



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

November 2016



DECEMBER PROGRAM

BILL DRENGUIS

Nature Photographer Allan Bauer Highlights our Christmas Banquet



Alan Bauer on a research hike

We always try to get a special speaker for our Christmas banquet, and we really lucked out this time. Alan Bauer is a professional photographer based in the Pacific Northwest. He primarily shoots general nature scenes, but has promised to try and sneak in a few bird photos for us.

Check out his web site and you will be amazed at all the different things he has photographed. (Pipe organs anyone?) I bet most of us have one of the Mountaineers hiking

books on the shelf at home. If you check the authors, most likely you will find Alan's name as an author. My personal favorite is Best Desert Hikes. It covers our area and is really handy to find that trail that everyone keeps talking about.

So it's going to be a relaxing, non-taxing, trekking program to enjoy after our traditional, delicious potluck. See you there and be sure to save room for dessert.

Come to the Yakima Area Arboretum on December 1 - Auction starts at 6:00 pm and dinner at 7:00 pm

2016 Christmas Potluck Dinner and Silent Auction

On December 1st, we will be holding the annual YVAS Christmas Potluck and Auction at the Yakima Area Arboretum. There will be a silent auction for the larger items as well as the popular bargain table.

However, we need items to auction. Do you have a special skill/hobby to create unique artifacts? Use your imagination to come up with the item to put everyone in absolute awe. How about sponsoring a dinner or brunch in your garden? Otherwise, bird related items are well received.

It helps to have the items on display when the first members arrive. To make this happen, I can pick them up prior to Nov 29th. To arrange for a pick up, you can reach me at 965 - 5808 or by email (bdrenguis@gmail.com).

Ellen Stepniewski will also assist in gathering items prior to auction night from donors residing in the lower valley. If you can't reach me, please call Ellen at 731-6805 or email her at (steppie@nwinform.net). As a third option, you can drop your items off at the reception desk of the North Star Lodge, 808 N 39th Ave, PROVIDED you tag or label your item "Vera" to ensure that it is directed to YVAS secretary Vera Backstrom.

Regarding the dinner, in addition to your potluck items, be sure to bring serving utensils for your dish. Also you will need your own table service (plates, cups, silverware). To ensure

return, be sure to place your name on serving bowls/platters and utensils.

The doors will be open at 5:00 pm at the Yakima Area Arboretum and table decorating should be completed by 6:00 pm. The Silent Auction, wine service, and camaraderie will be underway by 6:00 pm. All foods need to be there by 6:15 pm as dinner starts at 6:30 pm. Arrive early enough to browse through auction items prior to dinner. To ease prolonged waiting in the potluck line, our president will cue individual tables to enter the serving line.

Potluck food assignments are by the first letter of your last name: **A-G = Desserts, Bread, Butter; H-P= Main Dish; Q-Z= Potatoes, Vegetables, Salads.** Dishes need to serve about 12-14 people. *It would be helpful to list the ingredients of your dish for those with allergies -milk, nuts, shellfish, wheat, etc.* We will be providing ham, coffee, and hot water for tea; punch will also be furnished. Wine will be available by the glass with donations defraying the cost.

If you are a member who has not been attending monthly meetings, this is a great time to get acquainted with some like-minded people, enjoy a great meal, and surf the auction's treasures. **Before Nov 29 - Donate, Donate! On Dec 1 - Bid! Bid!**

---Bill Drenguis---

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



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

KERRY TURLEY

Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge Landbird Inventories



Landbird surveys were initiated at Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge in 2013, at the request of the Refuge Manager. The staff was interested in occurrence, relative abundance and distribution of bird species during the breeding season. Staff also wanted to know if bird communities differed between Toppenish Proper Unit and the isolated tracks that comprise the Toppenish Upper and Toppenish Lower Management Units.

In the spring of 2013 Andy Stepniewski and I took on the challenge of surveying 34 points, 3 times a year for 4 years. We were able to complete the project this past June with the help of Ellen Stepniewski, Eric Heisey and Annika Willette. Well over 500 volunteer hours were donated!

Common Yellowthroat and Ring-Necked Pheasant were among the most abundant species on all three units. Relatively rare species include Golden-Crowned Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush and Peregrine falcon. Eighteen landbird species were detected in all units.

While this project has now come to a close there are ways you can contribute to our knowledge of the birds we enjoy so

much. You can record your sightings in eBird.org the international database for bird sightings. If scientists want to work with "big data," more is always better. (Remember when your English teacher advised you to write more than you'll need because it's easier to trim than to expand? Same principle!)

You can join the great team of Auduboners who monitor our bluebird trail during the breeding season. You'll not only add to our data base and your own knowledge, but will also get to know a wonderful group of dedicated birders.

There is also NestWatch a nationwide monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds, including when nesting occurs, number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many hatchlings survive. The database is intended to be used to study the current condition of breeding bird populations and how they may be changing over time as a result of climate change, habitat degradation and loss, expansion of urban areas, and the introduction of non-native plants and animals.

Citizen Science is a valuable endeavor and I encourage you to do your part in helping us all to better understand the birds around us.

Welcome New Audubon Members

Yakima: Clark and Debra Satre

Thank you for renewing your membership

Richland: Connie Estep

Talkeetna, AK: Billy and Ute Fitzgerald

Toppenish: Jensen Thayer

Yakima: Sue and Jim Richmond, Stan Belsher and Diana Bailey, Mary Lou Rodzilsky, Becky and Tom Boyd,

Please note that the above membership renewals are for Yakima Valley Audubon membership. Renewals to National Audubon are separate and are not listed here.



MEMBERSHIP

JOY MCKINNEY

YVAS Election Results



At the October chapter meeting, the following positions were filled by a unanimous vote:

Secretary – Vera Backstrom

Treasurer – Karen Zook

Both Vera and Karen are incumbent officers and have served us well in their respective positions for several years. Both are to be commended. We are fortunate to have capable and willing individuals to guide YVAS through whatever challenges may loom ahead.

No nominations were received for the office of President-elect so that position will remain unfilled.

Greater Sage Grouse Update

I attended the annual Sage Grouse Working Group meeting in Wenatchee November 1. More than 40 biologists and citizens concerned with the conservation of Greater Sage-Grouse were in attendance. Making up this impressive contingent were folks from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), US Fish and Wildlife Service, Yakima Training Center, and various conservation districts.

The latest available graph of Washington state's population was in 2015 which showed about 1000 birds. The news for 2016 shows a further reduction to about 750:

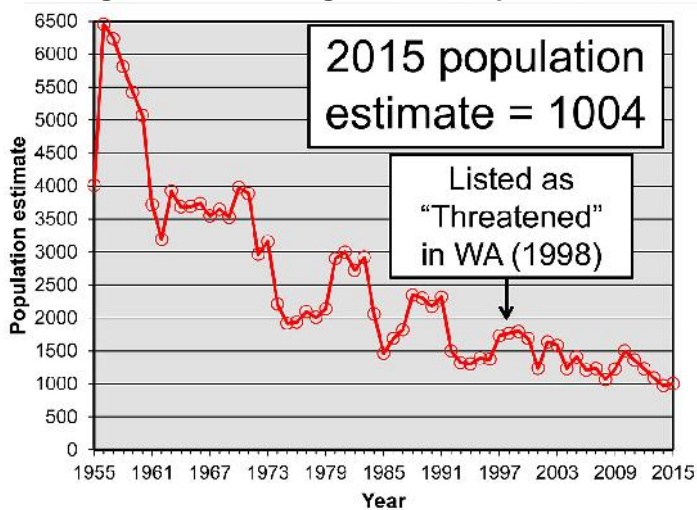
Douglas County-536

Yakima Training Center (YTC)-140, the lowest ever

Lincoln County-60

Yakama Indian Reservation-14

Washington's Greater Sage-Grouse Population Trends



Douglas County harbors the most important population, centered on the marginal farmlands (stony and thus producing low crop yields) on the northern Waterville Plateau. Unfortunately, with a reduction of 180,000 acres in USDA conservation "set asides," such as the Conservation Reserve Program and SAFE there has been huge conversions back to farmland in the period 2010-15. Grouse numbers are now half of pre-2010 populations and conversion of recovering shrub-steppe back to farmland was cited a probable cause, according to Michael Schroeder, WDFW Research Scientist.

There was considerable discussion on grouse situation on the YTC, which is but one-third the numbers in 2000. Fire has been a major cause for the decline. This year the monstrous (264 square miles!) Range 12 Fire resulted in some loss of habitat, but thankfully the fire spared most quality grouse habitat on YTC. Still 16,000 acres of habitat was torched on the installation this year. Predators such as ravens, coyotes, and badgers are also a major cause of mortality of grouse on the YTC. I mentioned counting 225 Common Ravens at one time soaring in a thermal on Yakima Ridge directly above the Terrace Heights Landfill, then drifting down onto the YTC. Researchers are investigating control of raven numbers to reduce predation, especially of grouse eggs and young.

Since YTC grouse are isolated from other populations of these birds, their impoverished genetics has become a major concern. To combat this problem of "inbreeding," translocation efforts continue. Last month's Calliope Crier reported Dan and Eileen Kinney undertook the long (nine hours each way!) drive to Nevada grouse habitat near Winnemucca to help in this effort. Though there have been repeated translocation efforts since 2014, most of these birds have succumbed to predation and research shows they have not thus far nested successfully to achieve the goal of greater genetic diversity in the population.

The Yakama Nation has a tiny and at this time an unsustainable population. Discussion on the Yakama Nation challenges noted further translocation efforts are needed plus bringing the "horse problem" under control.

The Lincoln County population was the only one that remained stable from 2015. These are all birds translocated from elsewhere, as the original population became extirpated in the 1980s. Thus, the news their numbers remained stable between 2015 and this year is encouraging.

While Washington's Greater Sage-Grouse numbers are in decline, there was good news that grouse numbers are up elsewhere over the species range (Wyoming, eastern Oregon, Idaho, in particular).

The USFWS has not opted to open discussion on whether the species warrants endangered species status until 2020, continuing to abide by their decision in 2015 that listing was "not-warranted."

— Andy Stepniewski —



FIELD TRIPS
SCOTT DOWNES

Dec 1, 8, 15 and 22 - Thursday Morning Bird Walk. Meet the group at the Poppoff Trail/ Jewett Pathway parking lot at the east end of Valley Mall Blvd., at the north side of the easternmost roundabout at 8:30. This walk is a great chance to check out a diverse habitat area in Yakima with local birders. There is a small change this year for Poppoff walks. There is a commitment to have a leader for the first Thursday of the month (December 1 for this newsletter), but the remaining walks will be group led. Group led is whoever shows up at the meeting time, start the walk, don't wait for a designated leader. **Contact Karen Zook if you have any questions - gadzooks7@charter.net**

2017 Field Trip Planning Meeting- January 7

We are nearing the end of 2016 and another successful year of field trips has come and gone. Yakima Audubon will meet at Denny Granstrand's house on January 7th at 9:00 to plan fieldtrips for 2017. If you will be attending the meeting, please email me (downess@charter.net) so we can get a count of how many to expect. Whether you want to lead a field trip or want to provide input on a trip that should happen in 2017, attending this meeting is your chance to provide input. If you have input or want to lead a trip, but can't make the meeting on January 7th, please email me your ideas by December 20th and I'll

ensure they are discussed at the meeting.

Yakima Audubon trips are successful because we have a variety of leaders and unique locations, both near and far where field trips explore. I hope that members continue to lead trips and support trips by attending so that our chapter may continue to have successful trips. I would also like to extend a personal thank you to all of our wonderful field trip leaders who give of their time and expertise to make the YVAS trips a success. Thank you!

---Scott Downes---

Kudus to Jan Gano

Jan Gano recently retired from the YVAS board where he capably served both as a director and as a committee chairman. Jan and his wife Judy plan to spend more time in their southern California winter home basking in the desert warmth. When they return for Yakima's summers, Jan says he'll be available for special projects with our chapter, welcome news indeed!



**Bobolink Group
Jan Gano on the left**



**Bobolink
Photo by Jan Gano**

decline until only two males returned from their South American winter quarters in 2014. None appeared in 2015 or 2016. Jan presented the keynote talk on the decline of Bobolinks at the Washington Ornithological Society annual conference in Yakima in

Jan's contributions were impressive while on the YVAS board. Two of these were "Citizen Science" projects and these totaled eight years. The first was his involvement in the Fort Simcoe State Park Lewis's Woodpecker Study. This was a collaborative project with WA State Parks amidst the stately Garry Oak groves in the park.

Later, Jan spearheaded the "Bobolink Study," another joint project, this one with Audubon Washington and the Yakama Nation. This study aimed to reverse the decline of the Bobolink colony west of Toppenish along Lateral C. This gorgeous bird had established a disjunct population in wet pastureland several hundred miles from the nearest other colony of Bobolinks. Despite yeoman's efforts, including curtailment of hay cutting until after the nesting season, Bobolinks continued to

2012. He began his talk with the words that moved the audience: "this presentation chronicles the gradual decline and extirpation of Bobolinks near Toppenish."

In 2015, the YVAS board voted to seek return of the Hoeger Preserve to the original holders. Jan's long career with the Department of Natural Resources, some of it dealing with land exchanges, gave him the tools to undertake this project. Jan did all of the leg work in researching the status of the various parcels before YVAS engaged Morrie Shore with the law firm of Stokes Lawrence to complete the process, which was successful in 2016.

Thank you for your service to YVAS Jan. We wish you well on your winter sojourns in the desert southwest and look forward to seeing you and Judy out in the field in the coming spring!

— Andy Stepniewski —

Arlo and Janis



Lower Grand Coulee Field Trip Report



Lake Lenore

Photo by Ellen Stepniewski

flock of 32 Wild Turkeys and 2 female White-tailed Deer mingling with 4 female Mule Deer. We next stopped at Tjossem Pond in Ellensburg where I had seen an immature Snow Goose on Friday, no Snow Goose was present but we did see a Red-necked Grebe. A stop at Vantage proved mostly uneventful, with a few grebes, a Common Loon and some scattered waterfowl. Soap Lake was next, and this spot is well known for concentrations of Ruddy Duck and Eared Grebe in the alkaline waters of the lake. Good numbers of both species were observed by all and some photo opportunities of Eared Grebes were had.

Waterfowl numbers seemed to be down throughout the day, even though most of the species were present. Speculation was that cold weather has not really hit yet this fall, allowing waterfowl numbers to remain further north. The sunny day allowed the group to thoroughly enjoy the majestic scenery of the Lower Grand Coulee and discussion on the geology of the

On November 6, five people joined me on a trip to the Lower Grand Coulee, making stops en-route in the Yakima Canyon, Ellensburg and Vantage. Our first nice highlight of the day came near the northern edge of the Yakima Canyon where we chanced upon a

area ensued. Bringing our attention back to birds were sightings of four Golden Eagles soaring and perching along the

cliffs. At Blue Lake we were able to locate a couple of unusual species; a Pacific Loon and two first winter Thayer's Gulls. Both species, though more typically found in the marine areas of the coast, are annual (but still unusual) to the Lower Grand Coulee area.

Therefore, they remain a treat to find. A picturesque stop at Dry Falls to view the wonders of this geologic marvel finished off the tour of the Lower Grand Coulee.

We traveled through Coulee City and down Pinto Ridge Road towards Brook Lake. At the sewage ponds in Coulee City a Dunlin lingered and a single Northern Shrike perched for views along Pinto Ridge Road. The final stop of the day was Brook Lake, well known for its fall concentration of geese. The lake did not disappoint with over 5000 Canada Goose reported, over 100 Snow Geese and lesser amounts of Cackling and Greater White-fronted Goose. For the day, the trip ended with 65 species and wonderful company and weather!

---Scott Downes---



Eared Grebe

Photo by Ellen Stepniewski

Put the Christmas Bird Counts on your calendars

Toppenish NWR: Dec. 17

Yakima Valley: Jan 2

I have been going on the two Christmas Bird Counts that YVAS sponsors since 1985. I think they are a great time!

CBCs are done all around the United States, Canada and south all the way to Ecuador and Brazil. Well over 2000 CBCs are done in the same three week period from Dec. 14 through Jan. 4. Many thousands of people are out on their CBCs doing everything from enjoying tropical weather to stomping around in snow and freezing conditions.

We certainly have endured our own cold and snowing CBCs. One year on the Toppenish CBC, Rod Phillips, who writes the hunting and fishing column in the Tuesday Outdoors section of the Yakima newspaper, wanted to go on our CBC so he could write his column about it. Andy Stepniewski put him with me. When we got out of my car at the first stop, it was 0°! But Rod was a duck hunter who was experienced with cold temperatures. He didn't seem to notice the cold at all. I know I shivered a little!

The Yakima Valley CBC was started in 1970, so this year we will do our 47th count. The past 46 counts have found 150 species of birds, with an average of just over 90 species on the last ten counts. Last year's count broke the record with 97 species seen! The Toppenish NWR count originated in 1983.

Even though the two counts are so close together geographically, there are always species found on the Toppenish count that were missed on the Yakima count. The all-time species total is quite close to Yakima's.

The Christmas Bird Count data, which is compiled by National Audubon, is frequently used by ornithologists to compile population trends of bird species. The spread across the continent of species such as European Starlings, Cattle Egrets and Eurasian Collared-Doves can be charted from Christmas Count data.

Following the Toppenish count we will gather at Andy and Ellen Stepniewski's house for the compilation dinner of Ellen's delicious soup and potluck items brought by everyone else. After the Yakima count we meet at Debie and Ron Brown's house. Dinner will be pizza along with potluck items. You are also encouraged to bring beverages to both dinners.

Please e-mail Eric Heisey (magicman32@rocketmail.com) if you would like to go on the Toppenish CBC. Contact me (453-2500 or dgranstrand@gmail.com) to go on the Yakima Valley CBC.

— Denny Granstrand —

Correction from October Calliope Crier: In the short article with websites that give information on identifying Sharp-shinned Hawks and Cooper's Hawks, the photo labeled Cooper's Hawk was actually a Sharp-shinned Hawk. The photo was replaced with the correct one in the on-line edition of the Calliope Crier that can be found on the YVAS website.

Denny Granstrand



BIRD SIGHTINGS

DENNY GRANSTRAND

A winter-plumaged female Long-tailed Duck was seen on Rimrock Lake on Nov. 3 and then again on Leech Lake at the summit of White Pass on Nov. 4 by Kevin Lucas. Long-tailed Duck, formerly known as Oldsquaw, is one of our rarest winter visitors. In the time I have been birding in Yakima County, there have been more sightings of Gyrfalcons than Long-tailed Ducks.

In 1981, a Long-tailed Duck, called Oldsquaw then, was seen on the Yakima Valley CBC. In looking through the files, I think that Harold and Virginia Vredenburg were the ones who found it as they were doing their route in East Selah. No details were provided for that sighting.

On May 17, 1991 I was scouting for a Yakima County Big Day that I was doing with Andy Stepniewski and several other guys. On the Graham-Morris gravel ponds north of Toppenish, I found a Long-tailed Duck. It was still there the next morning when the group stopped by. I found another one on the Toppenish CBC in 1995 at the same location.

The most unusual location for any Long-tailed Duck to be found was on the small sewage pond at the east-bound rest stop along I-82 north of Selah. It was seen on Oct. 30, 1994.

There are undoubtedly other, older sightings of Long-tailed Duck in Yakima County. I suspect it is more regular along the Columbia River at Priest Rapids Lake. It is, without a doubt, a top quality find away from the Columbia River in Yakima County.

Andy Stepniewski found a Pacific Loon on Dog Lake on Oct. 22. This is another of those species of birds that are rare in Yakima County, especially away from Priest Rapids Lake. The last Pacific Loon seen in our area was also found by Andy and his group on the Toppenish CBC in 2006.

The feeding station at the Yakima Area Arboretum is up and running and is attracting some interesting birds. A Red Fox Sparrow, the subspecies of Fox Sparrow that nests in the Eastern United States



Pacific Loon found on Dog Lake



White-throated Sparrow at the Yakima Area Arboretum



Red Fox Sparrow at the Yakima Area Arboretum

and Canada, was seen and photographed there on Oct. 21. This subspecies of Fox Sparrow is a fairly rare bird in Washington. It is also the most colorful of the Fox Sparrow subspecies.

On November 8, Lamont McLachlan saw a White-throated Sparrow among the more regular sparrows and finches. It was last seen on Nov. 14. It was with the idea of attracting the rare sparrows (White-throated and Harris's) that I started taking bird seed out to the arboretum in 1998. With the addition of the bird blind several years ago, we have a top-notch feeding station at the north end of the cottonwood grove on the east side of the arboretum.

Ospreys are rare in Yakima County after the end of September. I saw one perched in a cottonwood tree across the Yakima River from Buchanan Lake on Nov. 14. There have been Ospreys in the valley well into winter. Osprey have been seen on four Yakima CBCs, including last year.

The fall migration season has produced some great sightings already. Who knows what winter will bring. Please send your sightings to BirdYak or fill out eBird reports to share your sightings.

Yakima Valley Audubon Society Membership

Join (or 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)

____ I prefer to read the Crier online and not receive my copy by mail (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 or 698-4110.

2016 YAKIMA VALLEY AUDUBON OFFICERS AND BOARD

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First Field Sparrow for Washington and second for British Columbia have been found by YVAS birders!

In the eastern United States, there is a fairly non-descript little brown job called the Field Sparrow. It likes brushy pastures and old fields where it feeds on insects and seeds that have fallen to the ground. It will occasionally land on a grass stalk, ride it to the ground and pick the seeds off.

On October 29, 2016, Scott Downes and Eric Heisey were birding in Neah Bay, at the northwest corner of the Olympic Peninsula. This has recently become the spot to bird in the fall and winter because many rare species of birds are found there. This particular day was one of those.

After seeing and photographing a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Scott and Eric found a Field Sparrow, the first ever seen in Washington! Of course, Eric, with his quick camera work, was able to beautifully photo-



**First Field Sparrow seen in Washington
Photo by Eric Heisey**

graph it! Fast forward to Nov. 20 and move the location to the Esquimalt Lagoon near Victoria, British Columbia, and two more Yakima Auduboners are out birding. Andy and Ellen Stepniewski, taking a long Thanksgiving holiday to visit Canadian friends, find only the second Field Sparrow to be seen in British Columbia! After Ellen got photos of this rarity, Andy quickly phoned friends of his up there who got the word out. Soon there were more birders than birds in the area, and all of them got great views (ands many photos) of this rare sparrow from the east! The first Field Sparrow sighting in BC was a one-day wonder and only the initial ob-

Yakima County birders have Field Sparrow down pat!

Coming Attractions:

Christmas Banquet and Silent Auction - Dec 1

Thursday Poppoff Walks:

Dec 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

Toppenish NWR CBC - Dec 17

Yakima Valley CBC - Jan 2