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Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

LCBAS White-crowned Sparrow Study Results Revealed

Membership Meeting
Tuesday, May 22 nd
7:00 p.m.

**NEW LOCATION: MID-
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Kennewick

The May meeting of the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society features our very own past president and retired professor, Dr. Ed Rykiel. Whatever happened to all those White-crowned Sparrows that Nancy LaFramboise banded? Do

they really know where your bird feeders are and do the same birds come back to you every year (or maybe their sons and daughters)? Ed Rykiel is going to reveal all this and more at the May monthly meeting. Get your questions about bird banding answered and find out the results of our study. But wait - there's more: the estimated population of White-crowned Sparrows in North America numbers 75 million in 5 subspecies. Our WCSPs are almost entirely the Gambel's subspecies. Find out more about WCSP

here: <http://www.allabout>

[birds.org/guide/White-crowned Sparrow/id](http://birds.org/guide/White-crowned_Sparrow/id)

This meeting will prove to be a lively one. It begins at 7:00 p.m. with a short business meeting. Following the business meeting those in attendance enjoy a brief social time with cookies and coffee/tea. The speaker usually begins around 7:45 p.m



Special Interest Articles:

- Local Field trips upcoming
- Larkwire affiliation.

Individual Highlights:

President's message

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Bird Sightings 5

Bateman Island bird walk – May 5, 2012 *with Lisa Hill*

A good crowd of 40 people participated in the May Bateman Island bird walk. We found 48 species including several spring migrants. A very vocal GRAY CATBIRD gurgled and twittered near the parking lot. All six of the expected swallow species were zipping around over the water: BARN, BANK, CLIFF, TREE, VIOLET-GREEN, and NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED. The Yakima River and delta had very high water and it was almost completely empty of any waterfowl or shorebirds, but out on the Pasco side of the Columbia River, we were able to spot a COMMON LOON.

They have been tough to find this spring, but we did see one GREAT HORNED OWL. *Continued on page 2*

A beautiful male TOWNSEND'S WARBLER was singing. CHIPPING SPARROWS and GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROWS joined the handful of WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS still hanging around.

On the back side of the island is a marshy area where a pair of CINNAMON TEAL were nibbling around the reeds and cattails – very uncommon for Bateman Island. A VIRGINIA RAIL called from the middle of the marsh, but stayed hidden.

The next Bateman Island bird walk is Saturday, June 2 at 8am. We meet in the parking lot of Wye Park and birders of all skill levels are welcome. We take a break over the summer with no Bateman walk in July or August. We will resume the walks on Sept 1.

Learn Bird Sounds and Benefit Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society!

Ever wish you knew how to identify birds by ear? It's one of the most essential birding skills, but one of the hardest to learn. Some folks from Seattle's Audubon chapter set out to make learning bird sounds truly accessible to everyone.

The result is **Larkwire**: a game-based learning system that uses cognitive techniques to make it easier to learn and remember bird sounds. Combining quiz games, an extensive sound library, and tips from renowned birdsong expert Michael O'Brien, Larkwire makes the learning process not only much easier but fun.

Continued on page 6

Greetings from the President! With Robin Priddy

The May board meeting had a surprise guest; Nancy LaFramboise was back in town and came to visit! It was wonderful to see her there and I appreciated her presence. I was reminded, too, of just how much she is missed.

This month's board happenings were fairly quiet (except for Nancy's visit); we're winding down for the summer. We'll look forward to the reports from the Malheur trip Barb Clarke has put together. Cherie and Jr. Audubon continue their work; Barb and Connie Estep put on a class about Birding for Kennewick. The class came to the Bateman walk, along with many others; thank you to Lisa

Hill for looking after this monthly walk and to the many knowledgeable birders who help us all enjoy the day. Dana Ward has completed the slate of officers for next year - we're still needing people who'd like to serve as Vice President, and as Membership Chair. Please think about it, and we'd be happy to take a nomination from the floor at the May meeting!

Thank you to Jack Dawson who has worked to sort out our storage needs at the church, with Kathy's help by selling off her inventory of books! And, just in case I've not mentioned their work I'd like to appreciate Katie Harris' steady and clarifying presence as treasurer; along

with Debbie Berkowitz consistent care for the minutes of the meetings and keeping us all aware of the many conservation activities and opportunities around us.

After the board meeting, having been away for a while, Nancy was reminded just how much we do here with Lower Columbia Basin Audubon. Our area's ecology is so unique, and at times seems unappreciated; I'm grateful that we are all here, each of us adding in our own way, to help ourselves and others see, share and save the beauty we have around us.

Thank you as always for the opportunity to serve as President.

Please Note: Curlew subscribers that are not National Audubon Society members are encouraged to join the National Audubon Society by sending their dues (\$20) to the Chapter Treasurer so the chapter is credited with their membership. Mail check to LCBAS Treasurer, PO Box 1900, Richland, WA 99352 and indicate the check is for NAS membership.

Check out our website:

<http://www.lcbas.org>

Mailing Label Information

In case you haven't noticed, your mailing label gives the date (Year and Month) your subscription to The Curlew newsletter expires. If the date is in red, your subscription has expired and you are receiving a complimentary issue of The Curlew in the hope you will promptly renew your subscription. If the date is in red and LAST ISSUE is highlighted in yellow, this will be your last issue of The Curlew until you renew your subscription. Email subscribers are being sent an email notification on the month their subscription expires and will receive similar notifications until the last eCurlew is sent. We are providing a three-month grace period before stopping delivery of The Curlew by mail or email.

If possible, please renew your subscription to The Curlew well ahead of its expiration date. You can do that on-line at LCBAS.org or send a check and the form on the printed version to the address indicated.

Local Field Trip to Bethel Ridge

LCBAS Local Field Trip: Bethel Ridge, May 19, 2012

Our local field trip for May is not so local! It will be an all day excursion to Bethel Ridge Rd, west of Yakima on the way to White Pass. Because it is ~100 miles (and ~1;30) from the Albertson's at Leslie and Gage to the junction of Bethel Ridge Road and US-12, we will depart the Albertson's parking lot at 7:30 AM. This means arriving at the parking lot no later than 7:15 AM so we can organize car pools to reduce the number of vehicles making the trip. The number of participants is limited to 12, so sign up ASAP via email to localfieldtrips@lcbas.org. Rich Barchet will lead this trip.

If it is determined that there is too much snow on the road, an alternative location in the Yakima/Naches/Nile area at a lower altitude will be sought.

As with any trip involving much distance, drivers are to be remunerated at the rate of \$0.25/mile, shared equally among all passengers. Be sure to bring a lunch, water and snack and be prepared for whatever weather we might encounter. Further details will be forthcoming in future LCBIRDS2 posts.



Book Table Talk by Kathy

Criddle

Regarding the big book sale at the last meeting, we made \$101.00 and all the used books were either sold or given away at the end of the meeting or taken to the MCL Friends of the Library in two small boxes. The remaining "new" books fit into three small boxes. Two of the boxes are housed in the church cupboard. The third small box of books is at my home for access when we are not able to get to the church. THANK YOU JACK AND MURREL for arriving early and helping me with boxes, etc! And thanks to all the bought books and made the sale a success!

Future LCBAS Local Field Trips

June 9 (2nd Saturday): Bennington Lake (Walla Walla) & Biscuit Ridge. All day trip.

Contact localfieldtrips@lcbas.org to express interest in leading any of these trips. Details will be posted to the LCBirds2 Yahoo group and on the LCBAS.org website as they develop.

BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR APRIL 2012

Heightened interest was evident in April as the migrating birds and summer residents continued to show up in yards, parks, and natural areas.

North Richland and Leslie Groves Park

From the 4th -10th, Keith and Jane Abel's feeders entertained a Spotted Towhee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Downy Woodpecker and, most spectacularly, a Common Redpoll (rare, and usually absent after March 24)! Margaret Ford directed us to the Stevens Center pond on the 13th for Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds and 2 pair of Wood Ducks. From the kayak on the 14th Jane spotted 24 species on or around Island 19 in the Columbia including Common Loon, Black-crowned Night Heron and 5 Greater Yellowlegs. On the 18th she added 40 Sandhill Cranes and 180 Greater White-fronted Geese. On the 22nd the river count was 19 species including American Pipits, Long-billed Curlew, Horned Grebes in breeding plumage and Canada Geese with goslings. On the 23rd she circled Island 18 seeing Wilson's Snipe, Least Sandpiper, a Killdeer with 4 chicks, 4 Long-billed Curlew, a Western Kingbird and a flock of 120 Snow Geese.

Benton City, West Richland and Horn Rapids Area

Michael Crowder reported 3000 Sandhill Cranes, Cinnamon Teal, Long-billed Curlew, Black-necked Stilts and other shorebirds in just one pond on the Barker Ranch on April 8. Nancy Butler kept us posted on activity in the little pond on

Snively near the twin bridges. Throughout the month it has hosted American Avocets, Green-winged Teal, Greater Yellowlegs, a Wilson's Snipe and unspecified sandpipers. Many people reported flocks of 100-200 Sandhill Cranes moving north. Joel Tinsley, in Benton City, had a new yard bird April 21—a rare-in-this-area Red-naped Sapsucker! Mark Gerber, West Richland, set his own records: 6 Ruby-crowned Kinglets in his peach tree at the same time! And on the 30th Mark added the first Red-breasted Nuthatch to his yard list. Jane Abel reported Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers and Orange-crowned Warblers at Horn Rapids Park late in the month.

Yakima Delta and Bateman Island

Cherie Baudrand and Lauren Hirsh were keeping an eye on the pair of Osprey building a nest on a power pole near the Steptoe round-about. (Notice the past tense). Unfortunately it sounds like it might have been the victim of a lightning strike during our spring storm mid-month (no report of smoking feathers). Kathy Criddle reported Lincoln Sparrows and Tree Swallows on a Bateman Island walk on the 17th.

Rancho Reata Area and Amon Creek

Sharon and Neil Ofsthun reported a Cooper's Hawk nesting in their yard, as well as these and other visitors: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Great Horned Owl, Spotted Towhee, Varied Thrush and Pine Siskins.

W. E. Johnson Park, South Richland and Badger Mountain

On April 17 Lisa Hill reported 6 sparrow species in Johnson Park: 80+ Song

Sparrows, White-crowned, 2 Golden-crowned, 3 Lincoln's, 1 Fox and 1 White-throated Sparrow (the latter four are considered uncommon in our area). She also heard 2 Virginia Rails. Previously banded juvenile and adult White-crowned Sparrows from fall/winter 2010-11 have returned to her yard. In Kathy Criddle's yard on that same day among the regulars were a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwings, and her annual returning pair of Mallard Ducks.

Kennewick

On April 4 Ron and Carole Louderback reported a Ferruginous Hawk on Beck Road south of Kennewick. Phil Bartley reported a Golden-crowned Sparrow which arrived in their yard near the end of the month and stayed for at least a week.

Finley Area

On April 1 Dennis Rockwell saw his first Osprey of the season at Two Rivers Park. Kris Keating reported a lone American Avocet in a small artificial pond at the very end of Chemical Drive. She has seen Avocets nesting near it in the past. From her home in Finley she reported American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Western Kingbird, and Say's Phoebe among many others.

McNary NWR and West Walla Walla County

On April 1 Bob Woodley reported a pair of Ospreys at McNary NWR examining the nest platform near the headquarters. On the 9th at the overlook pond near Wallula Junction Bob and his wife spotted 2 American Avocets. At Casey Pond along Highway 12 they saw 3 Cinnamon

Teal drakes and 3 Dunlin. Nancy Butler reported Black-necked Stilts and Cinnamon Teal on Millet Pond in Madame Dorian Park on the 16th.

North Franklin and Pasco Area

An Osprey was seen at Sacajawea State Park on April 1 by Bob Woodley. On the 10th Kevin Black spotted Cliff, Violet-green and Tree Swallows in the Osprey Point area. He reported Caspian Tern and Osprey at Sacajawea Park as well as 10 Black-necked Stilts on the Island out from the park. On the 15th Kevin reported Cliff Swallows nesting under the bridge on Coyan Road off Highway 17. Scootenev Reservoir had Ruddy Ducks, Sandhill Cranes, Buffleheads, Northern Shovelers and Caspian Terns. The next day Kevin reported Wilson's Snipe, 20 Greater-white Fronted Geese, 3 Lincoln's Sparrows, Rough-winged and Cliff Swallows and Marsh Wrens in the Wahluke area. At Sacajawea Park on the 25th he reported hearing a Nashville Warbler, and saw Savannah Sparrows, 2 Western Kingbirds, and Bank, Barn, Cliff, Violet-green and Tree Swallows near Indian Island. There were Black-necked Stilts further north in Franklin County, and a Marbled Godwit (rare sighting) and 10 Dunlin at Scootenev Reservoir.

Thanks for posting your sightings on LCBirds2, e-mailing them to me (lanirock@charter.net) or calling them in (545-4898). Comments, suggestions, and corrections are always welcome. -Lannie Smith

Continued from Page 2

Customizable levels from beginner to advanced invite both the backyard birder and the serious student to play and learn.

The company behind Larkwire is a social venture whose mission is not only to teach birdsong; a minimum of ten percent of all proceeds go to support conservation. Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society has joined their affiliate program; enter our code when you purchase and we'll receive 20% of the purchase price! Our code: LCBAS

Citizen Science Opportunity – Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology Nest Watch program

As a NestWatch participant, you'll visit one or more nests or nest boxes every 3 to 4 days and report what you see at www.NestWatch.org—when the first eggs are laid, total number of eggs and young, and when the hatchlings take their first faltering flights. After signing up, you'll first do a bit of online training to understand how best to observe nesting birds without disturbing them. You'll learn the best time to check nests and how to avoid accidentally leading predators to them.

Osprey Pointe Report:

I did the Osprey Pointe Bird walk for Earth Month on Saturday 5/5/12. No one except Debbie Clark, City of Pasco, showed up which was not a surprise since I failed to advertise it in the Curlew. It was posted on the On-line Earth Month Calendar for over a month though, so that indicates the amount of interest or lack of interest in the community! The birding was sweet but obviously not like Bateman Island. I saw 33 species including 5 swallow species, a Common Loon up close and in breeding plumage, lovely views of "floating overhead" Osprey with fish, and a Great Egret standing on the pathway (a first sighting for Osprey Pointe!) ALL the new plants that we planted last fall look great and seem to be thriving. The Port of Pasco security guard showed up to say hi and it is obvious he has taken an interest in the "Natural Area" and our plants and their health and safety! Nice guy!

Sparrows of the United States and Canada

*By David Beadle and James Rising
Reviewed by Lannie Smith*

If I'm honest, most birds leave me frustrated: shorebirds (OK, it's a Yellowlegs, but is it a greater or lesser?); warblers (hold still!); gulls (don't get me started). I'm starting to like terns though. I've noticed a lot of them will park and let you get a good look. They also seem to hang out with their cousins, so you can compare notes. And then there are sparrows...

Are you ready for a map through the sparrow quagmire? This might be the book for you. It's brief. No wasted words. It starts right off with general identification problems. The authors give you some coaching about what to pay attention to. Size: they claim with practice you'll know a White-crowned is simply too large to be a Clay-colored Sparrow. Markings: breast color and markings, head pattern, color of feet and legs, does it show white in tail or wings when it flies, long, short, rounded or sharp tail? Actions: direct or floppy flight, walking or hopping, scratching for food or eating seed heads? Ecology: pay attention to the habitat.

There are 19 genera described in 19 *short* paragraphs. I always wondered what the *Spizella* sparrows were. Now I know there are 7 species of *Spizella*, they are small, slim sparrows with relatively long and usually slightly forked tails, and most of them like open, brushy habitat. You can get the same kind of info about whatever particular genus has always piqued your curiosity.

Nine pages address the plumage and molting, diagrams of bird parts, sample habitat photos and range map details. Then, the reason you bought the book: the species! They are numbered from #1 (White-collared Seedeater) to #64 (McKay's Bunting).

Each of these species sections has 3 to 6 pages. The measurements are listed, habitat, behavior, voice, similar species (and more stuff) followed by a very specific description and 2 or 3 pages of close-up photos—the kind I like—it's holding-it-in-your-hand-close.

Besides the photos, I love the range maps. A glance at the range map on the first page of each species allows for flipping through and tabbing the ones for this area. (Why would I clutter my brain with an east coast sparrow?) It makes it simple to use if you are studying up for a trip.

This is a helpful resource in terms of what should you look for and photos to compare to. All the information is concise and helpful. It's really simple. That's the best part.

Bird brains teach us a few things about our own brains

By [Sandi Doughton](#)

Seattle Times science reporter

May 14, 2012

http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/201209672_birdbrains15m.html

Celebrated by poets and welcomed as a harbinger of spring, the seasonal outpouring of bird song also is a focus of research for scientists interested in animal behavior, like University of Washington biologist Michael Beecher.

The way birds learn their songs is similar to the way babies learn to talk and adults master a golf swing, UW brain researchers say. And studies of the seasonal changes in bird brains are revealing neurological twists that one day might be harnessed to heal human brains damaged by stroke, Alzheimer's disease and other disorders.

It was research on songbirds that upset the long-held notion that most animals — and most certainly humans — were born with all the gray matter they would ever have. Working with canaries and chickadees in the 1980s, Fernando Nottebohm at Rockefeller University found brain regions associated with song and the ability to locate hidden caches of food were constantly birthing new cells.

Nothing in the human brain comes close to the transformation male birds undergo as they ride a roller coaster of hormones that peaks this time of year, said Eliot Brenowitz, UW professor of biology and psychology. Brenowitz is working to understand how a spring spike in testosterone causes the parts of the brain that control song to double or triple in size.

The birds produce new neurons year-round, but the testosterone surge enables more of those cells to survive and grow at a time when males need maximum brainpower to attract a mate, fight off rivals and defend territory — all of which demand bravura vocalizing. Perkel's studies show that the brain cells also undergo electrochemical changes that make them more responsive and better able to link up in networks.

After the chicks fledge in late summer and the father birds relax, their testosterone levels drop and song neurons die off like falling leaves. That's when things get really interesting to Brenowitz. The death of brain cells seems to accelerate production of replacements. Few of the new cells survive in the fall and winter, when testosterone levels are low. But the phenomenon tracks what happens in people who have lost brain cells to a stroke. Other parts of their brains begin producing new neurons. The effect isn't robust enough to heal the damage, but bird studies may reveal ways to give it a boost, Brenowitz said.

"There's a lot of hope that this will lead to a way to try to repair damaged brains," he said.

Many birds, such as gulls and flycatchers, are hatched with vocalizations hard-wired into their brains. But the 4,000 species that comprise the songbirds, considered the most melodious crooners, must learn how to sing properly. Perkel's research focuses on zebra finches, which study and memorize the songs of adults. At first, the fledglings jabber or sing snippets, gradually improving until what comes out of their beaks matches the template in their memory banks.

"It's a model for speech learning in humans," Perkel said.

Charles Darwin was among the first to suggest a connection, noting similarities between the babbling of baby birds and the nonsense syllables of human infants. Perkel is convinced the parallels extend to all types of learning that require practice and feedback, from memorizing multiplication tables to honing a golf swing or ski jump. "We think that by cracking this circuit in birds," he said, "it will have a large impact on our understanding of the brain mechanisms involved in learning a broad variety of skills."



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\$10. for full time students. (same benefits as above)

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