants can weigh in on options being considered for simplifying recreation fees. The survey is online at <https://tinyurl.com/RecPassWA>.

Questions or suggestions also can be emailed to [molly.stenovec@wsu.edu](mailto:molly.stenovec@wsu.edu).

### Are you ready for the Total Solar Eclipse on August 21?

As you have undoubtedly heard, and possibly read about in last month's Calliope Crier, the United States will experience a total solar eclipse on Monday, August 21. People in Yakima will see just over 90% of the sun covered by the moon.

You have also heard that you should not look directly at the sun without proper eye protection. You should be

able to find eclipse glasses at stores in Yakima. Recently, they have been seen at Lowe's Hardware and Fred Meyer. If you can't find some, you can search online for how to view the eclipse by not looking at the sun but by projecting its image onto a piece of paper. Enjoy the spectacle carefully. This cosmic event is as rare as finding a Black-throated Blue Warbler in Yakima County!

# Should forest fires be allowed to burn?

## What the Black-backed Woodpecker knows

BUCK MEADOWS, Calif. — With long strides, Chad T. Hanson plunged into a burned-out forest, his boots kicking up powdery ash. Blackened, lifeless trees stretched toward an azure sky.

Dr. Hanson, an ecologist, could not have been more delighted. “Any day out here is a happy day for me, because this is where the wildlife is,” he said with a grin.

On cue, a pair of birds appeared, swooping through the air and alighting on dead trees to attack them like jackhammers. They were Black-backed Woodpeckers, adapted by millions of years of evolution to live in burned-out forests. They were hunting grubs to feed their chicks.

The Black-backed Woodpecker is one of the rarest birds in California, and lately it has become something more: a symbol of a huge scientific and political debate over the future of fire in American forests.

Scientists at the cutting edge of ecological research, Dr. Hanson among them, argue that the century-old American practice of suppressing wildfires has been nothing less than a calamity. They are calling for a new approach that basically involves letting backcountry fires burn across millions of acres.

In principle, the federal government accepted a version of this argument years ago, but in practice, fires are still routinely stamped out across much of the country. To the biologists, that has imperiled the plants and animals — hundreds of them, it turns out — that prefer to live in recently burned forests.

Human lives are at stake, too. Firefighters die, more than a dozen in some years, putting out fires that many scientists think should be allowed to burn. Conversely, a shift toward letting more fires rage is certain to raise fears about public safety in communities bordering forests.

Scientists contend that if money were redirected from firefighting into projects like fireproofing homes, those communities could actually be made safer. But the politics of the shift would be difficult, at best.

Climate complicates the picture. It is making wildfires more likely, essentially punching through the human effort to

suppress fires. That may, in the short term, help achieve the scientific goal of having more fire on the landscape. But longer term, it could lead to profound changes in forests, potentially driving some creatures to extinction. The question coming into focus is simple, but answering it in the age of global warming will be a lifetime challenge for a rising generation of forest managers: How much fire is enough?



**Chad T. Hanson of the John Muir Project played a recorded woodpecker call while searching for birds in Yosemite National Park. Photo by Noah Berger for The New York Times.**

### A History of Fires

Scientists are still trying to figure out how regularly forests burned in what is now the United States in the centuries before European settlement, but reams of evidence suggest the acreage that burned was more than is allowed to burn today — possibly 20 million or 30

million acres in a typical year. Today, closer to four million or five million acres burn every year.

Scientists say that returning forests to a more natural condition would require allowing 10 million or 15 million acres to burn every year, at least.

“From an ecological standpoint, everything I’ve learned teaches me this is a good idea: Stop putting out fires,” said Jennifer R. Marlon, a geographer at Yale who was among the first to use the term “fire deficit” to describe the situation. “These forests are made to have fire.”

Yet in the few years when wildfires actually burn close to 10 million acres, that is seen as a national emergency, producing panicky news coverage portraying fires as devastating to forests. This year may turn out to be one of the more prominent recent years for fire; more than five million acres have already burned, temperatures are at record highs in parts of the country, and there are weeks of fire



**A Black-backed Woodpecker exploring for grubs in a burn on Bethel Ridge in Yakima County. Photo by Denny Granstrand**

weather still to go.

Efforts to suppress fires began in the 19th century, largely motivated by the view that forests should be seen as standing timber with economic value. By the 1930s, industrial-scale techniques allowed firefighting agencies, including the United States Forest Service, to suppress fires across the landscape.

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A handful of scientists began arguing decades ago that this was a mistake. Over the past decade or so, the research has crystallized into a new understanding of the role of fire in forests.

Hundreds of species can live in recently burned forest, researchers have learned, and many of them prefer these charred forests above any other habitat. Some beetles even have heat-sensing organs to detect forest fires from miles away, rushing toward them to lay their eggs in the just-burned trees.

Far from being calamities, fires are now seen by many experts as essential to improving the long-term health of the forests, thinning them and creating greater variability on the landscape. Yet that awareness has yet to penetrate the public consciousness. People still think forest fires are bad and expect the government to try to stamp them out, even in remote wilderness areas. Federal and state fire-fighting costs in some years approach \$2 billion.

Arguments for a new approach have yielded change in some parts of the country, such as the northern Rocky Mountains. But in California and many other areas, fire-fighters still try to extinguish virtually every blaze.

The battle over forest management may come to a climax in the next few years, though — and the Black-backed Woodpecker could be one reason.

### New Life Among the Ashes

In two visits with a reporter to the Sierra Nevada, in 2016 and 2017, Dr. Hanson made the case that letting more of the woods burn is essential to restoring the ecological health of forests.

Only a few years after the great conflagration known as the Rim Fire burned more than 250,000 acres of California forest near Yosemite National Park, Dr. Hanson cited signs of rejuvenation even in the most severely burned areas.

On several hikes, mostly in Stanislaus National Forest, which sustained most of the damage from the Rim Fire, he

pointed to newly sprouted trees carpeting the forest floor. Butterflies flitted through lush stands of shrubs. The once-dense forest had taken on a parklike openness, essential for certain kinds of plants to thrive.

Still, the dead, leafless trees, standing 80 to 100 feet tall and glistening black in the sun, made for a sight both starkly beautiful and disconcerting.

Any standing dead tree is called a snag, and Dr. Hanson calls any burned forest where the trees have been left alone a snag forest. His group, the John Muir Project of the Earth Island Institute in Berkeley, Calif., has pressed the argument over the past decade that snag forests are among the most important plant and

animal habitats in North America.

Dr. Hanson has made himself a thorn in the side of state and federal agencies, pestering and sometimes suing them. But gradually, they have begun to acknowledge that burned forests must be viewed as special places.

Still, considerable disagreement remains among scientists about exactly how forests should be managed. Dr. Hanson studied under Malcolm North, a Forest Service scientist who also holds a position at the University of California, Davis — but the two men have come to disagree. Dr. North argues that Dr. Hanson goes too far in arguing that even the most severe fires, those that produce some large

patches of snag forest, are a good thing.

“I would agree it’s actually a valuable habitat type,” Dr. North said. “It’s just that he’s arguing for way too much of it, and in really big patches.”

In cooperation with another group, the Center for Biological Diversity, Dr. Hanson’s group in 2012 filed a petition to list the Black-backed Woodpecker as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. They argued that fewer than 1,000



**A firefighter working on the Rim Fire near Yosemite National Park, CA, on Aug. 21, 2013.**



**Vegetation on the forest floor in June in the Stanislaus National Forest. The area was one of those burned in the Rim Fire. Photo by Noah Berger of the New York Times.**



## FIELD TRIPS SCOTT DOWNES

**September 9 (Saturday) — Washtucna and Surrounding Vagrant Traps** led by Eric Heisey. Washtucna and surrounding areas have hosted a multitude of vagrant birds from eastern North America over the years. This trip will give participants a good chance to see rare birds! We will be visiting Washtucna, Kahlotus, Hooper, Lyon's Ferry, and several other Snake River parks. This will be an all day trip, so make sure to bring a lunch and dress for warm weather. We will be meeting at the Granger Arco at 6:45 am, I would like to be leaving by 7:00 am. If you are interested in going on this trip please email Eric at [magicman32@rocketmail.com](mailto:magicman32@rocketmail.com) for the meeting time and place.



**September 30 (Saturday) — Sunrise-Mt. Rainier led by Andy and Ellen Stepniewski.** This will be the fourth in a series of Yakima Valley Audubon Society "natural history" trips led by Andy and Ellen this season. The first on March 25 targeted the shrub-steppe, the second on June 10 the lower forest zones (Oregon White Oak, Ponderosa Pine, Interior Douglas-fir, and Mixed-conifer), the third on July 15 the Subalpine. This trip will head to the Alpine Zone, featuring the treeless land above the trees. We plan a 7-mile hike in Mt. Rainier National Park from Sunrise to Fremont Lookout, where White-tailed Ptarmigan has often been seen. A very early start is planned to beat the crowds. Contact Andy at [steppie@nwninfo.net](mailto:steppie@nwninfo.net) for more info, including a the meeting time and place.

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breeding pairs might be left across Oregon and California.

Under the Obama administration, biologists at the United States Fish and Wildlife Service declared that protection for the bird might be warranted, but it is unclear what the Trump administration will do with the proposal. It faces a Sept. 30 deadline. If the petition is turned down, the environmental groups are likely to sue.

A listing for Black-backed Woodpeckers would almost certainly require a new approach to forest fires that would include allowing some fires caused by lightning to burn. The lucrative, and scientifically controversial, practice of logging trees just after a fire might well be banned across large areas, since those dead trees turn out to be important habitat for many types of creatures, including the woodpeckers.

Scientists who want to let more fires burn take pains to make clear that they do not mean to put people's lives on the line. In fact, they believe the government could make people safer than they are today if it redirected funds into community fire-safety projects.

They also point out that many people are putting themselves at risk by building homes in remote, fire-prone areas without taking essential steps to make the homes fire-resistant, like installing metal roofs. Extensive research shows that wildfires will usually leave properly built and maintained homes with little damage, but rural communities have hesitated to adopt strict building codes.

"People like to do whatever they damn well please on their own land," said Timothy Ingalsbee, a former firefighter who now runs an advocacy group, Firefighters for Safety, Ethic

and Ecology. "But when a wildfire comes, they're calling Uncle Sam saying, 'Please, come save me.'"

The argument for more fires will be especially difficult in California, the most populous state in the nation at 39 million people. Air quality is already poor across large parts of the state, and fires burning many miles away can produce smoke and haze that aggravate asthma and annoy people, potentially creating a political backlash.

Randy Moore, head of the Forest Service district that covers California, said in an interview that the agency was taking the recent scientific work seriously. In a milestone, it is drafting plans for three national forests in California that may call for allowing fires caused by lightning strikes to burn in some remote areas.

"We need to move toward fire as being not necessarily an enemy," Mr. Moore said. Dr. Ingalsbee believes another force is going to drive change in the nation's fire policies, perhaps more so than any argument over woodpeckers. The families of wilderness firefighters who died on the job once tended to accept their lot resignedly, but some are starting to sue, asking why the government is defying the latest science in a risky attempt to extinguish remote fires.

"The lives of young people are not worth saving trees that really need to burn anyway," Dr. Ingalsbee said. "Families are no longer going to be mollified by politicians showing up at the memorial talking about their fallen heroes."

Article by:  
Justin Gillis of The New York Times  
Article is used with permission

## YVAS natural history field trip to Sheep Lake finds 70 species of plants, and some birds, too

The wildflower spectacle in the Cascade Mountains attracts millions of visitors from all around the world to Mt. Rainier and Olympic National Parks, and a number of other mountain areas. We made this wildflower extravaganza our destination on Yakima Audubon's third "Natural History Outing" this year. Six keen hikers met on a beautiful Saturday morning to head out from Chinook Pass to Sheep Lake. This trek featured the Subalpine Zone, which is on grand display on this hike. Fortunately, most of the snow had melted and we encountered only a few patches along the way and these were easy to surmount. Being a Saturday, the trail was busy and, too, there were quite a few dogs, as the trail is not in the national park.

The Subalpine Zone is the area of forest, colorful meadows, and rocky slopes that lies below the treeless Alpine Zone. Climbing in elevation along the east slopes of the Cascade Range, precipitation, particularly annual snowfall, increases tremendously. Chinook Pass averages about 550 inches each winter, compared to Yakima's 24 inches. That's about 46 feet of snow! Obviously, that's not all at one time, but coming down in repeated storms from November through April. A notable feature of the Cascade snowpack is its long duration, some of it not melting until Jun or July. Thus, snow may remain on the ground for eight or more months each year. Obviously, this immense snowpack limits plant growth. The upper edge of the continuous forest line marks about the beginning of the Subalpine Zone. Tree cover diminishes in height and density above his elevation and shrubs such as huckleberries, mountain ash, and white rhododendron increase. Higher yet, tree cover begins to occur only in clumps, surrounded by shrub cover or flower



**Auduboners rest and enjoy the splendor surrounding Sheep Lake**



**Western Anemone decorates the trail near Sheep Lake**



**A bouquet of penstamen decorate a boulder near Sheep Lake**

meadows. Our trail encountered several "communities" in the subalpine zone. The prettiest, on account of the wildflower display, is the "parkland," the flowery meadows between trees found along the trail's beginning and again near Sheep Lake. Beyond the initial stretch, the trail contours along steep, south-facing slopes, through brushy thickets (mountain ash and dwarfed Alaska yellow-cedar) alternate with short stretches of parkland. This mosaic presumably is because of changes in subsurface moisture or soil depth. In a few areas very rocky areas, elements of lower dry forest and even steppe zones occur with species such as buckwheats, kinnickinick, and stonecrop. Birds in this habitat were Steller's Jay, American Robin, and Western Tanager. Family groups of both Chipping Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos were heard, too.

Rounding a bend in the trail and changing aspect from south to east, we noted an abrupt change in the subalpine forest, to a much more somber, closed community, dark and shady, with lingering snowbanks. Pacific silver fir and white rhododendron were in this area. Birds we tallied here included a drumming American Three-toed Woodpecker, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Townsend's Warbler.

At Sheep Lake, again in parkland habitat, we saw or heard Clark's Nutcrackers, Rufous Hummingbirds (at the gorgeous cliff penstemons on the nearby bluff), and Lincoln's Sparrow.

Along the trail, we studied the many plants. Dotty remarked "I can't ever recall seeing so much variety." None of us were expert botanists, so quite a number of plants were identified only to the genus level. Still, we tallied about 70 species, pretty good we thought for amateurs!

### Yakima Valley Audubon Society Membership

Join/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 Society Membership.....\$ 25.00 per household  
 YVAS Senior (62+) \_\_\_\_\_ OR Student Membership \_\_\_\_ (please check one).....\$ 15.00 per household  
 Yakima Valley Audubon Society Life Membership .....\$ 500.00 per household

New Member \_\_\_      Renewing Member \_\_\_ (please check one)

In addition to my membership payment of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, my check includes an additional donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
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**If you have any membership questions, contact Joy McKinney at [joycatbird@gmail.com](mailto:joycatbird@gmail.com) or 698-4110.**

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# The case of the migrating Warbling Vireo

One short visit to our yard, then off on a long journey.



While we sitting at our patio table with friends on August 17 and enjoying some of Chris's blueberry crisp, a Warbling Vireo landed near us in our cedar tree. Unfortunately, I was the only one at the table who got a good look at it. It was nice to see it in our yard and it was the first one I have seen in Yakima County this year.

This was certainly a bird that is just starting its migration to wintering areas in central to southern Mexico and Central America. That is a long, perilous journey for such a small bird but it is one that is undertaken by many of the species that nest in Yakima County, including the hummingbirds.

May they all have a safe journey!

The Warbling Vireo in the photo was seen in Oak Creek Canyon on May 23, 2015.

— Denny Granstrand —

## *Coming Attractions:*

Aug 24 YVAS Chapter Meeting

Sept 14 Washtucna, etc., rarity field trip

Sept 30 Sunrise-Mt. Rainier field trip