



May/June 2023
Volume 52, Issue 5

The Calliope Crier

Newsletter of the Yakima Valley Audubon Society

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.

YVAS May Program

Clark's Nutcrackers and Whitebark Pine: Players in our Western Mountains

Speaker – **Taza Schaming**

(Due to field work, Taza will be joining us live via Zoom)

Thursday, May 25 at 7 pm, Yakima Area Arboretum

Doors open at 6:30; Zoom meeting opens at 6:55.



Whitebark pine and Clark's Nutcrackers have a fascinating relationship: the trees provide rich, fatty seeds, and the birds "plant" the trees' seeds—a single bird may hide up to 98,000 seeds in a year. The food caches help the birds get through the winter, and the leftovers grow into new trees. In fact, whitebark pine trees sprout almost exclusively from nutcracker seed caches. This dependency has led to considerable concern for both species because whitebark pine ecosystems are rapidly disappearing in the western United States. While whitebark pine restoration efforts are underway, these efforts will not be effective if Clark's Nutcracker populations decline or their habitat selection changes to a degree that they are not available to disperse seeds. Taza Schaming has been trapping, surveying, radio-tracking, and satellite-tracking nutcrackers since 2009, to study movement, habitat selection, and social behavior. Now, in collaboration with Alison Scoville, Central Washington University, she has also been using acoustic monitors to continuously survey nutcracker occurrence in whitebark pine stands throughout the Cascades, as the first step in a proposed long-term citizen science project. Her ultimate goal is to determine which management actions will increase the persistence of nutcrackers throughout their range. The Yakima Valley Audubon Society contributed funds to this ongoing study.



Since 2009, Taza Schaming has been investigating the impact of the decline of whitebark pine on Clark's nutcrackers, studying the stability and resilience of the Clark's nutcracker-whitebark pine mutualism, to help ensure persistence of these species and the nutcracker's seed dispersal function. She began her research in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, then branched out into the North Cascades Ecosystem in 2018. Taza finished her PhD at Cornell in 2016, and is continuing her research as a long-term study as a Wildlife Ecologist through Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative. She spends her free time exploring the woods and world with her eight-year-old daughter, Suneva – birdwatching, hiking, camping, canoeing and skiing.

This program can be viewed in person or on Zoom at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85751241932?pwd=K0lseGlvbng4WG1KN3NaeEdaL2VTQT09>

To view this and previously recorded programs, visit our website at www.yakimaudubon.org.

[Upcoming Events Calendar](#)

May 1-31	Birdathon 2023!! It’s not too late to support this important work. See link below.
Thursday, May 25	YVAS May Program. <i>Clark's Nutcrackers and Whitebark Pine: Players in our Western Mountains.</i> Speaker: Taza Schamingom, live via Zoom. 7:00 PM at Yakima Area Arboretum and on Zoom.
Saturday, June 10	Second Saturday Bird Walk. Tietion Nature Trail. Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky. ses1440@outlook.com . 9-11 AM. <u>Discover Pass required.</u> See meet up details below in <i>Upcoming Field Trips</i> .
Sunday, June 11	Snow Mountain Joint field trip with Cowiche Canyon Conservancy. Leader: Stan Isley. See CCC sign-up information below.

BIRDATHON 2023 and the Annual Yakima County Migration Count

Nine teams participated earlier this month in the 2023 Yakima County Migration Count covering Priest Rapids, the Wenas, Toppenish Wildlife Refuge, White Pass/Chinook Pass/ Hwy 410, Fort Simcoe, and the City of Yakima with home birders submitted counts. Scott Downes, Migration Count leader is compiling counts from all the teams and will have this information tallied in June.

In conjunction with this important survey and to celebrate International Migratory Bird Day on May 13, YVAS held their Birdathon fund drive. It's not too late to show your support! Below is the link to our website where you may conveniently donate online: <https://donorbox.org/yakima-valley-audubon-society-membership> (please note “Birdathon 2023” in the Comment box on the form).

Thank you for your help with this important work!

[Upcoming Field Trips](#)

Saturday, June 10: Second Saturday Bird Walk, Tieton Nature Trail. 9:00 – 11:00 AM. Discover Pass required. Leaders: Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky
The Tieton Nature Trail is a part of the Oak Creek Wildlife Area off of Highway 12. We will follow the path across a suspension bridge over the Tieton River and head up a wide canyon. Riparian vegetation, brushy hillsides, and cliffs along the way attract many birds, including Golden Eagle, Bald Eagles, Lewis’s Woodpeckers, and Bullock’s Orioles.

Directions: From Yakima, head west on US 12 about 4.4 past the stoplight in Naches to the junction with Highway 410. Turn left to stay on Highway 12. Continue southwest 2.0 miles to the Oak Creek Wildlife Recreation Area. Park in the large lot.



Yellow-breasted Chat, photo by Sarah Shippen

Sunday, June 11: Bird Walk with Cowiche Canyon Conservancy(CCC), 7:30 am to 10:00 am**Where:** Snow Mountain Ranch trailhead / parking lot (2648 Cowiche Mill Rd #2262, Cowiche, WA 98923)

Join Stan Isley and members of the CCC for a tour of early summer birdlife at Snow Mountain Ranch. In the heat of summer, early mornings are the best time to hear and see some of the rich birdlife of our valley. Because Snow Mountain Ranch offers so many unique habitats — from riparian to meadow to upland shrub-steppe — it's a great place to observe everything from later migrating neotropical birds to woodpeckers to many birds of prey.

Please note the unique early start time (7:30 am) and day (Sunday) of this walk. Dress for all weather, and bring water, snacks, and your favorite binoculars if you have them. **You need to register in advance for this walk with Cowiche Canyon Conservancy at this link:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bird-walk-with-yakima-valley-audubon-society-tickets-609827318927>

Bluebird News

Bluebird season is here!

On April 7, eleven of us gathered for the annual clean out of the Bluebird boxes. It was a cloudy day with rain showers on and off throughout the day and the mud was terrible, but our hardy group persevered. We got the boxes cleaned and installed several new boxes to replace the ones that burned in the Cow Canyon fire last summer.

In the past couple of years, we have found complete nests with eggs in them, but this year there were very few nests (with the exception of the Durr road boxes) and none of them had eggs. So, the birds are off to a slightly later start this year. But there were both Mountain and Western bluebirds seen, and the Vesper sparrows were singing away as well.

Many thanks to our volunteers who helped with the clean out: Terry and Dale Critchlow, who helped with the clean out and the installation of new boxes; Sara and Ron Montgomery, Martha Taylor, Barbara Webster, Richard Repp and Joe Zook; and a big thank you to our neighbor Randy Poulson for making us eleven new boxes, which we installed after the clean out. Randy and his grandson Logan also helped with the clean out.

Joe and I returned to the trail on April 30 to install more replacement boxes and do some other maintenance, and we were disappointed to see that one of our new boxes has disappeared. It wasn't even up for a month! So, we have replaced 18 of the 22 boxes that were lost – only four to go. We have found placement to be a bit trickier after the fire, but we are hoping the boxes will be in spots that the birds will like and use.

Group photo: Karen, Richard, Ron and Sara, Terry, Randy, Dale, Logan (not shown: Martha Taylor, Barbara Webster, Joe Zook)





Above – Dale and Joe install a new Bluebird box

There were a lot of bluebirds and other birds in the area on the 30th. In addition to Vesper sparrows, the Brewer’s sparrows and Sage Thrashers have returned, and there were woodpeckers heard and seen throughout the burned area. We also heard and saw Say’s Phoebe, Red-breasted, White-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches, Mountain chickadees and Sooty grouse (to name a few). It will be interesting to see how the bluebirds fare post-fire. We are hoping for a good year with lots of chicks and lots of insects for them to eat (and NO fires).

Submitted by Karen Zook

[Field Trip Reports](#)

April 16: Sunnyside Wildlife Area Trip

Leader: Andy Stepniewski

Though an overcast day, it was quite calm and pleasant for the 15 Yakima Audubon members traveled down to the Sunnyside Wildlife Area. We began scoping the corn stubble field north of headquarters where a 100 or so Sandhill Cranes and a flock of Canada Geese were feeding. It was a great start to see the cranes, most on a long migration to northern reaches of Alaska and Canada.

Waterfowl migration continues in April and we tallied eight species of this clan here, including one Cinnamon Teal that slipped away before most could get on it.

Shorebirds were not at all plentiful but Black-necked Stilts were certainly eye catchers in addition to the usual noisy Killdeers. A handful of Wilson’s Snipes flew off, calling their raspy note. I suspect more species will be

arriving shortly, perhaps tardy because of the delayed spring. Not related to shorebirds but occupying the same marsh habitat were both Virginia Rails and Soras. Some in the group had good views of a Virginia Rail. Out on the “rice fields” dikes, we had much closer views of another 20 Sandhill Cranes. Though often likened to herons, they are actually allied to the rails. Raptors were conspicuous with five species of diurnal (daytime) species. An Osprey dove and caught a fish but as soon as he started to fly off with his catch, a Bald Eagle sped in to steal the meal. The Osprey dropped the fish and dive-bombed the eagle a half-dozen times, and both birds seemed to forget retrieving the fish. Other raptors included Northern Harriers, Red-tailed and Swainson’s Hawks, and American Kestrels. Gene spotted a pair of Great Horned Owls in a tree not far from headquarters. We had good scope views of these powerful predators.



Sandhill Crane, photo by Ross Bornfleth



Yellow-headed Blackbird, photo by Ellen Stepniewski

Spring birds were rather sparse, perhaps reflecting the persistent cool and blustery weather. Most numerous were Marsh Wrens. We noted too, a couple Tree Swallows and a single Barn Swallow. A few Common Yellowthroats were singing and we managed to call one resplendent male in for a closer view.

Blackbirds were abundant with good numbers of showy Yellow-headed Blackbirds singing their “rusty gate song. Many more Red-winged Blackbirds were present, too.

Homeward, we stopped along the Yakima Valley Highway at Kerry's Pond where we added Cackling Geese, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and Common Merganser to our trip list. Along with the American White Pelicans in the Yakima River along the way, we saw an even 50 species for the morning, a nice tally considering the delayed spring we’ve been experiencing.

Trip Report by Andy Stepniewski

Complete Bird List:

Cackling Goose 35	Ring-necked Pheasant 2	Great Blue Heron 1	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1
Canada Goose 75	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 3	Osprey 2	Marsh Wren 12
Cinnamon Teal 1	Eurasian Collared-Dove 2	Northern Harrier 3	European Starling 5
Northern Shoveler 15	Mourning Dove 5	Bald Eagle 2	American Robin 3
Gadwall 20	Virginia Rail 4	Swainson's Hawk 1	House Sparrow 3
American Wigeon 6	Sora 1	Red-tailed Hawk 5	White-crowned Sparrow (Gambel's) 5
Mallard 4	American Coot 50	Great Horned Owl 2	Song Sparrow 1
Green-winged Teal 8	Sandhill Crane 120	Northern Flicker (Red-shafted) 1	Yellow-headed Blackbird 85
Redhead 9	Black-necked Stilt 15	American Kestrel 2	Western Meadowlark 2
Ring-necked Duck 1	Killdeer 1	Black-billed Magpie 1Tri	Red-winged Blackbird 250
Bufflehead 9	Wilson's Snipe 2	Common Raven 6	Common Yellowthroat 3
Common Merganser 2	Virginia Rail 4	Tree Swallow 2	
California Quail 6	Double-crested Cormorant 1	Barn Swallow 1	

April 8: Selah Cliffs Natural Area Preserve

Leaders: Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky

We had an overcast but calm morning for our visit to Selah Cliffs Natural Area with 14 birders attending. Last time we visited this site was October and there wasn’t much bird activity. This time we were rewarded with sightings of Prairie Falcon, Great-horned Owl chicks, and singing Canyon Wrens. The wildfires in this area a couple of years ago may be impacting bird numbers, but hopefully the area is slowly recovering. A few of us went further up into the canyon after the walk to look for a Golden Eagle nesting site. Andy and Ellen Stepniewski’s patience was rewarded in spotting a pair of adults returning to their nest.

Trip Report by Sarah Shippen

Complete Bird List:

Mallard	2	Prairie Falcon	1	Common Raven	4	Dark-eyed Junco	1
California Quail	5	Say's Phoebe	1	Violet-green Swallow	22	White-crowned Sparrow	2
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	3	Black-billed Magpie	3	Canyon Wren	4	Western Meadowlark	2
Red-tailed Hawk	3	American Crow	1	European Starling	5	Brewer's Blackbird	1
Great Horned Owl	3	Common Raven	4	House Finch	3	American Robin	2
Northern Flicker	2						



Great Horned Owl chicks, photo by Sarah Shippen

Education — Ellen Stepniewski

ARBORFEST- “Our Changing Climate”

After a three-year break due to covid, Yakima Audubon was back at Arborfest at the Yakima Area Arboretum and it was again an amazing success. Weather this year on April 15th was as close to perfect as we have had. It was warm and calm enough that we volunteers all enjoyed being outdoors. Families must have enjoyed it too as there were lots of participants and we went through 350-400 buttons.



All photos by Ellen and Andy Stepniewski

Thanks to all the intrepid volunteers who made this happen!!! Our grateful thanks go to Andy Stepniewski, Bill Drenguis, Deborah Severtson-Coffin, Kathy Howell, Kerry Turley, Julie Kawakami, Peggy Braile, Peggy Schwartzenberger, Rich Mathieu, and Susan Paoella.

Next year, again in April, please plan on helping or bring your families to celebrate Arborfest!

Submitted by Ellen Stepniewski

Arborfest is a free community event, celebrating Arbor Day, spring, conservation and nature. This year the theme was “Our Changing Climate.” A display with photos of a few habitats and birds around Yakima that may be affected by climate change, as well as the Audubon display with photos and information about Yakima Audubon attracted both children and adults. A spotting scope was set up for kids to look at birds that politely stayed in one spot (life-sized photos). The big draw to our booth was button making, obviously enjoyed by the kids. They colored pictures of birds and had their artwork transformed into a button they could wear. This time, it seemed many children and adults already were familiar with some birds.

Several times an Osprey flew over the pond next to our booth eyeing the waters below for a fish. Several times it plunged into the water, a spectacular sight. On one dive, this beautiful “Fish Hawk” surfaced with a fish and flew off with its catch, with lots of onlookers hollering “look, it got one!



AJ finished his button of an American Kestrel



Button making is a popular event!

Conservation News – Stan Isley

Updates on Solar and Clean Energy Siting in Washington State

Least-Conflict Solar Siting Project

Washington State University's Energy Program and its consultant are currently preparing the final report and maps for the Least-Conflict Solar Siting Project, which will be completed and distributed at the end of June 2023. This nearly year-long project has identified and mapped areas in the Columbia Plateau of central and eastern Washington where solar energy projects could be developed with minimal impacts and conflict. This project has also identified and mapped sensitive areas where solar energy projects should not be developed. The final report and map products will be a valuable guide for clean energy developers and permitting agencies, and will help to ensure that solar energy projects are developed responsibly, with the least negative human and environmental impacts, here in our Columbia Plateau.

The Clean Energy Siting Act

The 2023 Washington State Legislature passed, and on May 3, 2023, Governor Inslee signed into law, the Clean Energy Siting Act (House Bill 1216). The Legislature's intent with this act is to support efficient, effective siting and permitting of clean energy projects. The act creates a coordinated permitting process for clean energy projects for faster environmental review and permitting by state and local governments. The act requires the Washington

Department of Ecology to complete several non-project environmental impact statements by June 30, 2025, that assess probable significant adverse environmental impacts, and mitigation measures, for the following categories of clean energy projects and their colocated battery energy storage projects: 1) green electrolytic or renewable hydrogen projects; 2) utility-scale solar energy projects; and 3) onshore utility-scale wind energy projects. These non-project EIS's will include maps to inform decision making by energy project proponents, tribes, and government. Additionally, the act requires the WSU Energy Program, by June 30, 2025, to identify issues, and prepare maps, relating to siting of pumped storage hydroelectric projects in Washington State, to support the state's transition from fossil fuel to 100 percent clean energy. The 2023 Clean Energy Siting Act reflects the continuing commitment of the Washington State Legislature and Governor Inslee to expedite our state's transition to 100% clean energy sources, while avoiding or minimizing adverse human and environmental impacts.

Inflation Reduction Act of 2022

In 2022, Congress passed, and President Biden signed into law, the Inflation Reduction Act, to address our climate crisis. This act provides tax credits and rebates to individuals for home weatherization and efficiency upgrades, installing new electrical appliances, and purchasing an electric vehicle or a rooftop solar system. You can click [here](#) or [here](#) for more information

Membership – Joy McKinney

Welcome New Members! John Thayer, Sunnyside; T. Suzanne Purtee, Yakima; Pam Egan, Yakima

Thanks for renewing your membership: Bill Jacobs, Bill Drenguis, Catherine Rex Reed, Martha Fleming, Fern Sule, Joe & Kathy Howell, Jackson & Cheryl Mayes, Cynthia Lacey, Tyler Shepherd, James R. Christiansen, Bill Drenguis, Alex Conley, Anita Osterhaug & Job Rabinowitz, Elizabeth (and Muffin and Cookie) Chicken, John & Sheri Rivard, Don & Jane Gargas, Dan Kinney, Kathy Tierney, Rick Mains, Deborah Severtson-Coffin, Bob & Carrie Chicke



YVAS Board and Committee Members Urgently Needed!

Your Board needs your help! We are currently without a person for the following positions: Vice-president, Director, Fund-raising Chairman, and Communications and Newsletter Chairman. These positions are vitally important to the sustainability of our organization. Following is a brief description of the responsibilities of each position. Collectively we can get so much done!

- **Vice-President:** The Vice-President assists the President in the carrying out of his/her duties and shall preside at all meetings in the absence of the President. He/she may be designated by the President to head one of the Standing Committees. The Vice-President is in training to become the President for the next term.
- **Director:** This position serves on the Board in support of activities, but without specific Chairman duties.
- **Fund-raising Chairman:** To make recommendations and carry out plans for obtaining financial support for the Society, and to coordinate all revenue-generating activities of this Society. Birdathon in May is the principal fund-raising event for YVAS.
- **Newsletter Chairman:** Publish a periodic newsletter for the members of the local Society and to prepare any other publications helpful to the ongoing programs of the local Chapter. The chairman of this committee shall be known as Editor.

If you would like to learn more about the responsibilities or are able to help, please contact Sarah Shippen, YVAS President at ses1440@outlook.com.

Meet Your YVAS Board and Committee Members

President	Sarah Shippen	Newsletter Chair	Volunteer needed	Membership Chair	Joy McKinney
Vice President	Volunteer needed	Conservation Chair	Stan Isley	Programs Chair	Andy Stepniewski
Secretary	Deborah Severtson-Coffin	Conservation Committee	Andy Stepniewski, Scott Downes	Toppenish Refuge Volunteer	Kerry Turley
Treasurer	Rich Mathieu	Arboretum Bird Blind	Kathy and Joe Howell	Toppenish CBC	Volunteer needed
Director	Bill Drenguis	Education Chair	Ellen Stepniewski	Yakima CBC	Scott Downes
Director	Ken Tolonen	Education Committee	Volunteers needed	Website Administrator	Volunteer needed
Director	Volunteer needed	Field Trips Chair	Scott Downes	Website Committee	Volunteers needed
Bluebird Trail	Karen Zook	Fundraising	Volunteer needed	Yakima Migration Count	Scott Downes

Contacts:

- YVAS Information: info@yakimaaudubon.org
 Membership questions: membership@yakimaaudubon.org
 Newsletter content: newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org
 Conservation concerns: conservation@yakimaaudubon.org
 Field trips: fieldtrips@yakimaaudubon.org
 Program ideas: programs@yakimaaudubon.org
 Bluebird Trail: bluebirdtrail@yakimaaudubon.org

- Bird questions: birds@yakimaaudubon.org
 Donations: donations@yakimaaudubon.org
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For more information about Yakima Valley Audubon Society, visit our website:
<https://yakimaaudubon.org>

To Join:
https://yakimaaudubon.org/assets/pdf/yvas_membership_form.pdf

