



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

March 2018



MARCH PROGRAM

PHIL FISCHER

Tropical Wildlife and How to Protect It: A Photographic Journey into the Peruvian Rainforest Presented By Eric Heisey



Eric stares down a Reticulate Worm Snake

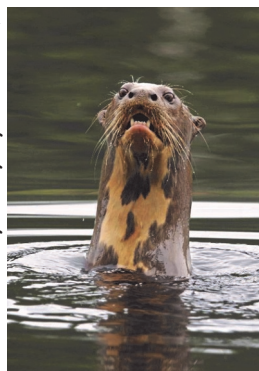
I have never been to Peru or the Amazon drainage basin. The closest I got was Ecuador where I stayed mainly in the highlands. That was when I was young, close to the age of Eric Heisey, this month's presenter. I heard many tales of the Amazon jungle, its unimaginable distances of untouched jungle wilderness. That is changing as humans demand more and more. Please join us for Eric's presentation, see some amazing photography, and listen to what one who will be inheriting this world has to say about one of earth's treasures. Eric

has provided the following description:

The Amazon Rainforest is one of the most biodiverse places on planet earth. Covering 40% of South America, an area about the size of the lower 48 states, it is as vast as it is diverse. As you might imagine, there are some pretty amazing creatures that call this forest home! Over 40,000 species of plants, 1,300 species of birds, 3,000 species of freshwater fish; the Amazon is estimated to hold 10% of the earth's biodiversity, maybe more. Single locations in the Amazon have recorded more bird species than all of Washington. Organisms here have evolved to fit into extremely specialized niches, resulting in some of the most bizarre and beautiful flora and fauna you'll find anywhere. Katydid that look exactly like leaves (and know how to act like them!), Otters that eat caiman (which are closely related to alligators), swarms of Army Ants that stretch for miles; there are so many extraordinary things to find in the Amazon. However, the Amazon is in peril. The human population is ever expanding, and with it comes deforestation, habitat fragmentation, overexploitation of resources, pollu-

tion, and so many more things. Why does protecting the most biodiverse area on earth matter? More than for the aesthetics this forest provides us, humans need the rainforest to survive. The Amazon is one of the most important carbon sinks left on earth; the destruction of these forests not only perpetuates climate change but we don't even know what we're losing. This talk will not only explore some of the astounding wildlife that occurs in the Amazon, but also some of the threats facing these natural systems and what we can do to help.

I am a college student studying biology at Western Washington University. I have always had an intense interest in birds, and for the last several years I have been actively involved with the Yakima Audubon Society. I have been drawn to the tropics since I was a young child, watching documentaries about the otherworldly plants and animals that make the rainforest so special. I got my first taste of the rainforest on a 2015 trip to Costa Rica. This trip sold me on the tropics, and



Giant Otter By Eric Heisey

when I was presented the opportunity to take a month and a half field course in Peru this past fall I jumped on it. This course took us from the Andean highlands, down the east slope of the Andes, and into the Amazon Rainforest. We visited so many incredible places, and I learned and saw a tremendous amount. I learned more about the inner workings of tropical rainforests, as well as about the pressures these forests face. Through all of this I relentlessly carried my camera with me, snapping photos of any and every amazing creature we came across. I hope to spend my career working to save these magnificent forests. Letting others know what they can do to help is one of the first steps.

Mark your calendar for Thursday, March 22, at 7:00 to see this presentation at the Yakima Area Arboretum

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



THIS MONTH'S YVAS CALENDAR

- Mar 22 Audubon Chapter Meeting**
It is at the Yakima Area Arboretum at 7:00 pm.
- Apr 10 Board Meeting**—Location to be determined

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 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.



MEMBERSHIP JOY MCKINNEY

Thank you for renewing your membership!

- Granger:** Kyle Heisey and Diane Liebe
Moxee: Debie and Ron Brown
Naches: Phil Fischer and Teresa Lorenz
Seattle: Martha Lee Fleming, Birgitta Beck
Selah: Joy McKinney, Cathy LeCompte
Sunnyside: Myra Dorsey
Toppenish: Kathleen Ross
Yakima: Karen Ramey, Fern Sule and Lance Chamberlain, Ron Sell and Linda Knutson, Elizabeth and Greg Bohn, Jean Ragland, Joyce Lucas



BOARD BRIEFS KAREN ZOOK

By the time you read this, it will be spring! It's time for me to dust the cobwebs out of my brain and tune up my ears for spring migration. Migration is such a normal occurrence in a birder's life that I don't often stop to think about how amazing it really is. Birds from the tiniest hummingbird to very large birds like vultures make journeys twice a year totaling hundreds or thousands of miles. Hummingbirds have brains that enable them to remember the location of a feeder or a flower patch that they visited the year before! I have trouble remembering where I set my glasses twenty minutes ago.

When one of these migrants has a problem with their built in navigation system, or gets off course due to weather or another event, they may be spotted by a birder or birders who notice that this is a bird which does not belong. A rare bird sighting often draws birders by the droves. I know plenty of birders who have driven several hours to see one of these rarities, and I have chased rare birds myself. That bird may not stay long, and it may be a species that you will never have the opportunity to see again, so see it while you can. But, if you want to learn about birds, the best place to start is with the common birds that you will find in your backyard or local park.

Birds like Song Sparrows, House Finches, Chickadees and Robins give excellent opportunities to learn a species well. Since they occur year-round, they give us the chance to really look at them in detail, listen to their songs and watch their behavior. If you study the Song Sparrows in your yard, when you see or hear another type of sparrow, you may not know what it is, but you'll know it's not a Song Sparrow. You can look through your field guide and find similar birds, like Fox Sparrow or Lincoln's Sparrow and maybe learn a new bird in the process. If you study the behavior of say, a

Spotted Towhee vs. the behavior of a House Finch, you will notice the difference in feeding styles: the "hop scratch" of the Towhee is quite different from the seed cracking style of the finch. In addition, if you study their appearances, notice the difference in the bills. The thick, chunky bill of finches is quite different from the bill of the sparrow. This can help you narrow down a new bird to one that looks "finch like," such as an Evening Grosbeak, or more sparrow like, such as a Towhee.

Then of course, there is bird song – my favorite part of spring! I am plenty happy to just stand and listen to birds and not see them. There are many birds that you may hear and rarely get a glimpse of: Virginia Rail, Sora, Swainson's Thrush, Veery, Yellow-breasted Chat. If you are interested in bird song and have the ability to hear them and distinguish between sounds, birding by ear may be something for you to try. It's very helpful when you are trying to identify a bird that you cannot see, and it is also very valuable in helping you locate an unseen bird. When I hear the distinctive "quick, three beer!" of the Olive-sided flycatcher, the sound guides me to which direction to look for it.

Whether you are a backyard birder or one of those "crazy" birders who spends hours out looking for birds, you should enjoy and appreciate our feathered fellow creatures. In this "Year of the Bird," there are many ways you can help birds. The Year of the Bird featured action for March is "grow native plants." You don't have to tear out your landscape to add natives to your yard. Something as simple as planting Penstemon, or maybe a shrub or two like currant or Ocean spray. You can go big and try adding a native tree, but make sure you have room for the mature size. Whatever you do, have fun and enjoy the birds!



FIELD TRIPS

SCOTT DOWNES

March 30/31 (Friday/Saturday). (Weather /Participant Dependent) - **Bluebird Box Cleanout** - The event you have been waiting for! It is spring and once again time to clean out and inspect the 132 nest boxes on the Vredenburgh Blue bird Trail in preparation for the upcoming nesting season. To participate in this fun event and facilitate the assignment of boxes to teams, please contact Richard Repp (bbirder247@gmail.com or 965-1134) if you wish to help or for further info. A half-day event but bring snacks, drinks, and work gloves. Clothing for wind and rain protection recommended as is sturdy footwear.

April 17 (Sunday). Zimmerman Ponds and Toppenish NWR field trip. Each spring, snowmelt in the Cascades rushes down Toppenish Creek filling ponds and flooding valley bottoms, creating a bonanza for water and marsh birds. The marshes, fields, and riparian patches in the lower valley rise to their birding peak in late April. We'll look (and listen) for American Bittern, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Cinnamon Teal, Virginia Rails, Sora and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. The Zimmerman property was restored by the Yakima Nation and is normally closed to the public. This is a great half-day field trip and with the refuge visitors center opening at noon there will be birding opportunities close by for those who want to extend the day. Meet at 7:30 am at the Valley Mall parking lot north of Sears (old IHOP location). Contact Kerry Turley (840-0980 or email him at kdturley@embarqmail.com).

Further out - August 24-26 (Friday-Sunday) - Andy and Ellen Stepniewski will lead a trip to Grays Harbor. Note **early registration** with Westport Pelagic **required** for the Saturday boat trip. For info contact Andy at (steppie@nwinfo.net).

ARBORFEST

Imagination and creativity bloom

Once again, it is almost time to celebrate nature with families at the Yakima Area Arboretum's annual Arborfest, on **Saturday, April 21st from 10am to 3 pm**. This is a **free** community event, celebrating Arbor Day, spring, conservation, and nature. Featured are lots of hands-on learning opportunities, crafts, and displays for children of all ages.

The theme this year is "Be a Tree Champion, protect our trees and forests!" The emphasis at the Yakima Valley Audubon booth will be that tree champions need to protect the dead trees too. There will be informational displays on the



AJ Dart in the snag being fed gummy worms

benefits of SNAGS that are left after the fire, including the woodpeckers that build cavities, other birds, mammals and bugs that use these dead trees. There will be another appearance of the child friendly "snag" where young children climb into the baby woodpecker position and beg for gummy worms. We will be making the ever-popular buttons, providing materials for kids to make a button of a bird that relies on snags.

Hundreds of children and families will participate



Ellen and Bill provide guidance at the YVAS Arborfest booth

in our activity and we need volunteers to help. Please consider joining us for this fun and educational activity. We will need **VOLUNTEERS** to help for all or part of the event, assisting with setting up, and taking down the booth as well as interacting with participants. Set up will start at 8:30. Please contact Ellen Stepniewski at 509-731-6805 or stepie@nwinfo.net for more information or to volunteer.

Come help with the Audubon booth, enjoy the festivities, and bring your family!

— Ellen Stepniewski —



CONSERVATION ANDY STEPNIEWSKI

Back to the drawing board for Sage Grouse Adapted from an article by Tay Wiles in the High Country News

The March 2016 Calliope Crier had a very hopeful article detailing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse as an endangered species. This was because an historic agreement was reached by the various stakeholders in the debate: ranchers, agriculture, conservationists, and the energy sector, who had agreed to a collaborative plan, signed in September 2015, to protect habitat and ramp up restoration of the Sagebrush Sea. The article cited this was a "remarkable moment" in wildlife conservation. More than a thousand private landowners signed up to protect habitat, nearly 100 federal and state sage grouse plans were adopted, and the scores of non-profit conservation efforts agreed to in a deal that amounted an epic promise from this generation to the next.

Fast forward to 2017 and it appears the grouse conservation efforts may have key elements dismantled. In July 2017, President Donald Trump directed Interior Department Secretary Ryan Zinke to begin a federal review panel to revisit the 2015 plan. Zinke said when he announced the review in June, "while the federal government has a responsibility under the Endangered Species Act to responsibly manage wildlife, destroying local communities and levying onerous regulations on the public lands that they rely on is no way to be a good neighbor."

The panel's August recommendations open the door to overturning many of the core elements of the plan. Zinke has indicated he wants to give states more flexibility to manage their sagebrush ecosystem as they see fit, including whether to allow more energy development.

Conservationists are alarmed and see the recommendations as the first step in dismantling the plans. These took a decade of study and negotiations and were considered a massive, unprecedented collaboration between a variety of federal, state and local stakeholders. One might conclude the sage grouse review signals a pendulum swing in the West, toward extractive industry taking priority over the health of the sagebrush ecosystem that supports not just the grouse but hundreds of other species of wildlife and plants.

In the photo above, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service workers listen as Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announces in

Denver in 2015 that the greater sage grouse won't be listed as endangered, thanks to state-led plans to protect habitat and prevent extinction. Kathryn Scott Osler/The Denver Post via Getty Images

Zinke's decision should come as no surprise, considering his reflection on the BLM, lead agency in the grouse debate: "What the BLM does know is that false tears for the sage grouse offer a very real way to arbitrarily restrict energy exploration activities." Zinke is not convinced grouse numbers are in peril "It's entirely possible that there are man-made reasons for the sage grouse's population drop — if there has been a population drop at all, of course." Scientists speculate the bird's population, estimated to be 16 million in the 19th century, is now down to about 400,000, due to industrial development, grazing, wildfire and invasive species.

A controversial part of Zinke's sage grouse management vision is one that bucks scientific consensus. The new plan puts more emphasis on meeting population targets than on maintaining or improving sagebrush habitat. The August report, authored by representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, and Fish and Wildlife Service, does not state that habitat management will be entirely abandoned. Rather, it places new emphasis on population targets which raises concern from some state officials. Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead, a Republican who co-led the Sage Grouse Task Force, a group of state and federal officials that helped create the 2015 plans, criticized this shift. "We still strongly believe that management for habitat, based upon what science tells us, is the best way to do it," he says.

Most wildlife biologists agree that managing sage grouse primarily for population avoids addressing the underlying reasons for the bird's decline, which is loss of quality habitat. San Stiver, a biologist and the sagebrush initiative coordinator for the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, says, "Although we use population objectives for lots of critters we manage, it's more difficult and a little less useful to arrive at that for grouse, mainly because of large fluctuations in populations." Zinke even suggests in his secretarial order that captive breeding be undertaken to augment numbers. Most experts say breeding programs have

(continued on page 5)



Back to the drawing board for Sage Grouse

Continued from Page 4

not been successful in the past. These are expensive and often result in loss of genetic diversity in the birds.

The August Interior report also recommends altering the tiered habitat area designations, which now limit development to protect the bird. The original plan outlines "focal areas", those deemed critical for grouse and have the greatest land-use restrictions. More habitat alteration is allowed in "priority" habitat, and even more development in "general habitat." Brian Rutledge, director of the Audubon Society's Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative, cites the Montana Mountains in Nevada as one example of a priority habitat area where industry stands to gain from changes to the sage grouse plans. He states mining companies are eager to develop this area and says they now have a better chance of doing so.

Another recommendation in the report that could further weaken protection for priority habitat is that of removing U.S. Fish and Wildlife from its role in approving waivers for energy development in those zones. "To have FWS not have input in policing this whole operation puts BLM as the fox in charge of the henhouse," Rutledge says.

While Zinke has been reworking the grouse plans, some state officials have pushed to keep them intact. "Wholesale changes to the plans are likely not necessary at this time" wrote Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper in a letter to Zinke in May. John Swartout, a senior policy advisor for Gov. Hickenlooper, says that conservationists and others are worried the tremendous efforts that went into the plans could be lost under the new administration. But there might be a bright spot in Interior's review: some interpret it as a kind of scoping document that outlines a number of alternatives to choose from. For example, in places like northwest Colorado's Piceance Basin, management plans could use more flexibility: "Let's say an operator was technically less than four miles from a lek, but they're in a ravine and birds are at the top of a plateau, and you could drill that formation without disturbing the birds." Draft plans in Colorado were originally created with wiggle room for that kind of situation, he says. But in the final version, "some of that got taken out" states Swartout.

Idaho's Gov. Butch Otter has been openly receptive to the federal review. There, some of the state's 3.8 million acres of sagebrush focal areas could potentially be removed. This is



welcome news to many in the state. Idaho is already suing over the focal areas that limit mining and grazing. Audubon's Rutledge says that getting rid of those areas "might remove some expansion space for the grouse but it wouldn't be terminally detrimental to the plans."

In Utah, long critical of the Obama-era plans, Zinke's review has also been well-received. The state has its own efforts to keep many federal lands open for grazing, off-road vehicle recreation and mineral and energy development.

Utah, too, has been vigorously working to weaken grouse protections on a number of fronts. For example, Republican Sen. Mike Lee introduced a rider to the National Defense Authorization Act that would prevent an endangered listing of the bird until at least 2027. The state also has a \$2 million contract with the group Big Game Forever, which lobbies members of Congress to weaken protections for the species.

As expected, the oil and gas industry has also been receptive to Zinke's review. The American Petroleum Institute issued a statement: "We look forward to reviewing Interior's report, and continuing to work with the states and Department of the Interior to prioritize sage grouse conservation and local economic growth." Western Energy Alliance president Kathleen Sgamma mentioned in their response to the plan the notion of states' rights: "the Interior Department's new willingness to actually listen to states and localities instead of imposing one-size-fits-all plans." Sgamma detailed the industry's qualms with the grouse plans. Almost every issue the letter raised, such as the "overly expansive" buffer zones around grouse breeding grounds, was later addressed in Interior's recommendations.

Zinke's vision for sagebrush country may prevail, enabled by a Republican-controlled Congress and a president whose executive orders show unwavering dedication to "energy dominance" through extraction on public lands. State and federal officials will continue to discuss the sage grouse plans in the coming months, with rounds of new recommendations in early 2018. Swartout says it's important that the Sage Grouse Task Force be involved in any future reworking of the plans. "You're hearing from people on all sides that have concerns about what (the sage grouse review) means, but the truth is, we don't know what it means," he says. "What matters is what happens next."

When you see a White-headed Woodpecker, check for bands on its legs

It's that time of year again when we start getting out to go birding in areas we couldn't get to in the winter. I want to remind everyone that we are still in the process of color-banding White-headed Woodpeckers in the Wenas in areas of the Ellensburg Pass Road, Mud Flats Road, Wenas Campground and Hog Ranch Road, Milk Canyon, Rocky Prairie and Cow Canyon.

Since 2011 we have banded over 95 different White-headed Woodpeckers with unique combinations of colored plastic leg bands. We are trying to determine duration of territory occupancy as well as locating birds banded as hatch-year birds.

There are 2 colored bands on one leg, and 1 colored band and 1 numbered aluminum band on the other leg.

If you see any White-headed Woodpeckers when in the Wenas, please take an extra few minutes to look for colored bands on their legs. If you see bands, please report them right leg first then left leg (the birds right and left, not your right and left). When reporting the right leg, report the upper band (closest to the body) first, then the

lower band (closest to the foot), then followed in the same pattern for the left leg. So, a bird that is X Y Y W, would be X (aluminum band) Upper Right, Yellow Lower Right, Yellow Upper Left, and White Lower Left. For the banded bird in the accompanying photo, that bird would be reported as B I G X W. Colors that we use are Red (R), Pink (P), Orange (O), Green (G), Light Green (Lg), White (W), Yellow (Y), and Blue (Bl).

Please report the sex of the bird (males have the red patch on the back of the head, females do not) and description of the location as detailed as possible, preferably with a GPS. You can report them to me at kozi@yakamafish-nsn.gov. If you report it in ebird, please be sure to report the bands in the comment section and if you looked and didn't see any, and were sure there were none, report that as well. So, anytime you are anywhere in the Wenas and see a White-headed Woodpecker, please look for bands. Thank you!

— Jeff Kozma



The color-coded bands can be seen in this White-headed Woodpecker that Jeff Kozma has expertly banded. Seeing the bands on a woodpecker that is clinging to the side of a tree might be difficult. Just do the best you can to give Jeff as much information as possible on your sighting.

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

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In addition to my membership payment of \$ _____, my check includes an additional donation of \$ _____
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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 membership questions, contact Joy McKinney at joycatbird@gmail.com or 698-4110.

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2018 is the “Year of the Bird”
For the March issue of the Calliope Crier, the Osprey is the Bird of the Month



**Osprey
Photo By
Charles Crandall**

Year of the Bird? If you are not aware of this fact, check page 8 of the January online version of the Crier.

And in the spirit of celebrating, what better way than to feature a relatively easy to find local bird each month?

The third week of March often welcomes Osprey returning to the valley after spending the winter in warmer latitudes.

And as we can now say that Osprey is relatively easy to find locally, that has not always been the case. Though it is the second most widely distributed raptor (after the Peregrine Falcon) in the world and is found on all continents except Antarctica, the widespread use of DDT in the United States after World War II drastically reduced its numbers across the country. Studies concluded that raptors at the tops of contaminated ecosystems were failing to reproduce due to eggshell thinning that coincided with the introduction of chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides like DDT. Peregrine Falcons, Bald Eagles, and Ospreys fell into this group.

Once DDT was banned, Osprey began to rebound. A second factor locally was the construction of I-82 through Yakima County. In a March 2016 article in the Yakima Herald, Andy Stepniewski wrote: “To make these new highways, enormous quantities of river gravels had to be mined to form the raised roadbeds. Many of the pits mined for gravel were right along the Yakima River and, thus, at the level of the river. After the gravel was excavated, many of these pits filled with water to the level of the nearby Yakima River, forming the chain of “freeway ponds” we see now along both I-90 and 82.”

“The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife now manages most of these lakes, stocking them with trout to generate fishing opportunities. Soon after the lake-stocking began, ospreys began

appearing. Pacific Power and Light erected a number of poles and platforms for the birds to nest upon. Today, travelers along I-82 regularly spot ospreys and their nests.”

With fish as the Osprey’s almost exclusive prey item an ideal habitat was created as the birds acclimated to artificial structures to support their large, elevated nests. Too often, they chose power poles and resulting outages from Ospreys contacting lines prompted power companies to contribute those aforementioned poles and platforms.

Andy continued, “The osprey feeds mostly on fish, usually between 4 and 12 inches long. The bird spots its prey while flying or hovering over a lake or river, then dives feet-first with a tremendous splash, often completely underwater, reappearing with a fish in its talons.” While Osprey may dive a full meter below the surface, most fish taken are closer to the top.

Ever try to grab a slippery fish out of the water? Ospreys have specialized feet for grasping fish: all four talons are curved more so than on other raptors, and the toes have tiny spines or “spicules” on the bottom that help them hang on to its slippery prey. Most raptors have three toes in the front, and one in the back, but Osprey can rotate the outer toe backward to help them carry fish, which they typically do head-first for optimal aerodynamics.

As this article is being written at the end of the second week of March, an Osprey has yet to be detected in Yakima County this year. However, one was documented on eBird up in Ellensburg on March 14. But don’t worry, they will return and soon. Need a hint on where to look? Check those big, vacant nests along rivers and ponds such as:

- Mile post 193 on Highway 12 where the power substation stands.
- The pole platform at the warehouse just east of the Painted Rocks.
- Two platforms east of I-82 and south of Exit 26 to the Training Center.
- Platform at Myron Lake.
- Huge nest on the ball field lights opposite Buchanan Lake along I-82 to the west.
- On Hwy 97 just south of Union Gap just prior to the Lateral A exit...nest on river side.
- On I-82 near milepost 48, nest pole on dike between two ponds to the south.
- On I -82 pole to the south just prior to Exit 50 to Toppenish.
- On Highway 24 heading towards Moxee, to the south just after the bridge over the Yakima River.

I don’t travel much, but I don’t think you can take a main road out of Yakima proper without passing an Osprey nest. And the time is right...soon most of those nests will flick on the No Vacancy Sign. Get out there and enjoy the Year of the Bird, after all this is the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the most powerful and important bird protection law ever passed.



**Osprey
Photo By
George Valhakis**

To see more photos by YVAS’s talented photographers, click on the Birding Resources tab on our home page.

--- Richard Repp---

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Coming Attractions:

March 22 Chapter Meeting - 7:00 p.m

March 30/31 Bluebird Box Cleanout

April 17 Zimmerman Ponds field trip