



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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MARCH PROGRAM

BILL DRENGUIS

Let's go on safari! This month we can join David and Margie Van Cleve as they recall their recent adventures in Africa. And not just any part of Africa, but Namibia!

Have you heard about the Skeleton Coast? Have you seen those pictures of huge, endless dunes? How about the water-holes that are surrounded by arid bush? You know the ones that are packed with all manner of animals because it's the only water around. Well, guess what? All those attractions are in Namibia.

Over the years, David and Margie, who serves on the Executive Committee of the Washington State Chapter of the Sierra Club, have given several presentations to our group. Their photography has been superb, and the narrative is witty. I am really looking forward to experiencing (OK, second hand) a trip to this unique land.

Experience Namibia

Presented By David and Margie Van Cleve



Mark your calendar for Thursday, May 25, at 7:00 to see this presentation at the Yakima Area Arboretum



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

KERRY TURLEY

The Yakima Valley Audubon Society (YVAS), like most Audubon chapters, relies almost exclusively on its volunteers and in reality would probably not exist without them. This was made evident this past month when we were approached by a board member with excellent tech skills who enthusiastically volunteered to update our website and improve its appearance. If you haven't had a chance to see the website's new look I encourage you to check it out at <http://yakimaaudubon.org/>.

This caused me to reflect on how much communication in the birding world has changed in just the past 18 years that I have been involved with YVAS. In the "olden days of birding" we depended a lot on word of mouth, calling others we

knew might be interested when we spotted a new or exciting bird. Then we progressed to a birding hotline that we could call to hear any statewide reports and then a new age was born when the list server "TWEETERS" surfaced and sent email alerts to every subscriber's computer. Now we have cell phones, instant messaging, Facebook, Birdyak and other websites to make both our and our fellow birders' sightings known almost instantly.

As all this was running through my mind it came to me that a lot of what we take for granted at YVAS is due to the work and/or influence of one extremely dedicated volunteer, who would probably prefer that he continue to fly under the radar, but it's not in my nature to let that happen.

(President's Column continued on page 2)

The Yakima Valley Audubon Society meets on the fourth Thursday of January, February, March, April, May, August, September, and October at 7pm at the Yakima Area Arboretum, located at 1401 Arboretum Drive, Yakima, WA. Guests are welcome at these meetings. The Annual Meeting of the Society is held the first Thursday of December at 6pm. The Board of Directors meets each month except December at 7pm at locations announced in the Calliope Crier. Members may attend Board meetings; however, please notify the host because of possible space restrictions.

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



MEMBERSHIP

JOY MCKINNEY

Welcome New YVAS Members!

Yakima: Sofia Jaramillo, Agnes Rambeck

Thank you for renewing your membership!

Naches: Peggy Briskey, David Churchill

Selah: Connie Buckley, Jerry and Margaret Turner

Sunnyside: Donna Homer

Yakima: Rich and Deb Mathieu, George and Susan Vlahakis, Connie Hughes, Gary and Sharon Slagle, Susie Lattomus, William and Edith Ryan, Vi Whitmire, Steve and Grace Shaul



THIS MONTH'S YVAS CALENDAR

- May 25 Audubon Chapter Meeting** at the Yakima Area Arboretum at **7:00 pm. Great program!**
- June 13 Board Meeting June 13 – Pizza at Russillo's.** Come order your dinner at **6:00**. Kerry will start the meeting at **6:30**. Guests are welcome. Russillo's has various items on the menu besides pizza, including pierogi. (From Wikipedia: Pierogi, also known as varenyky, are filled dumplings of Eastern European origin. They are made by wrapping pockets of unleavened dough around a savory or sweet filling and cooking them in boiling water.)

President's Column (continued from page 1)

So the Board of Directors and I (including three past presidents – Dan Kinney, Andy Stepniewski and Bill Drenquis) unanimously agreed at the May meeting that Denny Granstrand should be recognized for his 35 years or so of service to the chapter and to birding in general.

For those newer members who may not know (and some of us older members who may not remember), I would like to share a few of the things Denny has done for the chapter over the years. Denny has been active in guiding YVAS in a variety of positions including writing the bird sightings column, Crier editor (taking on a vacant position and learning unfamiliar computer software to ensure no lapse in Crier production), Yakima Christmas Bird Count participant and compiler, two terms as YVAS President, founder of BirdYak, initial writer of the Bird Alert in Yakima Herald, annual field trip leader, always eager to mentor new birders, host of the

annual board retreat, host of many board meetings & field trip planning meetings, designer/construction superintendent/repairman of Arboretum Bird Blind, primary volunteer to ensure birdseed is provided all winter to birds visiting the blind, annual volunteer at Christmas dinner/silent auction where he frequently donates items, and assists at many training and outreach functions. Last year he stepped up, without complaint, and took on the vacated task of webmaster, a most difficult job working with our web-host to redesign our web-site.

Undoubtedly I have forgotten many other areas, but mostly I think that what Denny brings to our chapter is a love for birding and an enthusiastic desire for others to experience the same enjoyment. I hope we have many more years of his friendship and leadership. Next time you see Denny be sure to thank and congratulate him!

Arborfest — “Trees are the Best”



Photo by Vera Backstrom

At the Yakima Area Arboretum's Arborfest on April 12, the YVAS booth was again a rousing success! Arborfest is a free community event, celebrating Arbor Day, spring, conservation and nature. Celebrating trees is a natural springboard for celebrating birds which is what we did. A display with photos of common birds that utilize trees and shrubs, as well as the Audubon display with photos and information about Yakima Audubon attracted both children and adults.



Photo by
Vera Backstrom

Going Solar in Yakima

When internationally famous geneticist and environmentalist David Suzuki talks, I listen. So, I took note when he proclaimed in his inspirational *Letters to my Grandchildren* "the easiest and most effective thing you can do to reduce your carbon footprint is to go solar as the energy from the sun is free and abundant." Over the past year, at least three Yakima Audubon households that Ellen and I know of have gone solar. When it became time for us to move from our orchard setting to Yakima, we took it as an opportunity to study

solar energy. Beyond the rock solid testimonials of our friends, I asked my accountant if he could lend his perspective on the claimed payback from the sizeable out-of-pocket outlay before signing a contract. He replied "you asked the right person as we went solar about four years ago and it's everything they claim it to be. Our payback (after federal tax credits and Washington state incentives and reduced power bills) was just over four years." Regarding his thoughts on how solar affected real estate values in Yakima, his perception was "not much four or five years ago." Now, however, he sees solar as a definite asset which he predicts will increase. With the feedback from our friends and advice from our accountant, we went ahead and installed solar on our newly purchased home and are now one of the million or so households in America that has gone solar.

From Audubon Washington: "Currently, about two-thirds of the electricity used in the United States comes from burning coal, oil, and natural gas. In a furnace, those materials combust and release carbon pollution, which forms a thin layer in the atmosphere and traps heat like a blanket. Over the past century, that greenhouse-gas blanket has grown so thick that here on the ground we can feel and see its effects through rising temperatures, which in turn affect long-term trends in rainfall, polar ice, and sea levels.

In contrast to coal, oil, and natural gas, solar panels produce plentiful electricity without releasing any carbon pollution. By taking the step to install them at

your house, you ensure that your energy use won't contribute to the climate problem."

One of Audubon Washington's key initiatives is to push for solar energy. From Audubon Washington:

"The *Audubon Birds and Climate Change Report* states that carbon pollution is the primary reason for climate change that may affect nearly half of America's bird species, including 189 species found in Washington state. Slowing the rate of increase in carbon in the atmosphere will slow overall warming and allow ecosystems

and their species time to adapt to the rapid changes we're seeing now.

Though solar energy technology has brought down the cost of equipment dramatically in the United States, in Washington state, solar lags behind many states as a way we produce and consume electricity. This presumably because of the Pacific Northwest's abundant and inexpensive hydropower. To prompt increased use of renewable energy such as solar, Audubon Washington feels a need to build public support for this green energy in our state. Further, Audubon wants to galvanize citizens to press our politicians to "implement strategies and actions that will make Washington a leader in the clean energy revolution."

Most energy development imposes costs to the environment. Harmful effects from residential solar installations are minimal or none, however. Photovoltaic (PV) solar is what is installed on the roofs of houses or in a community solar garden. These solar panels are composed of hundreds of photovoltaic cells, which collect sunlight and transform it into electricity. The presence of PV panels on a roof—whether on a house, office building, or other structure—doesn't disrupt wildlife habitat and takes advantage of already-built space.

Large scale solar projects, however, are a different matter and can impose substantial environmental damage. These large PV installations, such as utility-



House with solar panels on the roof

(Continued on page 6)



FIELD TRIPS

SCOTT DOWNES

May 26-29 (Friday-Monday) - **Memorial Day Wenas Campout.** The annual Memorial Day weekend Wenas Audubon Campout at the Wenas Creek Campground on Audubon Road. Birding field trips and flower walks abound at this casual and friendly gathering. In past campouts activities have included field sketching, bat and owl prowls, and much more. You do not need to be an Audubon member to attend. Drive up for a day or camp. All are welcome. Visit the Wenas Audubon website (www.wenasaudubon.org) for directions and complete information.



June 3 (Saturday)- Teresa Lorenz and Tierra Groff will lead a field trip to look for woodpeckers and other forest birds. Trip will focus on white-headed, black-backed, Lewis's and three-toed woodpecker, as well as Williamsons and red-naped sapsucker. We will visit burns on Oak Creek Wildlife Area and the Naches Ranger District. exact locations TBD, but may include Rock Creek, Nile Creek, Rattlesnake Creek and Rimrock Lake area. Meet at 7 am June 3 at the carpool lot near Highway 12 and Highway 410 junction, which is 4 miles west of Naches on Highway 12. Bring lunch/snacks and water. We will do short hikes (<1/2 mile) through the forest so bring shoes for walking off road/off trail. Contact Teresa for questions: teresajlorenz@gmail.com

June 10 (Saturday)- Andy and Ellen Stepniewski will lead a trip to White Pass Highway, continuing the "Yakima Natural History" field trip series the Stepniewskis began in March (the arid Shrub-steppe Zone). This trip will move upslope in the Cascades to middle elevations. Here in the outposts of the next zone, the northernmost fringes of the Oregon White Oak Zone lie west of the 'Y' on the highway. We'll search for Ash-throated Flycatcher, and other species characteristic of oak habitats of the American West. Upwards in elevation, we'll next encounter the Ponderosa Pine Zone, the quintessential dry forest throughout the West, stopping several times, sampling its diverse birdlife, including signature birds such as White-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches. Moving west again towards Clear Lake in wetter terrain, we'll make stops in the Interior Douglas-fir Zone, where Cassin's Vireo and the lovely Western Tanager are characteristic species. Along with birds, we will look at other plants in these three zones, including wildflowers, which should still be on fine display. Around the Tieton Marsh and Clear Lake, and perhaps elsewhere, we will pad our list with species wedded to water and riparian habitats. Email leader Andy Stepniewski (steppie@nwinform.net) for details of the meeting time and place. Plan on meeting at 7 am, returning by 3 pm. Bring a lunch and fluids, sun protection, and dress for possible cool and breezy temps. Mark your calendar for July 15 when the third fieldtrip in this series, a hike occurs into the Subalpine Zone from Chinook Pass north up to Sheep Lake. Those attending all three trips will have been introduced to the extraordinary biodiversity found in the Yakima region!

YVAS Booth at YVC's Earthfest Event

YVAS was one of about two dozen organizations and individuals participating in this year's Earthfest sponsored by the Yakima Valley College. The April 20th Earthday event was to inform students about local outdoor issues and opportunities. Our entry was a poster with a theme: Shrub Grassland "It Is Not a Wasteland".

Members Kerry Turley, Philip Fischer and Bob Chicken engaged students using Education Chairperson Ellen Stepniewski's designed poster with many photos to highlight the diversity of plant and animal life as well as human activities found in this shrinking habitat. One estimate is that nearly one hundred students visited our booth during the three hours of the event.



— Bob Chicken —

Lots of activity at YVAS's Earthfest booth

Greater Sage-Grouse field trip to the YTC was thoroughly enjoyed!

A group of Yakima Audubon members were escorted on the Yakima Training Center by biologists Colin Leingang and Kevin White on the morning April 15th to observe Greater Sage-Grouse. The trip started pre-dawn and we were on the sage-grouse lek when the sun rose. Viewing had to be quite a distance away from the lek so as to not disturb the birds and the lekking behavior. Despite the distance, everybody had good looks at the displaying birds. Following the lek viewing, Colin and Kevin escorted the group to several spots on the training center where the group had excellent views of such birds as Loggerhead Shrike, Sage Thrasher, Vesper Sparrow and Brewer's Sparrow. Some early spring migrants were found in upper Selah Creek and the morning trip ended with wonderful scenery and wildflower views overlooking Selah Canyon while the group watching the interaction by the breeding pair of prairie falcons. A huge thank you to both the Yakima Training Center and to Colin and Kevin who were excellent hosts for making this trip happen. This trip was a highlight for all who attended.

— Scott Downes —



Loggerhead Shrike
Photo by Mike Roper

Snowmountain Ranch field trip produces fun bird sightings

Seven birders (and flower lovers) took a hike at Snow Mountain Ranch. Despite the cooler, wetter conditions there than in year's past, we saw some great birds and some beautiful wildflowers. If I knew the plant names better, I could have kept a list of plants as well as birds.

We started the trip watching two Ruby-crowned Kinglets in a shrub close to the trail. In typical kinglet fashion, they flitted around, sang and one of them flashed his ruby crown several times for us.

As we walked up the canyon, we found that there was still water in the stream. We don't usually see that this time of year. We spotted a House Wren at the entrance to the canyon, and our first flycatcher of the day. The flycatcher was singing from a sagebrush. I had to let the song rattle around in my brain

for a minute before it clicked: Gray Flycatcher! We watched him for a few minutes and started to move along, when a male Northern Harrier flew over the ridge to the south of us. He had prey in his talons. We watched as he flew over the ridge and down over the field, where a female harrier flew up toward him. When she got fairly close, he dropped the prey to her - and she caught it! She then flew off to the southern end of the field, perhaps to feed chicks? That had to be one of the more exciting parts of the morning.

We hiked on up the canyon, stopping at the cottonwood trees just before you start up the steeper part of the hill.

There, we found Nashville and Orange-crowned warblers and our second flycatcher of the day, which turned out to be a Hammond's (after photo reviews). This bird was very quiet, but sat long enough to allow photos.



Joy McKinney admiring the wildflowers
Photo by Karen Zook

We went up to the Wildflower trail, enjoying the views and the flowers. We also added Brewer's and Vesper Sparrows to our list - we actually saw them, too - along with Horned Larks. As we were headed back down the hill, one of the Horned Larks sat up on a bare branch, visible to all of us.

At the end of the Wildflower Trail, we watched a pair of kestrels and a pair of Northern Flickers hanging around the snags close to the cliffs. We suspect that the kestrels were already nesting in one of the many cavities in these snags, but they were good at concealing which cavity they were using.

Along the Ditch Bank Trail, we found several House wrens, more Orange-crowned Warblers, a small flock of Golden-crowned Sparrows, a Gray Flycatcher and our first of year and first of trip Western Kingbird. We also saw Turkey Vultures and California Scrub-Jays.

We missed a couple of species that we often find there: Great Horned Owl and Loggerhead Shrike, but we ended up with a respectable total of 34 species.

— Karen Zook —

Conboy Lake field trip finds Sandhill Cranes!

Six of us ventured down to Conboy Lake NWR on April 19. The weather was a bit cool, cloudy and showery at times, but we had a nice trip.

After several stops along the way, we reached Glenwood just before noon, and made a brief stop at the cemetery before heading to Conboy Lake. The cemetery there has Bluebird boxes, one of which was in use by a pair of White-breasted nuthatches. We did see a pair of Western bluebirds there as well, who appeared to be vying with Tree swallows for one of the other boxes. Also at the cemetery were the pugetensis sub-species of the White-crowed sparrow, belting out their distinctive "see meeee pretty pretty me" song. Not to be outdone were a couple of Ruby-crowned kinglets singing away as well.

At the cemetery, a smallish group of goose-like birds flew overhead. They were not Canada or Cackling Geese. The sounds they made while flying over sounded more crane like than goose like. We deliberated on them, came up with a couple of possibilities and after reviewing some photos and deliberating a bit more, we came up with Greater White-fronted Goose.

Finally we arrived at the Conboy Lake NWR headquar-



Sandhill Cranes at Conboy NWR



Herd of elk on the run
Photos by Karen Zook

ters, just in time for lunch. There was a lot of water in the lake - way more than last year - and it was full of waterfowl. We did not see any cranes, but we did hear some calling at the south end of the lake. After lunch, we walked around a bit, watching bluebirds and swallows, Purple Finches and more Ruby-crowned Kinglets. We set up scopes and found all kinds of ducks: nine species in all including Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser and Bufflehead. We also finally found some Sandhill Cranes! After visiting refuge headquarters, we drove around to the other side of the lake where we startled a herd of elk. We watched as they ran across a flooded field, splashing as they ran. We added some more cranes to our trip list, a Bald Eagle, Savannah Sparrows, Wilson's Snipe and a Red-breasted Sapsucker. We also saw a few hundred more White-fronted Geese fly in, and mixed in with them were about a dozen Snow Geese.

With the cooler weather, we missed several species seen last year, but we still managed a total of 46 species seen on the refuge, with a few more species added at other stops. Even with the clouds, the scenery was beautiful. We had a nice group of people and a great day.

— Karen Zook —

Going Solar in Yakima (continued from page 3)

scale solar, install many large solar panels in a single location to generate electricity for utility companies to distribute to many homes. While these large projects can benefit birds by reducing carbon pollution, it's critical for policy makers to direct developers to minimize their harm to wildlife. A project in Minnesota, for example, grows native plant species around solar panels to benefit birds and other pollinators. In the Western United States, these large solar projects are often developed in desert regions that receive bountiful sunlight. However, these deserts lands are often important habitat for birds and other wildlife. Again, it's important for policy makers to guide solar farm placement to avoid destroying important habitats. Some states are now working with conservation groups such as Audubon California to develop solar farms in areas that will minimize harm to wildlife. Not only is habitat lost in large projects, but migrating water birds can mistake the large shiny surfaces of solar panels as lakes. Some species such as loons and grebes need a "taxiway" on the water to take-off. If they end up on the ground in a solar farm, they may die. Some developers are adding special patterns to their panels or using other strategies to reduce the risk of these crash landings.

In addition, each solar panel installation is an investment in an economy driven by renewable energy. The more demand exists for solar panels, the cheaper their production becomes. And the more people that install solar panels on their rooftops or buy into community solar gardens, the louder the message to communities and elected officials that people care about climate change and protecting the environment.

If you haven't investigated the benefits of solar, I invite you to do so, not only for your pocketbook (assuming you plan to live for a number of years at your present home!), but it's also good for the environment. Several cautionary points are worth mentioning. The first is the federal tax credit is due to expire fairly soon, and may not be renewed. You may need to act promptly to tax advantage of this huge incentive. The second caveat is the Washington state incentives. Due to the vagaries of politics, there is no guarantee the favorable state buyback agreements with PP & L will continue indefinitely as written now, so it's up to you to incorporate this risk factor into your decision.

— Andy Stepniewski —

Yakima Valley Audubon Society Membership

Join/renew my annual membership to) the Yakima Valley Audubon Society to receive 10 issues of the Calliope Crier and all chapter benefits. National Audubon membership and Audubon Magazine are not included.

Yakima Valley Audubon Society Membership.....\$ 25.00 per household
 YVAS Senior (62+) ____ OR Student Membership ____ (please check one).....\$ 15.00 per household
 Yakima Valley Audubon Society Life Membership\$ 500.00 per household

New Member ____ Renewing Member ____ (please check one)

In addition to my membership payment of \$ _____, my check includes an additional donation of \$ _____

____ I do not want to receive any solicitations or communications from NAS (please check if applicable)

____ 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.

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The confusing contradiction of Gray Catbirds

Gray Catbirds, as anyone in our area who has tried to get a good look at one knows, are very secretive birds. They can be fairly easily heard singing in appropriate breeding habitat but they usually hide in a bush while singing. It is with great reluctance that a Gray Catbird will expose itself for all to see.

This is not the case with Gray Catbirds in the Eastern United States. They are abundant and showy nearly everywhere with good habitat. This was the case while my wife and I were in New York City recently. The first catbird I saw was in a newer park along the Hudson River at about 25th St. I was watching one from the table of a café where we were having lunch.

Later, we visited Trinity Church, which is near the inter-

section of Wall Street and Broadway, deep in the “Canyons of New York”. There were several Gray Catbirds in the burial ground of the church. The photo on the left is one perched on a short fence in the burial ground.

My eBird list for a morning in Central Park several days later lists 20 Gray Catbirds seen. They were abundant and tame, frequently coming within ten feet of me. The photo on the right is a Gray Catbird in Central Park.

I guess the moral to the story is: if you want to great experience with Gray Catbirds, to paraphrase William O. Douglas, “Go east, young person, go east!”

— Denny Granstrand —



Coming Attractions:

May 25 Chapter Meeting: Experience Namibia

May 26-29 Wenas Campout

June 3 Woodpecker field trip

June 10 White Pass field trip