



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

June/July 2019

The deadline is getting closer! The Crier is going online, ONLY!

As you may already know we are changing to an all-electronic newsletter. This has been a difficult decision as many members have mentioned they like have a paper Crier for easy reference. However, as a conservation organization, we are attempting to reduce our use of paper and save money. We will save over \$2500.00 per year, which is significant for Yakima Audubon. The money we save will be used to further our education and conservation work, and will allow us to keep our membership dues at the current levels. The online newsletter will have full color photos and will be printable, either in its entirety or as single pages. Just as we did with the printed version, it is our goal to post ten issues of the newsletter per year, approximately one week before each monthly program. An email will also be sent to BirdYak saying the Crier is on the YVAS website.

As a benefit to our members, we are planning to email each of you a link when the Crier is finished and posted online. We have found that many of our members have not yet shared their email addresses with us, and consequently we have extended the date for the online-only version from August until the September issue. This will give

you an opportunity to update your email contact information.

We will only use the email addresses to communicate a link for the newsletter, and for other Yakima Audubon chapter information, such as program reminders or special events. We will NOT share your email contact information with any other organization.

Please send your current email address to membership@yakimaaudubon.org. In the future, if your email changes, please send the new one to the same address.

If you are unable to access the internet and need to receive a paper newsletter, please notify us by mail. Our mailing address is YVAS, P.O. Box 2823, Yakima, WA, 98907 attn: newsletter.

Membership renewals will remain as they are now, with paper reminders mailed to you.

We appreciate your support as we transition to the electronic newsletter and welcome your feedback. If you have comments, you can email any of the board members or use the YVAS post office box.

Birders on woodpecker field trip worked hard but were well rewarded!

On Saturday June 25th nine enthusiastic and dedicated birders joined trip leader Teresa Lorenz on a YVAS field trip targeting rare woodpecker species of the eastern Cascades. Half of the group were members of YVAS and half made the drive over from the west side to see the abundance that the eastern slopes has to offer.

The group decided to try for a rare American Three-toed Woodpecker first, a species which inhabits higher elevations, often above 5000 ft. Many field trip participants got more exercise than they bargained for during a hike up the Union Creek Trail, but were rewarded with beautiful views of a male American three-toed woodpecker excavating a cavity in the 2017 Norse Peak burn on

the Wenatchee National Forest. Along this trail we heard or saw 14 additional species, including Olive-sided Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, MacGillivray's Warbler, Yellow Warbler and Townsend's Warbler.

The next stop was the Meeks burn, also in the Wenatchee National Forest, a wildfire burn from 2016. We accessed the burn via the Clover Springs Road, or Forest Road 1600. Highlights were White-headed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, both of which were feeding nestlings in nests located within a couple hundred yards of each other. The parents required some patience to

Woodpecker Field Trip continued on page 2

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



MEMBERSHIP
JOY MCKINNEY

Welcome new members!

Yakima: Ralph Woodall, Bruce and Diane Crockett, Michael and Kimberley Lawler

Thanks for renewing your membership:

Seattle: Jennifer Kaufman

Selah: Jerry Turner

Union Gap: Lawrence Martin

Yakima: Betty Peterson, George and Susan Vlahakis, Lee and Edith Hunsperger, Rich and Deb Mathieu, Dan and Eileen Kinney, Connie Hughes, Karen Ireland, Don Sattler, Jan and Judy Gano



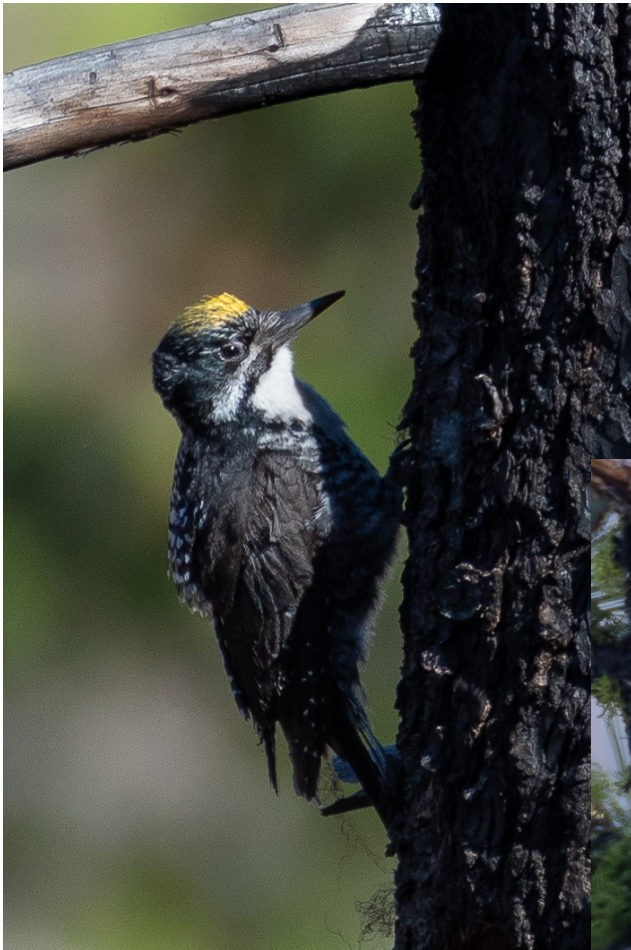
THIS MONTH'S YVAS
CALENDAR

There are no chapter meetings in June and July.

Aug 13 Board Meeting at Denny Granstrand and Chris Reid's house at **6:00 pm**.

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.

Woodpecker field trip continued from page 1



Above: Male American Three-toed Woodpecker took a break from cavity excavation to strut his stuff and drum on a few snags in the Norse Peak Burn. Photo by Mike Roper.

photograph - the Black-backed Woodpecker parents did not visit the nest for a full 40 minutes. The White-headed Woodpecker male parent scolded us vigorously for 30 minutes but did not present good views until his mate returned to feed the nestlings. Meeks burn also provided sightings of Hairy Woodpeckers and Williamson's Sapsucker to different subsets of the group. Despite the warm afternoon sun - unseasonably warm for mid-June - we tallied an additional 34 species, including Cassin's Vireo, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Western Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire, Hermit Thrush, Red Crossbill and Western Tanager, .

All in all, for a hot June day, the trip was a great success. The total number of species topped 50, and included all target woodpecker species. And most importantly, the field trip participants were patient, had good spirits despite some hard hiking on a hot day, and were a pleasure to spend the day with.

— Phil Fischer —



Left: A very uncooperative male White-headed Woodpecker in the Meeks Burn. It just refused to present a nice pose. Photo by Mike Roper.

Vredenburgh Bluebird Trail - Two Weeks In June

The three newly hatched bluebirds in the snapshot below want to give a shout out to all our sponsors! Monitors rarely glimpse a shell fragment with new young inside a nest box...the adults either remove shells promptly after hatching or perhaps they consume them for the calcium content. As I take quick grabs with my smart phone, the quality/sharpness isn't the greatest. My guess is that the top bird recently popped out and fell over backwards in its attempt to gape with its siblings for the next food delivery.



The results from the first week of June's monitoring team (Brad's Blues – led by Nancy and Hannah Born) indicated that things were off and running! The 125 boxes contained 80 eggs and 246 nestlings in various stages of development. In addition, 50 Mountain Bluebirds and 19 Western Bluebirds had fledged. Second nest efforts were just beginning and should continue for the next month.

The following week, the fledge totals increased to 88 Western and 61 Mountain Bluebirds. In the nests, were 66 eggs and 183 nestlings; the majority of the nestlings were well developed and within days of fledging.

In addition to bluebirds, three broods of White-headed Nuthatches are calling the Trail home this year. Tree Swallows and House Wrens (both start nesting a bit later than bluebirds), are also laying claim to nest boxes. Other nest box trails in the area have also seen an uptick in Nuthatches this spring. Normally, the Vredenburgh boxes might attract one or two pairs of Nuthatches; three is a high tally for the last 20 years or so.

That so many cavity nesters utilize these nest boxes is a testament to the value of the Trail and illustrates the shortage of natural cavities in the area.

Competition for the boxes does generate some conflicts between both different species and at times, the same species battling for a nest site. In an instance of the former, Box 36 (sponsored by Doris and the late Larry Robinson) fledged White-breasted Nuthatches; bluebirds immediately built a new nest on top of the fledged nest. Not willing to surrender gracefully, the Nuthatches began constructing their unique

fur-based nest over the top of the bluebirds' effort. Time will tell who wins this battle.

The Trail also attracts a fair number of photographers each spring. Occasionally in an effort to obtain a photo more in tune with an individual human's preference, the boxes sprout adornments from other habitats. In the photo below, Box 90 (sponsored by Edith and the late Bill Ryan), an ever-green branch beckons in the blue sky above the box. The stark dead branches to the right also float without natural anchor. The hope is that an adult will land on either newly added perch and pose for a striking portrait, sans the man-made box.



Each season and even each week, brings a different look to both the birds and the overall habitat. Early spring blooms give way to a succession of later arriving flowers that flaunt their beauty be it a dainty understated stand alone offering or a large riot of color spreading across the landscape. It adds interest and variety to each and every trip through the Wenas.

Hopefully, the weather will provide an abundance of bugs to sustain the second wave of nestlings along the Trail. Last year produced a record number of fledglings, 620 in all. This year's current total of Mountain Bluebird of 61 may well eclipse the 75 recorded in 2018.

Yakima Audubon makes a second visit to Malheur

Yakima Valley Audubon made a second expedition to famed Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Oregon, leaving early Friday morning. There were 11 of us: Bill and Jan Drenquis, Joy McKinney, Rich and Debbie Mathieu, Mike and Kurt Roper, Gene Miliczky and Sarah Shippen, and birding leaders Andy and Ellen Stepniewski. Bill did a great job as logistics coordinator, including finding restaurants each evening.

1 JUNE. We started our first full day at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge just a mile or so from our hotel in Hines. We enjoyed some very nice birding in flooded fields there, with great studies of colorful waterfowl (Cinnamon Teal and Northern Shoveler), showy shorebirds (Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope, and Willet), whining Soras, and lines of commuting White-faced Ibis. Franklin's Gulls cried overhead and the spectacular Yellow-headed Blackbird perched just a few feet from us. Such was our introduction to Malheur!

At the "transmission station pond", we got onto our only Black Tern of the trip, a species sadly declining over much of its vast range. Also here were diving ducks such as Bufflehead and Lesser Scaup, species we would not see in the shallower marshes elsewhere in Malheur.

In drier shrub-steppes above the marshes we made a short stop for birds of the sagelands and were rewarded with the Brewer's Sparrow and Sage Thrasher. I mentioned the overwhelming cover of weedy invasives, especially Cheatgrass, which depresses popu-



White-faced Ibis in flight.
Photo by Mike Roper.

lations of shrub-steppe birds, especially Greater Sage-Grouse, but also songbirds.

Also on these uplands, we encountered numerous raptors such as Swainson's and Red-tailed Hawks, but especially Ferruginous Hawks, a species declining over much of its range. It was heartening to see this regal species in numbers on this trip. We stopped several times to photograph a giant nest in an isolated tree just off

the highway, with four downy young and watchful parent.

We finally made it to Malheur NWR headquarters about noon in time to have a picnic lunch in the shade of the big trees there.

We soon noticed a paucity of migrant songbirds for which this grove of trees is famous. I spent an informative 15 minutes gaining tips and insight on the birding hotspots from the fellow manning the information desk at headquarters. It was Alan Contreras, one of the deans of Oregon ornithology. I was getting tips for Malheur specialties from the right guy! He reasoned a virtual absence of "eastern" migrants this spring was on account of a persistent storm coming in off the Pacific, dissuading potential wanderers from east of the Rocky Mountains, as songbirds really don't like to fly into a headwind. So, the good fortune we enjoyed on the first trip to Malheur, such as Rose-breasted Grosbeak and other birds, were simply not here this year. However, we had wonderful views of the regular migrants such as Bullock's Orioles, Western Tanagers, and Black-headed Grosbeaks. We also had great scope views of a juvenile Great Horned Owl dozing away high up in a cottonwood. Common Nighthawks "peented" in the sky and Mike located a sleeping bird on a big horizontal branch.

After lunch we made our way nearby to well-known nesting sites for both Prairie Falcon and Golden Eagle. Both spots were right above the roadside. We enjoyed fantastic views of the adult Prairie Falcon. Its downy young poked their head out their cleft in the cliff a few times. The parent eagles were probably off on a foraging hunt but the 2/3-grown young shifted about in the nest so we could get reasonable views.

Heading back to Burns, we took famous Rue Red Road which first traverses dryish shrub-steppe, then swings through marshy country. In the initial dry section, we did get a glimpse of a Burrowing Owl poking a bit of its head out of its burrow. Farther along there were scads of marsh birds, including several handsomely attired Blue-winged Teal, perhaps the least common of the expected ducks. As we approached the highway in Lowen, I caught sight of a Short-eared Owl elegantly flopping over the meadows. We all had pretty decent views of this beautiful bird as it hunted for voles, its favorite prey item.

2 JUNE. At Frenchglen at the south end of Malheur NWR, some poked about the country store, while others explored the shade trees for oddball birds.

Then we headed up into the junipers and sagebrush hills just above Frenchglen where we got onto a pretty Green-tailed Towhee, a large and smartly-attired sparrow. Cassin's Finches were coming to a mud puddle for water while we got onto both Gray



A female Wilson's Phalarope
Photo by M

NWR in Southeast Oregon and found 129 species!

Flycatcher and the very pretty Lazuli Bunting atop junipers. A Lesser Goldfinch, mainly a Southwest species, uttered its unmistakable, plaintive "tee-yeer" call.



Loon, a highlight at Malheur
Mike Roper

From this vantage on the mountainside, we had wonderful views of the snow-draped Steens Mountains off to the east. This big fault block mountain marks the northern edge of the Great Basin in Oregon and has been a famous draw to birders and naturalists for decades. The road to its crest is scheduled to open this year about 4 July. For those who haven't been to its alpine crest, Ellen and I can highly recommend a trip to Malheur in midsummer. It offers stupendous views down to the Alvord Desert, one vertical mile below. Too, the glacier-carved cirques along the

crest are the only breeding location of Black Rosy Finch in Oregon. Besides great birding, the upper Steens offer a colorful wildflower extravaganza in mid-July, another reason for a visit to this area.

Then we headed further uphill and west to the base of the commanding cliffs at Milepost 62. We all had very nice scope views of calling Chukars, including one at the very top of the rocky ramparts! A Prairie Falcon wailed as it soared about the cliffs, affording fine studies of its "dirty arm-pits."

Back down the mountain, we next hit the Page Springs Campground area where a suite of colorful birds like Yellow-breasted Chats, Yellow Warblers, Bullock's Orioles, and Eastern Kingbirds dashed about the dense willows. We searched for the reported American Dipper on the water diversion structure without any luck, other than finding the old nest, but blundered onto our target in a nearby canal. Usually, this species is wedded to clear, rushing mountain streams.

In the campground, a very obliging Virginia Rail and its two downy young gingerly walked about an opening in the marsh, affording outstanding views of this normally very furtive species.

Heading north on the Center Patrol; Road, we stopped for Bobolink in the meadows. Though it was warm and getting on in the afternoon, we did get good views of several male Bobolinks, a showy member of the blackbird clan. Here, they're very near the edge of their nearly continent-wide range.

At Benson Pond we had great views of Trumpeter Swan and Forster's Terns but the "pumper-lunking" American Bittern, always furtive, kept hidden in the marshes. Overhead, Franklin's Gulls were fly-catching while uttering their odd cries.

3 JUNE. Aiming to nab one or two species that had eluded us, six of departed the hotel at 5:30 am on an early bird search for Sagebrush, Lark, and Black-throated Sparrows. We first stopped at Wright's Point, a consistent spots some years for both Lark and Black-throated Sparrows. No luck, so we descended to the shrub-steppe nearby in the basin, but again had no luck on the Black-throated Sparrows. This year, abundant precipitation in the deserts of California and Nevada may have put the brakes on any northward peregrinations of this classy sparrow. There's probably plenty of seed and insects following the "super bloom" in their usual haunts in the Southwest. So, they have no need to wander in search of better feeding.

I had noted on eBird Alan Contreras had recently had luck on Sagebrush Sparrow on the slopes of Saddle Butte, so we rocketed south there and I instantly cued in on the "halophytes" here, meaning plants adapted to alkaline soils. Cheatgrass is not as widespread or abundant in this soil type, so there was much bare ground, which suits the Sagebrush Sparrow, a species that spends lots of time chasing insects on the ground. Shortly, we had fine views of Sagebrush Sparrows, smart fellows indeed! Then we

headed directly back to breakfast in Burns, arriving a mere four minutes past our appointed 7:30 am return!

On our long drive to Yakima, we made one last birding stop about an hour north of Burns at Starr Campground in the Blue Mountains south of John Day. Here we took a walk through the campground in a dry-side forest of Ponderosa Pine, Douglas-fir, Grand Fir, and occasional Western Larch. Along the walk, I employed a century-old technique of playing tooting calls of the Northern Pygmy-Owl, arch enemy of small forest birds. It turns out in bright sunlight, forest birds are quite confident of outwitting this bluebird-sized predator. Soon, birds were flocking to us from all directions, 10 or so species in



Eared Grebe in breeding plumage at Malheur NWR. Photo by Mike Roper.

all! Red-breasted Nuthatches were first to investigate, followed by Mountain Chickadees, then Townsend's and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Lastly, a flycatcher called "dew-hic" repeatedly, thus a Dusky Flycatcher, one of the "difficult *Empidonaxes*, a genus of look-alike small flycatchers. The genus name literally means "king of the gnats."

Our species total was 129, reflecting the diversity of birds found in this very special part of the northern Great Basin in the warmer months.

SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

AUGUST 8-11, 2019 · FREE NATURE EXPO



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SOUTHEAST ARIZONA BIRDING FESTIVAL

AUGUST 8-11, 2019 · FREE NATURE EXPO
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| Thursday, August 8: 12-6 pm | Saturday, August 10: 10 am-6 pm |
| Friday, August 9: 12-6 pm | Sunday, August 11: 10 am-2 pm |



Kids' Zone Saturday, 10 am-2 pm

- Live animals from Reid Park Zoo, 10 am-12pm
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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 \$ _____
 ____ I do not want to receive any solicitations or communications from NAS (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.

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More of Mike Roper's photos from Malheur NWR



Pronghorn Antelope



American Avocet



Willett

Coming Attractions:

Beginning in September, the Calliope Crier will be an online-only publication. Have you sent your email address to membership@yakimaaudubon.org so you receive an email notifying you when the Crier is posted on the YVAS website?