



# 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.

Volume 45, Number 10 A Chapter of the National Audubon Society November/December 2017



## DECEMBER PROGRAM BILL DRENGUIS

### The Tiger Trail: A Photographic Journey Presented by Tom Kogut

Mark your calendar. The Christmas Banquet is fast approaching and will occur on December 7.

For our program, we are very fortunate to have finally landed a speaker we have pursued for some time, Tom Kogut.

Tom is a retired wildlife biologist turned professional photographer. He has been an obsessive nature and travel photographer for 35 years, photographing wildlife, landscapes, and indigenous cultures, both here in the U.S.A. and abroad, including 18 trips to the Indian subcontinent (India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan).



He currently resides in Packwood, nestled in the shadow of Mt. Rainier, so he is almost a local.

Tom will show some of his favorite images from around the world, with emphasis on nature subjects here in Washington, including many eastern WA photos (including one or more of my favorite birds: White-headed Woodpecker). He will also be including many lens captures of people and wildlife from India and Sri Lanka. A few tips for the photographers in the group will also be provided by Tom.

## 2017 Christmas Potluck Dinner and Silent Auction

On Thursday, December 7th, we will be holding the annual YVAS Christmas Potluck and Silent Auction at the Yakima Area Arboretum. There will be a silent auction for the larger items as well as the ever-popular bargain table.

We need items to auction. Do you have a special skill or hobby to create unique artifacts? Use your imagination to come up with the item to put everyone in absolute awe. How about sponsoring a dinner or brunch in your garden? Bird related items are well received.

It helps to have the auction items on display when the first members arrive. To make this happen, you can drop items off with Bill Drenguis (bdrenguis@gmail.com, 965-5808) or Ellen Stepniewski (steppie@nwinform.net, 731-6805). If you are not able to drop auction items off with us, Bill may be able to pick up items before December 5th.

Doors will open at 5pm, at the Yakima Area Arboretum. The silent auction, wine service, and camaraderie will be underway at 5. Dinner will begin at about 6, so please put your food items out and, if applicable, decorate your table by then. The silent auction will close at 6:30 so we can all enjoy the program, photography by Tom Kogut, which will begin at 7pm.

Potluck food assignments are by the first letter of your last name: A-G = Main Dish; H-P = Potatoes, Vegetables, Salads; Q-Z = Dessert, Breads. Dishes should serve about 12 people. It would be helpful to list the ingredients of your dish for those with allergies (milk, nuts, shellfish, wheat, etc.) We will be providing ham, coffee, and hot water for tea. Wine will be available by the glass with donations defraying the cost.

In addition to your potluck items, be sure to bring serving utensils for your dish. Please mark them with your name to ensure return. You will need to bring your own table service (plates, cups, silverware).

Come enjoy the friendship, listen to the speaker, view his great photos, have a yummy meal, and surf the auction's treasures. Arrive early enough to browse through the auction items prior to 6:30. As auction proceeds go directly to fund education and conservation activities for our chapter, an evening of festive, generous bidding is essential for our success.

If you have questions, please contact Bill using the information above.

**Before Dec 5 - Donate! Donate! On Dec 7 - Bid! Bid!**

— Ellen Stepniewski and Bill Drenguis —



## **PRESIDENT'S COLUMN**

### **KERRY TURLEY**



Citizen Science Means Getting Involved. We each bring our own special talents and gifts to this world. Would you like to share yours with our beautiful birds and other creatures? Each year there are many projects that you can get involved in with Yakima Valley Audubon. Citizen Science (CS) is just that, citizens who do science and then share it with the professional scientists. There are many things in our natural world that need to be observed, counted, and documented and there are not enough scientists to do all the work.

That is where you come in. Do you like to watch the birds at your feeders? Then FeederWatch and the Great Backyard Bird Count are just for you. Both CS projects are administered

## **Citizen Science projects in which you can participate**

by Cornell Ornithology Lab but you can participate from home. There are other CS projects that you can participate in by using your smart phone. Hummingbirds at Home is tracking hummingbirds with the purpose of determining if the little gems are arriving early or late and if the flowers they are need are in bloom or past their prime. We can't forget the Christmas Bird Count as that is the longest running documentation of species ever recorded. That long history of information that has been gathered for 117 years was instrumental in the groundbreaking work done by the science team at Audubon regarding how climate change is going to affect the range of birds in the future. So you never know how the science will be used in the future, but what we do know is that it is very important.

### **Thank you for renewing your membership!**

**Anacortes:** John O'Connell

**Naches:** Rita and Adrian Fernandez

**Seattle:** Martha Taylor

**Selah:** Larry and Kathryn Nelson

**Toppenish:** Jensen Thayer

**Yakima:** Becky L. and Tom Boyd, Stan and Lori Isley, Diana Bailey and Stan

Belsher, Eileen Gavin, Kathy Hennessy, Robert and Leslie Wahl, Tyler Shepherd, James and Mary Stephenson

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



## **MEMBERSHIP**

**JOY MCKINNEY**

## **Stepping forward to help YVAS do its business**



At the October chapter meeting, the following positions were filled by a unanimous vote:

President: Bill Drenguis

Vice President: René Navarrete

Director: Bob Chicken

Director: Phil Fischer

Director: Denny Granstrand

Director: Ken Tolonen

This will mark the second time Bill will serve as our President as he previously held the office for the 2010 - 2011 term. We are particularly pleased to welcome René Navarrete as our new Vice President...a position that has gone unfilled for...decades?? All the Directors are returning incumbents. We are fortunate to have capable and willing individuals to guide YVAS through the unseen challenges ahead.



## CONSERVATION ANDY STEPNIIEWSKI

Fire is altering Washington's shrub-steppe on a landscape level. In historic times, fire burned in a mosaic pattern, with some areas affected, and others left untouched and intact. Increasingly, fires in both the shrub-steppe and Northwest forests now burn huge tracts. The primary reason for fires to have escalated to huge swaths rather than patchily is due to structural changes in both the shrub-steppe and forests. In the shrub-steppe, the widespread encroachment of weedy invasives, especially cheatgrass, has radically altered much of this ecosystem. In the forest, fire suppression for more than a century has caused huge changes in the forest cover, primarily through "overstocking", especially of firs at middle elevations, but also in the pine belt, along with a concurrent increase in dead and dying material on the forest floor.

How these landscapes respond to fire is a critical question and focus of ongoing research, with the goal of assisting land managers in restoring these ecosystems to their biodiverse, vibrant and functioning former selves.

Scientists interested in the shrub-steppe are finding how the area recovers from fire is largely determined by the vegetation that existed at the time of the fire. A shrub-steppe tract with native grasses and shrubs at the time of the fire is likely to recover rather nicely with much the same vegetation. However a parcel with a history of overgrazing opens the door to a widespread invasion of non-native grasses and shrubs. In this scenario, there is a high likelihood these non-native invasives will promptly return.

Rangeland scientist Lisa Ellsworth of Oregon State University who "has a thing for fire" and fellow scientist J. Boone Kauffman, a senior research professor, also at OSU, co-authored a paper on how the shrub-steppe responds to the wildfires that plague much of the semi-arid American West. As part of their study, Ellsworth and Boone documented the recovery of three areas from prescribed fires in Lava Beds National Monument in Northern California. One area was dominated by native perennial grasses and sagebrush, with very little grazing historically. The second site had been overgrazed and was dominated by cheatgrass. The third had abundant Western juniper, a notorious water "thief" that crowds out sage and native grasses.

After prescribed burns in the spring and fall, the first plot with native plants fared better. About 65 percent of the sagebrush survived the fall fires and 33 percent survived the spring fires. This is important information to land managers who are timing prescribed burns to achieve optimal results. Spring burning does more harm because this is the period of the most active growth in the shrub-steppe. Fall fires burn more dead material, Ellsworth notes.

On the second site filled with cheatgrass, nearly all the sagebrush and other shrubs were killed in the prescribed burn. On the third site with Western juniper, less than 50 percent of the trees and shrubs survived.

So, what they found is a shrub-steppe landscape primarily grown to native plants such as sage and various bunchgrasses, recover from fire to a similar habitat whereas a tract with a high cover of weedy invasives such as cheatgrass and Western juniper tends to be replaced by these invasives.

## Native Vegetation handle Wildfires better

In south-central Washington, I believe we are witnessing a similar phenomenon. For example, repeated fires have burned vast tracts of the Hanford Reach National Monument over the past 20 years. Following these huge fires, revegetation has been dominated by weedy invasives despite near heroic restoration attempts.

Fire is also increasing in frequency in the shrub-steppe. In addition to natural causes such as lightning, summer drought is apparently increasing in intensity. Accidental fire starts have increased, too, due to increased human population in the shrub-steppe. Thus, looking at the Columbia Basin shrub-steppe in total, increasingly there is insufficient time for reestablishment of any semblance of a functioning ecosystem after a fire, particularly so in areas where weedy invasives have taken hold. What we are seeing is a steady increase in area of degraded ecosystems.

The research has ramifications for how ranchers and conservationists focusing on preserving the Greater sage grouse and other elements of the shrub-steppe. It's apparent the shrub-steppe ecosystem evolved alongside fire, often started by lightning, and fire has thus long been part of the cycle in the arid West. Many ranchers and conservationists now recognize that if the shrub-steppe is in good condition, some fire isn't all negative. However, overgrazed shrub-steppe has opened the door to non-native grasses and shrubs that burn hotter and more frequently. "They really change the story," Ellsworth said. Cheatgrass in particular, responds to fire with a carpet of dense grass, a highly flammable annual once it finishes its brief spring flourish of growth, flowering, and seeding. By early summer, a cheatgrass-dominated landscape is tinder dry. Any spark brings the inevitable fire.

Ellsworth stated the two main results from their research is "There's a natural role for fire in sagebrush ecosystems...and the condition of the land before a fire is crucial in determining how it will bounce back." She said people who live and work in such areas know these things better than any scientist. "Nobody wants better conservation of rangeland than a rancher," she said.

I might add that I believe it is imperative for land managers entrusted with conserving the remaining parcels of Washington's shrub-steppe, to maintain a concerted focus on preserving in good condition these remaining shrub-steppe areas. Once altered by weedy invasives, restoration to a functioning ecosystem with the suite of native flora and fauna, has proved hugely expensive and time consuming.

*Courtesy of Lisa Ellsworth, Oregon State University:  
A test plot in the Lava Beds National Monument in Northern California is assessed immediately after a "prescribed" fire. A rangeland scientist at Oregon State University said an intact sagebrush steppe habitat with native plants recovers well from wildfires compared to range taken over by invasive or intrusive plants such as cheatgrass and Western juniper. Researchers burned three test sites and tracked the recovery.*

*Based on an article in the Capital Press. June 1, 2017*

— Andy Stepniowski —

## 2018 Field Trip Planning Meeting - January 6

We are nearing the end of 2017 and another successful year of field trips has come and gone. Yakima Audubon will meet at Andy and Ellen Stepniewski's house at 902 N. Conestoga Blvd. on January 6th at 9:00 to plan field trips for 2018. If you will be attending the meeting, please email me (downess@charter.net) so we can get a count of how many to expect, just in case someone wants to bring donuts. Whether you want to lead a field trip or want to suggest a trip for 2018, attending this meeting is your chance to provide input. If you have input or want to lead a trip, but can't make the meeting on January 7th, please email me your ideas by December 20th

and I'll ensure they are discussed at the meeting.

Yakima Audubon trips are successful because we have a variety of leaders and unique locations, both near and far where field trips explore. I hope that members continue to lead trips and support trips by attending so that our chapter may continue to have successful trips. I would also like to extend a personal thank you to all of our wonderful field trip leaders who give of their time and expertise to make the YVAS trips a success. Thank you!

— Scott Downes —

## What Would You Like to Learn More About?

Hey Yakima Valley Auduboners, friends, relatives and/or Crier readers, we need your help! Your muscles will not get tired nor will your hands get dirty. We are hoping to tap into your brain and surely Crier readers are amongst the brainiest nature lovers out there.

On January 6th, board members and anyone interested will be meeting to plan both field trips and classes for 2018. As "education chair", I would like to hear your suggestions about possible topics for a class. As a partner organization of the

Yakima Area Arboretum, Yakima Audubon has held a class there every year. These classes are open the members and the general public, last a few hours (sometimes longer) and often include a related field trip. Please contact me before January 6th with your ideas and wishes.

— Ellen Stepniewski —  
steppie@nwinfo.net  
731-6805

## Put the Christmas Bird Counts on your calendars

### Toppenish NWR — Dec. 16

### Yakima Valley — Dec 30

I have been going on the two Christmas Bird Counts that YVAS sponsors since 1985. I think they are a great time and the highlight of the birding year!

CBCs are done all around the United States, Canada and south all the way to Ecuador and Brazil. Well over 2000 CBCs are done in the same three week period from Dec. 14 through Jan. 4. Many thousands of people are out on their CBCs doing everything from enjoying tropical weather to stomping around in snow and freezing conditions. Even in Barrow, Alaska, where they can only be out for about two hours in a snowcat, because it is so cold ... and they have only ever seen ravens!

We certainly have endured our own cold and snowing CBCs. One year on the Toppenish CBC, Rod Phillips, who writes the hunting and fishing column in the Tuesday Outdoors section of the Yakima newspaper, wanted to go on our CBC so he could write his column about it. Andy Stepniewski put him with me. When we got out of my car at the first stop, it was 0°! But Rod was a duck hunter who was experienced with cold temperatures. He didn't seem to notice the cold at all. I know I shivered a little!

The Yakima Valley CBC was started in 1970, so this year we will do our 48th count. The past 47 counts have found 151 species of birds (we added American Bittern last year), with an average of about 90 species on the last ten counts. Last year we had 89 species, down from a record 97 the year be-

fore. We did, though, suffer through a day of birding in really bad weather conditions.

The Toppenish NWR count originated in 1983. Despite the two counts being so close together geographically and only two weeks apart, there are always species found on the Yakima count that were missed on the Toppenish count. The all-time species total is quite close to Yakima's.

The Christmas Bird Count data, which is compiled by National Audubon, is frequently used by ornithologists to compile population trends of bird species. The spread across the continent of species such as European Starlings, Cattle Egrets and Eurasian Collared-Doves can be charted from Christmas Count data.

After the Toppenish count we meet at Debie and Ron Brown's house. Dinner will be pizza along with potluck items. Following the Yakima count we will gather at Andy and Ellen Stepniewski's house for the compilation dinner of Ellen's delicious soups and potluck items brought by everyone else. You are also encouraged to bring beverages to both dinners.

Please e-mail Andy Stepniewski (steppie@nwinfo.net) if you would like to go on the Toppenish CBC. Contact me (dgranstrand@gmail.com) to go on the Yakima Valley CBC.

— Denny Granstrand —

## Vantage Field Trip – Waterbirds and more!

On Sunday November 12<sup>th</sup>, four Yakima Audubon members joined me for a trip to Vantage to view the fall migrant waterfowl spectacle along the Columbia River. A quick stop at the Tjossem Pond in Ellensburg yielded two surprises; 2 female Red-breasted Mergansers among the more expected Common Mergansers and two leucistic Canada Geese hanging out with a flock of Canada Geese. Along the old Vantage Highway en route to Vantage we had our first of the winter Northern Shrikes as well as one Rough-legged Hawk.

Upon arriving in Vantage, waterbirds dominated the rest of the day. The first uncommon bird was an immature male White-winged Scoter noted just north of the I-90 Bridge. Abundant numbers of other ducks, grebes and especially American Coots were noted. A stop at Wanapum State Park south of I-90 along Huntzinger Road notched a few notable non-waterbird species; a Mountain Chickadee, an unusual migrant from more mountainous habitats was seen as was an immature Northern Goshawk (also from the mountains). In addition to these mountain birds, a flyby of five Common Redpolls, a northern finch that appears in some winters in central Washington, was observed. Based on early sightings this month of Common Redpolls throughout the state, this may

### Other ducks seen on the trip:



Red-breasted Merganser



Barrows Goldeneye



White-winged Scoter



Two leucistic Canada Geese  
Photo by Karen Zook



The Birders  
Photo by Karen Zook

be a notable winter for them. As this species targets the seed catkins of alder and birch trees, watch those trees for a possible rare delight.

South of Wanapum State Park, a few more unusual waterbirds were noted including two more White-winged Scoters, an adult male and an immature female. In the waters below Wanapum Dam a large grouping of Barrow's Goldeneye were a treat and three more Red-breasted Mergansers were tallied. The weather was dry, calm and in the mid-40s, which for mid-November at Vantage is considered a nice day! For the day, the group tallied 68 species, a nice collage for late fall in the Columbia Basin.

— Scott Downes —

*What's the difference between a bird that is "leucistic" and one that is "albino"? When an individual is albino, it doesn't have any pigment in its body. Its feathers are pure white. Other parts which are usually black, such as eyes and legs, are pink. A bird that is leucistic has varying amounts of white in its feathers. This might be seen in white patches of varying shapes and sizes scattered around its body, or in the geese in Karen's photo, all of the "color" you can see a dusky wash on the neck. This is a hint of the black neck of a normally-plumaged Canada Goose.*

# A photographic guide to raptors wintering in the Yakima area



Light morph Red-tailed Hawk



Northern Harrier — Male left, female/immature right



Intermediate Rufous morph Red-tailed Hawk



Sharp-shinned Hawk — adult left, immature right



Rough-legged Hawk



Cooper's Hawk — adult left, immature right

### 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 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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ 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.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

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

**If you have any membership questions, contact Joy McKinney at [joycatbird@gmail.com](mailto:joycatbird@gmail.com) or 698-4110.**

### **2017 YAKIMA VALLEY AUDUBON OFFICERS AND BOARD**

President	Kerry Turley ( <a href="mailto:kdturley@gmail.com">kdturley@gmail.com</a> )	837-6930	Membership	Joy McKinney ( <a href="mailto:joycatbird@gmail.com">joycatbird@gmail.com</a> )	698-4110
Past. President	Andy Stepniewski ( <a href="mailto:steppie@nwinfo.net">steppie@nwinfo.net</a> )	949-7404	Newsletter Editor	Elizabeth Bohn ( <a href="mailto:elizabethannbohn@yahoo.com">elizabethannbohn@yahoo.com</a> )	901-1886
Secretary	Vera Backstrom ( <a href="mailto:vback47@gmail.com">vback47@gmail.com</a> )	731-2103	Programs	Bill Drenguis ( <a href="mailto:bdrenguis@gmail.com">bdrenguis@gmail.com</a> )	965-5808
Treasurer	Karen Zook ( <a href="mailto:gadzooks7@charter.net">gadzooks7@charter.net</a> )	225-9494	Fund Raising	Dan Kinney ( <a href="mailto:insur3@gmail.com">insur3@gmail.com</a> )	452-3260
Directors:	Ken Tolonen ( <a href="mailto:8rivard@gmail.com">8rivard@gmail.com</a> )	965-4584	<b>Special Committees:</b>		
	Denny Granstrand ( <a href="mailto:dgranstrand@gmail.com">dgranstrand@gmail.com</a> )	453-2500	Bird Rehabilitator	Connie Hughes ( <a href="mailto:owlbirdlady@gmail.com">owlbirdlady@gmail.com</a> )	457-5661
	Bob Chicken ( <a href="mailto:robertchicken@msn.com">robertchicken@msn.com</a> )	457-2014	Bird Reports	Denny Granstrand ( <a href="mailto:dgranstrand@gmail.com">dgranstrand@gmail.com</a> )	453-2500
	Phil Fischer ( <a href="mailto:pcfischer@gmail.com">pcfischer@gmail.com</a> )	731-0211	Important Bird Areas	Vacant	
	Reneé Navarrete ( <a href="mailto:renee@digitalcardboard.com">renee@digitalcardboard.com</a> )	654-9646	Publicity	Vacant	
<b>Standing (Voting) Committee Chairs:</b>			Social	Vacant	
Refuge Keeper	Kerry Turley ( <a href="mailto:kdturley@gmail.com">kdturley@gmail.com</a> )	837-6930	Volunteer Rec.	Vacant	
Bluebird Trail	Richard Repp ( <a href="mailto:bbirder247@aol.com">bbirder247@aol.com</a> )	965-1134	Webmaster	Denny Granstrand ( <a href="mailto:dgranstrand@gmail.com">dgranstrand@gmail.com</a> )	453-2500
Conservation	Andy Stepniewski ( <a href="mailto:steppie@nwinfo.net">steppie@nwinfo.net</a> )	949-7404	Website	<a href="http://www.yakimaaudubon.org">www.yakimaaudubon.org</a>	
Education	Ellen Stepniewski ( <a href="mailto:steppie@nwinfo.net">steppie@nwinfo.net</a> )	731-6805	Toppenish CBC	Eric Heisey ( <a href="mailto:magicman32@rocketmail.com">magicman32@rocketmail.com</a> )	
Field Trips	Scott Downes ( <a href="mailto:downess@charter.net">downess@charter.net</a> )	469-7807	Yakima Valley CBC	Denny Granstrand ( <a href="mailto:dgranstrand@gmail.com">dgranstrand@gmail.com</a> )	453-2500
			YVAS Email	( <a href="mailto:birds@yakimaaudubon.org">birds@yakimaaudubon.org</a> )	
			YVAS Facebook	( <a href="http://www.facebook.com/yakimaaudubon/?fref=ts">http://www.facebook.com/yakimaaudubon/?fref=ts</a> )	

Winter is approaching —  
It might bring these birds with it



Common Redpoll  
Photo by Denny Granstrand



White-winged Crossbill  
Photo by Denny Granstrand



Snowy Owl  
Photo by George Vlahakis



Pine Grosbeak  
Photo by Denny Granstrand



Bohemian Waxwing  
Photo by George Vlahakis



Gyrfalcon  
Photo by George Vlahakis

# Coming Attractions

Christmas Banquet and Silent Auction Dec. 7  
Toppenish NWR CBC Dec. 16  
Yakima Valley CBC Dec. 30  
Field Trip Planning Jan 6