Upcoming Events

Mar 3 - First Saturday Bird Walk, 8:00 AM at Bateman Island, by special permission. Arrive early (~7:45 AM).

Mar 5 - Board Meeting, 6:15 PM at Richland Public Library.

Mar 6 - Birding 101 class, 6:30 - 9 PM, Wild Birds Unlimited, Richland. (Please note corrected date!)

Mar 13 - Sagebrush Songbird Survey Meeting, 5 - 8 PM at Keewaydin Library, Kennewick.

Mar 17 - Birding trip, location to be determined, 8 AM.

Mar 27 - Membership Meeting, 7:00 PM at First Lutheran Church, Kennewick.

April 2 - Board Meeting, 6:15 PM at Richland Public Library.

April 7 - First Saturday Bird Walk, 8:00 AM at Bateman Island, by special permission. Arrive early (~7:45 AM).

April 21 - Birding trip, location to be determined, 8 AM.

April 23 - Membership Meeting, 7:00 PM at First Lutheran Church, Kennewick.

LIGO: All about the Waves

Dr. Rick Savage
LIGO Hanford Observatory

March 27, 2018 at 7:00 PM
First Lutheran Church
US 395 and Yelm, Kennewick

The LIGO (Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory) Hanford Observatory, together with its sister observatory in Louisiana, have initiated the new era of gravitation wave astronomy by recording signals generated by black holes colliding more than one billion years ago.

Dr. Savage will give an overview of the LIGO observatories and the instruments that have enabled the first direct observation of gravitational waves. He will also discuss LIGO’s discoveries to date and their astrophysical implications. Rick earned his bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees at UCLA. He has worked on the LIGO project since 1992 and has been with the LIGO Hanford Observatory since 1997.
Upcoming LCBAS Field Trips

March Third Saturday Field Trip
As of press time, we don’t have a location for the March 17th Field Trip. Be sure to check lcbas.org to find out where we’re going!

April First Saturday Field Trip
On April 7th, we will bird on Bateman Island by special permission from the Army Corps of Engineers. Meet at Wye Park at ~7:45 AM; we will be escorted on and off the island by USACE Biologist (and LCBAS President), Jim Castle. Because we must stay together as a group, no latecomers can be accommodated.

April Third Saturday Field Trip
The April 21 field trip will take us into the sagebrush to see migrants and early nesting birds! New volunteers for the Sagebrush Songbird Survey or veterans who want to brush up on their skills will get some practice using GPS units to find a survey site! The location is to be determined – keep an eye out for details in the April Curlew!

Have a trip suggestion or want to lead a LCBAS trip? Email fieldtrips@lcbas.org and share your passion!

Intrepid birders at McNary NWR during our February birding trip!
by Elke Davis

The Curlew

March 2018

Volume LIII, Issue 7

Thanks for eating so many pancakes!

Thanks to you, we earned over $1200 at our Flapjack Breakfast fundraiser on February 17. The money will support educational and environmental projects, including taxidermy, that LCBAS supports throughout the year. You can see our taxidermy collection at the McNary National Wildlife Refuge headquarters.

Our sincere thanks to all who sold tickets, who bought them, and those who worked Saturday morning to serve the food.

A huge congratulations to our Fundraising Chair, Charlotte Reep, who says, “When we all work together for a good purpose, success is assured.”

Great work LCBAS supporters and great work Charlotte!
by Robin Priddy, Sagebrush Songbird Survey Chair

2018 promises an extraordinarily lush and song-filled shrub-steppe spring once the snow melts! Experience new adventures exploring the backcountry to document the distribution of six focal songbird species in eastern Washington: Sage Thrasher, Loggerhead Shrike, and Brewer's, Sagebrush, Vesper, and Grasshopper Sparrows. If you are interested in joining us for the 2018 field season, contact Robin Priddy at grania0358@aol.com.

First piloted in 2014 by LCBAS and Yakima Valley Audubon, the Sagebrush Songbird Survey has grown to eleven Audubon chapters covering nearly all Washington’s Columbia Plateau. The data from our community science breeding bird survey (wa.audubon.org/songbird-survey-eastern-washington-underway) will help conserve our birds and their habitats.

What's new with the Survey in 2018? We are partnering with WDFW, farmers, and ranchers to being surveying private lands this spring. Private lands comprise 59% of Washington’s remaining shrub-steppe. It's critical for biologists to know what's on these lands so they can accurately model species occupancy in the Columbia Plateau. These are sites (like Silver Dollar) that no one else can bird!

Training/Site Sign Up: March 13; 5 - 8 at the Keewaydin Library: We’ll go over bird ID and review any necessary details about the protocol. We'll have snacks, including chocolate. If you can't make it, we will be able to do site sign up by email or phone. The Keewaydin Library is at 405 S. Dayton Street in Kennewick.

Sites this year: There are a total of seven, including sites near McNary Dam, Plymouth, Ice Harbor Dam, Fishhook Park, Port Kelley, Scheffler Road in northwest Walla Walla County and near the Silver Dollar (west of the Yakima Barricade). Each site will be surveyed once each in April, May and June. Bird counts will be entered into eBird where the data is publicly accessible.

Survey Dates: April 19-22, May 10-13 and June 7-10. We can work with dates slightly outside these ranges as long as the sites are visited two weeks apart.

We are organizing an April field trip to the Wahluke Slope or Thornton Unit to see sagebrush birds. More information will be forthcoming!

Thanks for all you’ve accomplished & I’m looking forward to the 2018 field season.
Field Trip Reports

First Saturday Bird Walk: Bateman Island
Saturday, February 3, 2018
by Lisa Hill

It certainly was a blustery day, but that didn’t deter the 35+ people who attended the walk. It was good to have a small group of young boys along who were interested in birding, and quite knowledgeable, too. Bringing up the next generation of birders!

There were few good birds west of the causeway. Everyone got good views of an immature BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON perched on rugged rocks along the shoreline. The ever-popular male HOODED MERGANSER elicited some oohs and aahs for its exotic plumage. Singing RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS are settling in for breeding season. Their continuous singing, clicking and croaking is constant background noise. Spring is in the air!

We saw a spectacular VARIED THRUSH perched high for good viewing. It was a life-bird for a couple of the birders. Even the seasoned birders couldn’t help but be thrilled with the sighting. After the walk, a few of us checked out the area around the boat launch where we found one of the 5-6 HARRIS’S SPARROWS that have been seen there for more than two months. Some WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS were nearby. It sure would be a fun treat to see all four species of Zonotrichia sparrows in one small area. Those would be (in order of likelihood) White-crowned, Golden-crowned, White-throated and Harris’s Sparrows. It could happen!

Third Saturday Bird Walk: McNary NWR
Saturday, February 17, 2018
by Jason Fidorra

Eleven birders joined me and USFWS staff Keeley and Denise to bird the Fee Hunt area on the McNary NWR. Our vehicles started around the loop road, checking through large numbers of geese and ducks on the sloughs and ponds. GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE were fun to see and hear along with numerous dabbling ducks and some divers. Goose fun continued as we rounded a curve to see a blanket of white snow on the corn-stubbled hills. Some were in disbelief that it was actually over 12,000 snow geese! Now we all know how they got that name! Great views of both TUNDRA and TRUMPETER SWANS side by side were had, and overall more than 40 species were tallied. After returning to the headquarters at the end of the tour, we continued for a short stop to check out the brand new observation blind. Make sure to go check it out soon!
A Birder Drives the Columbia Gorge

Article and Photos by Ivar Husa

How do you get to the Portland/Vancouver area? I take the long way and I’d like share some of my favorite stopping points and activities.

My favorite trips often take me through Bickleton, a small community with a reputation for bluebird hospitality. The route is more practical that you might think - it only adds about 35 minutes of travel time. (You should allow more time for birding, of course!)

I always stop at Pioneer Park in Cleveland, WA for Hairy Woodpeckers, nuthatches, thrushes, and more. There is good tree cover to work around. One of my favorite birds to look for here are Lewis’s Woodpeckers. I see them about half the time, maybe more.

Continuing west, I plummet into Rock Creek and climb back out, until I am deposited at Goldendale, where I often stop for a meal. From about Goldendale, I use one of three travel options. The fastest route is via Biggs and I-84. But if you take one of the slower routes, you can get in some great birding.

One such route is west on SR 142, eventually winding down the Klickitat River to Lyle. The route into the gorge can be a nail-biter if one is prone to anxiety. The road is well-maintained, but narrow and lacks amenities such as guardrails and center stripes in places where you might wish it had them. Makes for an exciting trip, but worth it! The river is lovely, but there are fewer pullouts for ‘nature calls’, if you know what I mean (birding). Once I had a flock of turkeys descend around me while I drove along this river. It felt like darkness descending from above as their large wing area shielded the sun.

The Bickleton and Goldendale route (and Klickitat River) should be taken during good weather. Road conditions can be worse than in other areas and it has a lot less traffic on it. That’s a plus for studying the natural world but makes one more vulnerable.

I sometimes drive SR 14, which follows the Washington side of the Columbia. It takes you through a number of tunnels, which is pretty cool. There are many places one can stop for food, but one of my favorites is the Big River Grill in Stevenson. For birds, I sometimes turn on Doetsch Ranch Rd or Skamania Landing RD (and park near the bridge) to get looks at waterfowl, eagle, osprey and more.

Another favorite stop along this route is Steigerwald NWR. There is a lovely walk that takes you through open meadows, tree-lines sloughs, and ultimately the Columbia River. It’s a great opportunity to stretch your legs - and there are lots of birds. One spring I photographed my first Common Yellowthroat here! Bittern are seen there regularly, but are hard to find everywhere!

Make your trips down the Gorge more interesting, by taking alternate routes and taking your time and enjoying it!
Conservation Updates

**WWRP funds projects in our area**

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program has committed $80 million to conservation and recreation projects across the state. Projects in our area include $3 million to purchase land in the Cowiche Watershed (Yakima County). This land will link the Cowiche and Oak Creek Wildlife Area units with other public lands, increasing the connectivity of this crucial upland wildlife habitat. WWRP also allotted more than $350,000 for forest restoration in the Rock Creek - Tieton Forest area of Kittitas and Yakima Counties. Two projects in Benton County were designated as alternates for funding: riverfront trail improvements in Howard Amon Park and a trail along the Clover Island Riverwalk.

**Carbon tax dies in the state legislature**

Washington’s latest attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with a carbon tax has failed to pass the state Senate. The measure fell just a few votes short of passage; it would have still needed to get through the House to become law. In the wake of this defeat, Governor Inslee and other supporters have expressed their commitment to continuing efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions from the state. Washington has been a leader in U.S. efforts to curb emissions that cause climate change.

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**Upcoming Birding Festivals**

The Othello Sandhill Crane Festival is right around the corner! The event, scheduled for 23-25 March, has the theme “H2O Birds on the Go”. The stars of the festival, of course, are the Sandhill Cranes. Details at www.othellosandhillcraneffest.org.

Check out wintering birds and the first-arriving spring migrants at the Olympic Peninsula BirdFest (13 - 15 April). With field trips by sea and land, it will be a great time! Their website is www.olympicbirdfest.org.

Head over to the Yakima Canyon for the Yakima River Canyon Bird Fest, 11 - 13 May. The schedule includes owling, native plants, and river floats. Get all the info at www.ycic.org/yakima-river-canyon-bird-fest.

Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest (17 - 20 May) is mostly sold out, but you can get on a waiting list or reserve space on one of the available trips at www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.org.

Bummed that you missed out on the Leavenworth festival? ODFW is hosting the 13th annual Ladd Marsh Bird Festival between 18 - 20 May! There are field trips in Ponderosa Pine forests, Rheinhart Canyon, Ladd Marsh, and the Grande Ronde Valley. Find out more at www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/visitors/ladd_marsh/bird_festival.asp.
News from the World of Ornithology

by Lori Wollerman Nelson

These raptors keep the fires burning

Raptors have been observed to take advantage of fires to find food. As mice and other small animals flee the flames, these birds swoop down to grab an easy meal. A recent paper suggests that some Australian birds go one step further and spread fires to keep the gravy train running.

Three species have been observed manipulating fire: black hawks, whistling kites, and brown falcons. Called “firehawks” by Aboriginal Australians, the birds pick up burning sticks and drop them into unburned areas to keep a fire going. One flock of birds reportedly burned an entire valley by manipulating a fire’s spread.

A paper describing the behavior of these feathered arsonists (published in the Journal of Ethnobiology) gathered details from ethnographic accounts and interviews. The authors are planning a research expedition in May to (hopefully) document the phenomenon first-hand.

https://ethnobiology.org/publications/journal-of-ethnobiology/current

Do Woodpeckers Get Concussions?

If a person whacked her head against a tree trunk thousands of times a day for years, it seems almost certain that she would have brain damage that could cause a wide range of memory and behavioral problems.

This kind of head banging is exactly what woodpeckers do and, unlike humans, they don’t seem to be affected by it. This observation prompted researchers from Boston University to look at woodpecker brains for the same kind of damage found in the brains of football players who suffer from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

They discovered that woodpecker brains contained clumps of a specific protein (called tau) similar to those found in the brains of football players affected by CTE. However, none of the brains from a non-head banging bird (Red-winged Blackbirds) had these protein clumps. The researchers are not sure why tau causes debilitating disease in humans, but not in woodpeckers. It’s possible that the birds have ways of getting rid of the protein masses, or that they aren’t harmful in the same way they are for people. The researchers hope that understanding how woodpeckers survive head banging might just help football players and boxers live long and happy lives after retirement.

http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0191526
Looking for birds? We’ve got the links...

There are so many ways to find birds that it can be overwhelming - here are a few easy ways to keep up to date on the newest arrivals, most exciting rarities, and largest congregations of birds.

**eBird** has become the leading way to find good birding sites., but the website ([ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) does so much more than just tell you where to find the latest Red-breasted Sapsucker or Steller’s Jay! You can explore their dataset to see what birds to expect near your vacation destination next summer, get a retrospective list of what has been seen in your own neck of the woods in the past, and look for sightings of specific species. LCBAS offers ebird workshops, so if you want to learn how to use ebird, but need some help, keep your eyes open for these opportunities!

**Inland NW Birders** and **LCBirds** are services that send you posts that are contributed by other subscribers. Inland NW Birders covers Idaho and eastern Washington; LCBirds is a list maintained by LCBAS specifically for Tri-Cities birds. You can sign up for the Inland NW Birders at [https://www.lists.uidaho.edu/mailman/listinfo/inland-nw-birders](https://www.lists.uidaho.edu/mailman/listinfo/inland-nw-birders). The link to get on the LCBirds list is available from the LCBAS website ([lcbas.org](http://www.lcbas.org)).

You can use **Facebook** to find out about birds too. If you are on Facebook, you can have notices from both appear in your feed. **Tri-Cities Birders** is a Facebook group that you can join. Just search for the group and click on the “Join” button. **LCBAS** has a Facebook page - search for Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, click on “Like” and then make sure you are following us. If you don’t have a Facebook account, you won’t be able to make posts of your own, but you can still view other people’s posts on either page. LCBAS is at [https://www.facebook.com/lcbas/](https://www.facebook.com/lcbas/) and Tri-Cities Birders is at [https://www.facebook.com/groups/151054868748760/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/151054868748760/).

**Tweeters** is a Washington-based email list and webpage ([http://www.scn.org/earth/tweeters/](http://www.scn.org/earth/tweeters/)) that lists email lists and websites for birding groups all over the Northwest. To subscribe to their email list, go to [http://www.scn.org/earth/tweeters/subl.html](http://www.scn.org/earth/tweeters/subl.html).

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**American Kestrel with lunch**

by Elke Davis
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**ADDRESS CHANGES:** Please send address changes (postal address or email address) to Rich Barchet at subscriptions@lcbas.org so that your subscription is not interrupted. You can mail address changes to LCBAS, PO Box 1900, Richland, WA 99354.

**NEW NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERS:** We have been sending you complimentary issues of The Curlew newsletter to keep you up to date on local happenings. After three issues, the complimentary mailings end. To continue to receive The Curlew newsletter without interruption, please become a paid subscriber. Doing so is fast, easy, and secure at our website [http://lcbas.org/JoinLCBAS.html](http://lcbas.org/JoinLCBAS.html)

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<td><a href="mailto:vicepresident@lcbas.org">vicepresident@lcbas.org</a></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:secretary@lcbas.org">secretary@lcbas.org</a></td>
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<td>Birding Events</td>
<td>Jason Fidorra</td>
<td><a href="mailto:fieldtrips@lcbas.org">fieldtrips@lcbas.org</a></td>
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<td>Lori Nelson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:communications@lcbas.org">communications@lcbas.org</a></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:conservation@lcbas.org">conservation@lcbas.org</a></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:programs@lcbas.org">programs@lcbas.org</a></td>
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<td>Director at Large</td>
<td>Robin Priddy</td>
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| **OTHER CONTACTS**     |                   |                            |
| Curlew Editor          | Lori Nelson       | curlew@lcbas.org           |
| Membership Database    | Rich Barchet      | subscriptions@lcbas.org    |
| LCBAS Website          | Ed Rykiel         | webmaster@lcbas.org        |
LCBAS membership benefits include a year's subscription (10 issues) to The Curlew and priority registration for space-limited field trips. LCBAS is a 501c(3) organization and dues are tax deductible.

- Regular membership ($20)
- Full-time student membership ($10)
- I would like to make an additional donation of ____________.

Total: ____________  (Make check payable to LCBAS.)

Mail your form and dues to:

**Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, PO Box 1900, Richland WA 99352**

- I want to save resources and postage and receive my newsletter by email
- I do not want to receive e-alerts for last minute activity changes, important issues, and volunteer opportunities (Check here to opt-out)

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*Membership in LCBAS is separate from membership in the National Audubon Society.*

To join the National Audubon Society, please go to [https://action.audubon.org/donate/chapter-membership?chapter=Y01](https://action.audubon.org/donate/chapter-membership?chapter=Y01).