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Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

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Burrowing Owls

Membership Meeting Tuesday, October 27, 2009, 7:00 p.m. Kennewick First Lutheran Church, corner of Yelm and Highway 395

The October membership meeting of LCBAS will feature Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist, Mike Livingston, as guest speaker. Mike will give members and others in

attendance a burrowing owl update. Mike's presentation will include burrowing owl migration timing, breeding activity, habitat needs, population trends, and management actions.

Mike Livingston earned a BS in Wildlife ecology and Management from Michigan State University and a MS in Wildlife Science from New Mexico State University. He

moved to eastern Washington in 1996 where he worked with the Yakama Nation until 2003. Mike has worked from WDFW at the Pasco office since 2003 as a district wildlife biologist. The business meeting will begin at 7:00 followed by a short social time and refreshments. Our speaker usually begins around 7:45 p.m. Any contributions of tasty snacks are appreciated by all!

Bateman Island Bird Walk *with Lisa Hill & Dana Ward*

It was a beautiful fall morning when 37 birders met at Bateman Island to go forth and seek the winged treasures of the bird world. The group ambled across the causeway and was treated by small flock of Greater Yellow Legs to the east and Lesser Yellow Legs to the west. The birds were working the shallows next to Bateman Island. The lighting conditions were just right for viewing the birds to the west and as the group watched the Lesser Yellow Legs someone spotted a Snipe in among the reeds.

Also sighted from the causeway, and a crowd favorite, were Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons and Black-crown Night-Herons. Also spotted was a lone Western Grebe and a Long-billed Dowitcher.

The 37 birders split into two roughly equal more manageable groups with one going more interior of the island and the other working the more traditional path to eventually view the small islands and mud flats towards the Yakima delta.

The interior group was treated to hundreds of Yellow-rump Warblers, Northern Flickers, a hovering Osprey at a distance and just by chance a very close up view of a Cooper's Hawk that flew about 10 feet off the ground the length of the group. Also sighted, in very large numbers, were several big flocks of Sandhill Cranes. Seeing and hearing the Sandhills was a special treat for all birders in both groups. The other group of birders, taking the more

Bateman Island Walk *Continued*

traditional trail, was treated to seeing a Golden-Crown Sparrow, Bewick's Wren, American Pipit, and our old friend the resident Great Horned Owl. Also spotted was a Peregrine Falcon and Spotted Towhee. Through spotting scopes, Black-Bellied Plovers, Green Wing Teal and a very rare Sabine's Gull were located working the mud flats and shallow water. The Sabine's Gull, a rare visitor from the arctic north, was the bird of the

day and all present had excellent good looks at this northern visitor. During the outing **51 species were recorded.**

I want to thank Ed and Nancy for their excellent guidance on the walk.

Come join us!

The next Bateman Island Bird Walk is **Saturday, November 7, 2009.** We meet at 8:00am in the parking lot at Wye Park near the entrance to the island. Birders of all experience levels are welcome. Binoculars are recommended.

Help for Injured Raptors:

If you find an injured raptor in the Tri-Cities or surrounding area you can call a local volunteer for advice. Injured raptors are usually transported to **Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton, Oregon** for treatment and rehabilitation.

Who to call:

Michelle Caron..(509) 366-0888
Marilyn Hayes..(509) 521-4648
Suzanne Baird...(509) 460-2434
Blue Mountain Wildlife...(541) 278-0215 see **Lower Columbia Basin Audubon website** and click on the **Help for Injured Birds** link.



"The Sabine's Gull, a rare visitor from the arctic north, was the bird of the day"



Burrowing Owl Monitoring at the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex *with Jennifer Bradbury & Heidi*

Newsome

Burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia*) are found in arid landscapes throughout the west. They prefer short grasslands and are often found in association with badgers and ground squirrels. Because burrowing owls do not dig their own burrows, they depend on these ground dwelling mammals which are the primary burrow excavators. The burrowing owl is a federal species of concern and a state candidate species in Washington.

Burrowing owls have been monitored at the Mid-Columbia River Refuge Complex (the Complex) since 2005. Prior to 2009, the majority of burrowing owl monitoring was done at the Hanford Reach National

Monument (the Monument). In 2009, Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was included in monitoring efforts.

In 2009 staff and volunteers monitored burrows for a total of 17 days, from February through July 2009. Initially, 49 burrows were checked to determine whether or not they were intact. Of these 49, five were found to be destroyed. In addition to monitoring known burrows, an effort was made to survey areas to find new burrow locations. Volunteers helped with both circular transect surveys at the Monument and line transect surveys at Umatilla NWR. As a result of these surveys, two new active burrows were found

in 2009. Including these two new burrows, a total of 46 intact burrow sites were monitored monthly throughout the 2009 nesting season.

During the 2009 nesting season, six burrow sites on our Complex were occupied by nesting pairs of burrowing owls: two at Umatilla and four at the Monument. Four of these pairs were observed with young and considered to have "Successful" nest attempts. Owl remains were found at one site and this nest attempt was considered "Failed" for the season. One burrow was found late in the season and had signs of owl presence (fresh pellets and white wash), but no owls were observed.

Continued on page 3

Conservation Notes *with Rick Leumont*

Columbia Point:

I am sure everyone has seen the articles in the Tri-City Herald concerning the decision barring the proposed Hanford Reach National Monument Interpretive Center from Columbia Point. I am not going to belabor the point or go into the decision process. The tribes objected to placing the project on the point and prevailed. A diligent search for an alternative location must be made and if one is available it must be selected. If none are available, Columbia Point can be selected and the tribal concerns mitigated. The chances of not finding a "suitable" location are slim; so barring a miracle, the Interpretive Center will not be located on Columbia Point. I still firmly believe, locating the Interpretive Center on Columbia Point was the best possible location and would provide long term protection to the fish,

wildlife and native plants of the point as well as the values the tribes treasure and strive to preserve. Barring the Interpretive Center from Columbia Point raises anew the ugly threat of commercial development. What is the future of the Hanford Reach National Monument Interpretive Center? The Richland Public Facilities Board is in the process of seeking a site, preferably along the Columbia River that is easily accessible. I have no doubt a site can be found. Remains to be seen, if the new site can generate the excitement the project needs and deserves. We will continue to work as hard as possible to make the project a success. Protection and preservation of Columbia Point has been one of the primary objectives of the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society for over four decades. Our primary concern now is not the success or failure of the Interpretive Center, but

preservation of Columbia Point. There are many groups in town that are interested in building a museum but we remain among the few, the very very few committed to preservation of wildlife habitat. We will have to work with the tribes and City of Richland to insure Columbia Point does not fall to commercial development. We must move quickly to develop a viable alternative plan that will protect and enhance the fish, wildlife and native plants of the point. We need a plan that makes the point accessible to the public for low impact recreation. Access by vehicles must be limited and confined to established roads and absolutely no dirt motorbikes. The point should be a commercial free zone. Hopefully the point could function as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for the Interpretive Center.

Burrowing owls on Mid-Columbia River Refuges *continued*

It is likely that more burrowing owl pairs nest on the Complex than we have been able to locate. Time constraints prevent staff from effectively surveying the 195,000 acres of the Monument and the 25,000 acres of the Umatilla NWR for burrowing owl nest sites. Our ultimate goal is to locate more burrowing owl nests so that population trends can be more accurately determined.

In 2010, with the help of volunteers, we will monitor the 46 known intact burrows in February to determine their status ("Intact" or "Destroyed"). All intact burrows will be monitored throughout the rest of the nesting season. Survey areas will be prioritized based on information from last summer's spotlight surveys, and soil maps. If staff and volunteer time allows, additional spotlight surveys may be conducted

earlier in the spring.

The goal of this project is to locate additional natural sites used by burrowing owls. We thank you for your help in 2009 and hope you will help us again in 2010!

If you are interested in reading our full 2009 report, contact Jennie Bradbury (jennifer_bradbury@fws.gov).

" Four of these pairs were observed with young and considered to have "Successful" nest attempts. ."

Bird Sightings – September 2009

Kevin Burke - (wildburke@hotmail.com)

“Sandhill Cranes are on their way back down through the Lower Columbia Basin their almost prehistoric call can be heard overhead.”

Bird Sightings Greetings

Hello everyone! It is time for the September bird sightings column. I wanted to thank all of the folks that submitted sightings to me this month. This column would not be successful without all of you. Migration has been continuing this month and we have seen some great things. Sandhill Cranes are on their way back down through the Lower Columbia Basin their almost prehistoric call can be heard overhead. The end of the month proved to be full of great sightings! Shorebirds, gulls, and Turkey Vultures oh my!!!

September:

1. Sept. 5th: Highlights of the Bateman bird walk are: Cliff Swallow, Orange Crowned Warbler, Red-Eyed Vireo, Gray Catbird, and Sharp Shinned Hawk. Observed by those on the walk. More to come in Lisa Hill's column
2. Sept. 7th: 6 Red-necked Phalaropes were seen at the blood ponds in WW County a Wilson's Phalarope was seen at the WW delta and about 1000 Greater White Fronted Geese were seen at Casey Pond all by JB
3. Sept. 8th: A Yellow-Breasted Chat was heard by LH and a Dark-Eyed Junco was seen. This is a late record for the Chat
4. Sept. 9th: Yellow-rumped, Wilson's, MacGillivray's, Nashville, Orange-crowned, and a Townsend Warblers were all seen by LH at W.E. Johnson Park and her backyard
5. Sept. 10th: A flock of 50 Sandhill Cranes were observed flying of the house of JA
6. Sept. 10th: An Anna's Hummingbird was in the yard of LHI
7. Sept. 12th: An Eared Grebe was observed by JA in Benton City
8. Sept. 13th: 2 Red-necked Grebes, a few Spotted Sandpipers, and 20 common Mergansers were seen by JA in Benton City
9. Sept. 16th: 1300 Greater White Fronted Geese 10 Ruddy Ducks, and a Great Horned Owl were seen at the Burbank Slough by JA, JB
10. Sept. 16th and 17th: 2 Blue Winged Teal were seen at the McNary bird blind by JA, JB, and KB
11. Sept. 16th: 15 Pied Billed Grebes were seen at Casey Pond by JA, JB
12. Sept. 17th: A Western Sandpiper was seen at Two Rivers Park by KB
13. Sept. 19th: 50 Barn Swallows were seen South of Ringold by C and F
14. Sept. 20th: Long Billed Dowitchers, Ruddy ducks, Greater Yellow Legs, Gadwalls, and American Widgeons were seen at the Yakima Delta by BC&TC
15. Sept. 20th: Sandhill Cranes and Golden Crowned Kinglets were seen at the home of JT
16. Sept. 20th: 2 American Golden Plovers, a Sanderling, and 10 Pectoral Sandpipers were seen at the Tyson Ponds by MD&MLD
17. Sept. 22nd: A Common Poorwill was

September Bird Sightings *continued*

heard by BL at his home.

18. Sept. 23rd: A Prairie Falcon was seen at the Tyson Ponds in WW county by JB&JA
19. Sept. 24th: Black Bellied Plovers were seen at Johnson Island by J&KA
20. Sept. 24th: A Baird's Sandpiper and 30 Greater White Fronted Geese were seen at Cold Springs by NL&JM
21. Sept. 26th: 110 Sandhill Cranes were seen in Richland over the home of RL&CL
22. Sept 26th: A Sabine's Gull, 3 Black-Bellied Plovers, Lesser Yellowlegs, Long Billed Dowitchers, Least Sandpipers, and Western Sandpipers were seen at the Yakima Delta by NL
23. Sept 26th: A Western Tanager, 2 Hermit Thrushes, A Merlin, A Turkey Vulture, & Spotted Towhees were seen at W.E. Johnson Park by NL&LH
24. Sept. 26th: An American Golden Plover, Sharp-Tailed Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpipers, and a Baird's Sandpiper were seen at the Tyson Ponds in WW county by MD&MLD
25. Sept. 27th: A Sharp-Tailed Sandpiper and Sabine's Gull were seen at the Yakima delta by BW
26. Sept. 27th and 29th: A Pacific Golden Plover was seen originally at the Tyson Ponds by MWO then again on the 29th by BD and NL
27. Sept. 28th: 7 Turkey Vultures were seen over Richland by KC and NL

Observers:

(LH) Lisa Hill, (LU) Larry Umthun, (JA) Jane Abel, (KA) Keith Abel, (JB) Jennie Bradbury, (KB) Kevin Burke, (NL) Nancy LaFramboise, (BL) Bill LaFramboise, (RL) Ron Louderback, (CL) Carol Louderback, (MD) Mike Denny, (MLD) Merrylynn Denny, (JM) John McLaughlin, (JT) Joel Tinsley, (C and F) Chris and Fred, (LHi) Lauren Hirsch, (MWO) Michael Woodruff, (BD) Bonnie Dunham, (KC) Kathy Criddle, (BW) Bob Woodley

Thanks to everyone who sent me sightings this month. I encourage any and all sightings to be e-mailed to me throughout the month. I found a great quote in an Audubon magazine from 1887 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "**Tis always morning somewhere, and above the awakening continents, from shore to shore, somewhere the birds are singing evermore.**" Good birding everyone!

NEW TO BIRDWATCHING?

A new page on our website (www.lcbas.org) is designed for the person (adult or child) who hasn't watched birds before. Learn what to think about first, how to choose a Bird guide and binoculars, and where to find lists of birds common to our area.

President's Message

If you ever have any doubts about whether your dues and your volunteerism make a difference to our community, I have the perfect way to clear up those doubts. Today I and a number of other LCBAS members attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex Environmental Education Center. Let's just call it the McNary Environmental Education Center or MEEC for short. Many local dignitaries attended and the local TV stations were on hand to record the event for posterity.

Various speakers noted the seminal role that the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society and its dedicated members played in starting the educational activities at McNary. We continue playing our part, and that makes today's grand opening special for all of us in LCBAS.

So what are your dues good for? You absolutely must visit the MEEC to see for yourself. If you miss the grand opening on Saturday, October 10, you can go visit any time. You will be impressed and proud.

Now here's the part of the job I don't particularly like but is nevertheless essential. After seeing some of our accomplishments at MEEC, I am slightly less hesitant to remind you to chip in with your renewal dues. After you see MEEC, I have no doubt you will want to be a contributor to the conservation and education work that our chapter is accomplishing.

Go outside and play.

Ed Rykiel
President



Washington State Audubon Science State of the Birds

New analyses by Audubon scientist show how climate change is affecting our birds in their ranges, populations, and life cycles. Audubon Washington's 2009 State of the Birds report looks at our birds in our 74 Important Bird Areas: Read the new summary publication with chart of climate changes, effect on landscapes, and implications for vulnerable birds. See full state report at http://wa.audubon.org/pdfs/Washington_Birds_and_Climate_Change_Report.pdf.

Since Audubon Washington released the first State of the Birds report in [May 2004](#), National Audubon followed up with similar reports on the national level in [September 2004](#), [June 2007](#) and [September 2008](#).

Like canaries in coal mines, the state of our birds holds implications for our own health and quality of life as well.

Renewal Reminder PLEASE NOTE:

There are 150 members whose renewals are due or are receiving a complementary copy. Please check your label. If you get the Curlew electronically, you will receive a renewal email. The last set of labels did not have the membership expiration date printed on them. If your renewal date is before October, we know you may not have received notice, but we do need you to renew as soon as possible. There are no consequences for this late renewal.

Check out our website: <http://lcbas.org>

- President Ed Rykiel.....(509)627-1113
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- Vice President Robin Priddy(509)783-4664
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- Treasurer Lucie Fritz.....(509)946-9134
E-mail: LucieF@aol.com

Book Table Talk *with Kathy Criddle*

This month I want to spot light 3 books by local authors that will be available for purchase at the Book Table. All three are well written, have amazing illustrations and feature Washington wildlife through the eyes of writers with an extraordinary passion for Washington State.

The first, The Birds of Yakima County, Washington written by Andrew Stepniewski will make it easy for any birder to know what they will be looking for and where to find it. There are cool maps and delightful pen and ink drawings. The chapter on vegetation zones is worth spending some time looking at but farther along, Andy's interesting dialogue on each bird will make it even harder for you to put this book down. Price is \$22 and I have 3 copies.

Second on the list is Birds of the Inland Northwest and Northern Rockies by Harry Nehls, Mike Denny, and Dave Trochlell is a must have for this area. It is pocket size and filled with excellent full color photographs. Each bird has a dedicated page with easy to understand facts and commentary which makes it a great choice for the beginning birder and a nice quick reference for the more advanced. Price is \$18.95 and I have 9 copies.

Our last book is a children's picture book If Wishes Had Wings written and illustrated by Richland resident Ginger Baird Wireman. This is a delightful adventure story of a little boy who dreams about being a golden eagle. Ginger has woven loads of wildlife facts and sprinkled her love for Washington ecosystems throughout. Nature loving parents and grandparents should add this to their holiday shopping

list. Price is \$14.00 and I have 11 copies. Stop by the Book Table and check these out. We are able to buy most of our books at a discount price, so buying at the Book Table helps LCBAS raise money for our many conservation and education projects.

Albatross cam for bird's eye view

By Jody Bourton, BBC news, Earth News
Reporter on BBC earth news on-line

Albatrosses associate with killer whales out in the open ocean, tiny cameras attached to the birds reveal. Unique pictures retrieved from the cameras placed on the albatrosses' backs show the birds feeding alongside the killer whales, also known as orcas. The birds are thought to feed on food scraps left by the marine mammals. The discovery may explain how black-browed albatrosses find their prey in an apparently featureless open ocean, say the researchers. Black-browed albatrosses (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) travel hundreds of kilometers to locate and feed on their prey. They may travel large distances in only a matter of days to feed on fish before returning to their breeding colony on Bird Island, South Georgia in the southern Atlantic Ocean. Although a number of studies have looked at the foraging behavior of albatrosses, it is not known exactly what strategy the birds employ to locate food on the open sea. Now scientists report in the journal PLoS ONE that miniaturized cameras attached to the back of the birds have revealed the birds fly in groups and forage with killer whales!

http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8292000/8292636.stm

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Audubon Membership Information

Please Note: Membership in National Audubon Society (NAS) and the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society (LCBAS) are **separate memberships.**

LCBAS Chapter Membership (includes a year's subscription [10 issues] to *The Curlew*)

_____ \$20. for annual membership dues or

_____ \$10. for full time students.

Please make check payable to **LCBAS**. I can help with an additional donation of \$_____

_____ Send *The Curlew* to my email address listed below. All my dues will go towards supporting LCBAS in local education and conservation efforts.

_____ I want to be on your Environmental Alert e-mail list to receive timely notices about issues/work parties. (Your e-mail address will not be shared.)

National Audubon Society Membership (includes annual subscription to *Audubon Magazine*)

_____ \$20. for one year new membership in the NAS. (Renewal of NAS membership is currently \$35.)

_____ \$15. for one year new senior or full time student membership in NAS.

Please make check payable to **National Audubon Society**. Please do not send renewals to LCBAS.

For any of the options above check the appropriate boxes, clip the form and mail it with your check(s) to:

Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, P. O. Box 1900, Richland, WA 99352

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