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# Calliope Crier

*Newsletter of the Yakima Valley Audubon Society*

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*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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## 2022 Christmas Bird Count, Toppenish and Yakima

**Toppenish NWR Christmas Bird Count invites you!**  
**Saturday, Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 7 am to 4:30 pm**

Somehow, it's CBC season again! This year's Toppenish Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 17. We'll fan out to census seven different routes in a 15-mile diameter circle to count birds and their numbers in the Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge area. Counters will meet at 7 am for breakfast and final instructions at the Branding Iron Restaurant, on US-97 just south of the junction with State Route 22 in Toppenish. After a day in the field, we will meet at the home of Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky, near Zillah, for a post-count dinner with pizza and other treats to go over the sightings of the day, team by team. Beginners are welcome to join this event. In fact, participating in this count is a great way for a novice to learn from knowledgeable birders.

Keep in mind this is a full-day birding event, and teams typically are out in the field until 4:30 pm. At the breakfast, you will be assigned a route leader. Come prepared for the forecasted temperatures, and possibly snow. Bring a lunch and fluids for the day and get ready to see a bunch of birds! This is one of my favorite birding events of the year, and I hope that you will join us!

Please contact me: Eric Heisey at [heiseyew@gmail.com](mailto:heiseyew@gmail.com) or my cell, 509-314-9570, if you have any questions or are interested in joining this year's count, and I will assign you a route.

If you live in the Toppenish area and do not wish to go out for the day but you have a feeder, counting feeder birds is welcomed, too. Contact me if you wish to do this and we'll work out details on submitting your sightings.

Thanks! Eric Heisey

**Post-count dinner:** 5:00 pm or any time after dark, 1440 Roza Drive, Zillah, WA. 98953. YVAS will be providing pizza. Please bring a side salad or dessert to share and a beverage of your choice. Contact Sarah at [ses1440@outlook.com](mailto:ses1440@outlook.com) if you have any questions. Sarah will hand out maps and her mobile number at breakfast in case anyone gets lost. Hope to see you there!



## Join the Yakima Valley Christmas Bird Count!

**Saturday, Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, all day**

The Yakima Valley Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is on Saturday, Dec. 31st, with Scott Downes as compiler. The Yakima Valley count circle covers the Yakima Valley from east of Moxee to West Valley, much of Selah and a little bit south of the Union Gap. This count includes both walking and driving routes. Volunteers may join an established route leader or sign up to count birds at their feeders if you live in the count circle. Volunteers wishing to join a route should contact the compiler to be assigned to a route. If you live in the count area and wish to count your feeders, please also contact Scott at the email below.

The count is always a ton of fun, as we typically see a lot of birds and spend the day in some great birding areas. Following the count day there will be a compilation dinner. The compiler will give the location and details to the counters.

What to bring: It can be cold, so be sure to bring plenty of layers as teams are outside for much of the day! Make sure to also bring lunch, and a hot beverage is always nice, too.

Leader: Scott Downes

To sign up and for meeting location and other details, contact Scott at [downess@charter.net](mailto:downess@charter.net).

**Post-count dinner:** 4:30 pm or any time after dark, 902 N Conestoga Blvd, Yakima. After the count, we will meet at the house of Andy and Ellen Stepniewski for dinner and to review each group's bird counts. This will be a semi-potluck, with soup provided. We will try to organize the rest of the food and ask a few participants to bring snacks, bread, salad, and dessert. To avoid too much of one dish, please contact us at [steppie@nwinform.net](mailto:steppie@nwinform.net) if you can bring food or if you have questions. Folks should bring their choice of beverages.

## Events Calendar

<b>Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup></b> <b>All-day event</b>	<b>Toppenish Area Christmas Bird Count.</b> Join in this annual event, lend a hand for conservation, and enjoy the camaraderie. Leader: Eric Heisey. To sign up, contact Eric at <a href="mailto:heiseyew@gmail.com">heiseyew@gmail.com</a> . (See article for more details.)
<b>Saturday, December 31<sup>st</sup></b> <b>All-day event</b>	<b>Yakima Valley Christmas Bird Count.</b> Help document how birds are doing in our local environment. Give a day for citizen science and warm up afterwards with a celebratory dinner. Leader: Scott Downes. To sign up, contact Scott at <a href="mailto:downess@charter.net">downess@charter.net</a> . (See article for more details.)
<b>Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>January <i>Calliope Crier</i> deadline</b> (send articles, questions to <a href="mailto:newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org">newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org</a> )
<b>Thursday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 pm (Yakima Arboretum and Zoom)</b>	<b>YVAS January Program</b> Our next program will be Thursday, January 26th. Speaker and topic to be announced. We are again planning a hybrid program, in person and over Zoom.

## Membership – *Joy McKinney*

### Welcome New Members!

Shawn Brown, Tacoma  
Susan Gallegos, Yakima  
Mary Lane, Olympia  
Marion Jean Winkler, Selah

### Thank You for Renewing Your Membership

Dotty Armstrong, Vera Backstrom, Robert and Mary-Lane Baker, Kathryn Blair, Ross and Diane Bornfleth, Jan Brydsen, Clara Eustis, Don and Jane Gargas, Denny Granstrand, Jackie and Jim Hertel, Clark and Debra Satre, Deborah Severtson-Coffin, Marcia Shotwell, Jim and Mary Stephenson, Martha Taylor, and Kristi Weeks.

## Field Trips – *Scott Downes*

*There will be no Second Saturday bird walks in January or February. There will be a field trip planning meeting in January, date to be announced.*

### **REPORT: Second Saturday Bird Walk, Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Popoff Trail, Union Gap**

Eight YVAS members met on a cold, but sunny day for a visit to the Popoff Trail. The trail offers some of the richest bird habitat in Yakima, with riparian shrublands, open water ponds (even in winter), mixed woodland, and open grassy areas, all with their own winged visitors. We saw a total of thirty-one species on the 2-hour walk; highlights were sighting of Pacific Wren and Cooper's Hawk.

We will start our Second Saturday Bird Walks again in March. These short walks are intended for ALL levels of birding, so please think about joining us next year.

—Sarah Shippen



**Photos:** (*above*) Pacific Wren; (*below*) Bird walk participants at the Yakima Arboretum. Photos by Sarah Shippen.

### Species Observed, 11/12/22 on the Popoff Trail

32 Canada Goose  
10 Wood Duck  
2 American Wigeon  
12 Mallard  
8 Green-winged Teal  
1 Ring-necked Duck  
3 Common Merganser  
28 California Quail  
1 Pied-billed Grebe  
1 Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)  
1 Great Blue Heron  
1 Cooper's Hawk  
5 Red-tailed Hawk  
1 Belted Kingfisher  
1 Downy Woodpecker  
7 Northern Flicker  
8 Black-capped Chickadee  
2 Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
1 Pacific Wren  
2 Bewick's Wren  
24 European Starling  
34 American Robin  
2 Cedar Waxwing  
14 House Finch  
1 Fox Sparrow  
2 Dark-eyed Junco  
2 White-crowned Sparrow  
2 Song Sparrow  
4 Spotted Towhee  
1 Red-winged Blackbird  
13 Yellow-rumped Warbler

## Education – *Ellen Stepniewski*

**THANKS! Volunteers and seed donation keep the bird blind going.**



Last month, Ace Hardware donated birdseed to the Yakima Area Arboretum. Thanks so much!

Since Yakima Valley Audubon maintains the blind and bird feeding area there, we were enlisted to haul the seed from the warehouse to the Arboretum and unload it. Luckily some of us have trucks and were able to help. Storage at the Arboretum is limited, so some of the seed was hauled to the Toppenish Refuge for the feeders that Yakima Audubon maintains there. Thanks to Denny Granstrand, Kathy and Joe Howell, Debi and Ron Brown, Kerry Turley, and Ellen and Andy Stepniewski for helping.

Since its inception, Denny Granstrand has supervised construction, maintained the blind, and made sure there was seed in the storage can at the blind. Kathy and Joe Howell have volunteered to take over this maintenance for this winter.

If you are at the blind, and see anything amiss, or have questions, you can contact Kathy and Joe through Yakima Audubon at [info@yakimaaudubon.org](mailto:info@yakimaaudubon.org), OR let Garrett, the education coordinator and naturalist at the Arboretum know. All folks going to the blind to view birds are encouraged to scatter seed from the storage can there.

Kerry Turley has been the Audubon volunteer liaison at the Toppenish refuge. Since Covid began, the visitor's center there has been closed to the public. Kerry will be again maintaining the feeders there intermittently, and, hopefully, will be able to open it on Sundays for public visits again this spring.

Don't forget, Jeff Kozma is running a multi-year project color-banding Golden-crowned Sparrows at the Arboretum. When he does banding at the Arboretum, he puts both color and silver bands with numbers on this species making a unique pattern that can be seen with binoculars. It is then easy to track to see whether specific birds return the next winter. Instructions for reading the color bands and reporting them to Jeff (at [yakimaGCSP@gmail.com](mailto:yakimaGCSP@gmail.com)) are on the sign attached the blind. If you arrive at the blind and find the seed can lid locked on, it means Jeff is planning to band birds soon and needs to plan their feedings for just a couple days.

Thanks to all the folks who help!

## **YVAS Volunteers Needed!**

We are about to update our Yakima Audubon website, and we also need volunteers to help out from time to time with announcements and the *Calliope Crier*. If you have Microsoft Word or web authoring skills and are able to help the YVAS communication team, please contact Anita Osterhaug, [osterhaug@gmail.com](mailto:osterhaug@gmail.com).

## **Conservation – Stan Isley**

### **A Conservation Potpourri**

#### **Grizzly Bear Recovery in the North Cascades, Status**

I received a Nov. 10th e-mail message from Conservation Northwest that reports that on November 10, 2023, the Biden Administration announced that it is restarting the process required to potentially return Grizzly Bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem—a large network of mostly protected public lands that spans from northwest Washington

into British Columbia and includes North Cascades National Park and surrounding wilderness and other protected areas down to I-90.

The environmental impact statement process will include opportunities for public input on a range of strategies designed to restore grizzlies. This revives a multi-year effort backed by overwhelming public approval. More than 159,000 public comments were submitted in support of the previous effort that began in 2015.

The North Cascades Ecosystem is one of only two grizzly recovery areas without an established population of bears, and due to its relative distance and isolation from other zones, it would not likely be repopulated from natural bear migration.

You can click on [this link](#) to see Conservation Northwest's press release and information about how to provide comments or input on the process.

I note that I also received a Nov. 10th e-mail message from Congressman Dan Newhouse, reporting on the Biden Administration's restarting of the environmental impact statement process to evaluate options for restoring and managing Grizzly Bears in the North Cascades Ecosystem. Congressman Newhouse's message attempts to rally opposition to this analysis of Grizzly Bear recovery options, claiming "our communities would directly and negatively be impacted", and that "(o)ur community has consistently opposed these proposals that would threaten the safety of our friends, families, wildlife, and livestock."

Representative Newhouse's emotional hyperbole is unfortunate, though predictable. People have co-existed with Grizzly Bears and Brown Bears for millennia. People in Alaska and Canada live with these bears today, and with minor accommodations, have little conflict or problems.

And keep in mind that no ecosystem or natural community is healthy and complete without its apex predators. I encourage your support for Grizzly Bear recovery in the North Cascades Ecosystem.

## **Whitebark Pine – Proposed Listing as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act**

A November 11, 2023 e-mail message from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology reports that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has proposed listing the Whitebark Pine as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The USFWS estimates that over half of all the Whitebark Pines in the high-alpine forests of the West have died, with much of that destruction happening in the last two decades. Without action (e.g., proactive restoration plans), Whitebark Pine forests could be gone in a century.

Whitebark Pines are killed by Blister Rust, caused by a non-native invasive fungus accidentally imported in the early 1900's. And a native pest, the Mountain Pine Beetle, that used to be naturally kept in check by winter cold snaps, is no longer killed back effectively with the warmer winters brought on by climate change. The combination of these two pests is wiping out Whitebark Pine forests in Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

Whitebark Pines and Clark's Nutcrackers have co-evolved and are dependent on each other for their continuing survival. The Whitebark Pine cones do not open on their own, don't open from fire, and have no wings on the seeds for wind dispersal. The seeds depend completely on Clark's Nutcrackers for dispersal and planting. So, the Whitebark Pines place their cones at the very top of the tree, and the cones are full of seeds – fatty pine nuts that are calorically equivalent to Nutella.

Our Clark's Nutcrackers can eat other foods, like the seeds of Ponderosa Pines and Douglas Firs, but those seeds do not provide as much caloric value to the birds as do the Whitebark Pine seeds. So fewer Whitebark Pines will inevitably mean fewer Clark's Nutcrackers. It's imperative that we develop Blister Rust-resistant Whitebark Pines. And we will have to rely on avian helpers, the Clark's Nutcrackers, to plant those rust-resistant seeds, if we are to successfully intervene and restore healthy Whitebark Pine forests across our American West.

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[Click here](#) to read the Cornell Lab of Ornithology article about Whitebark Pines and Clark's Nutcrackers.

## **Solar Energy Generation Projects**

The solar energy project rush, a modern-day gold rush, is proceeding across Washington's sun country. East of Yakima, in the Moxee and Blackrock Valleys, the proposed Goose Prairie and Blackrock Solar Energy Generation Projects have received initial approvals and permits to proceed with development. The Ostrea and High Top Solar Projects are currently moving through the expedited permitting process with the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC). And the proposed Wautoma Solar Project is moving more slowly through the EFSEC review process, with a recent EFSEC finding that the project is inconsistent with Benton County land use regulations, as amended at the end of 2021.

Meanwhile, I've been participating in the [Least-Conflict Solar Siting Project](#) effort being led by the Washington State University Energy Program. I'm working with the Environmental Conservation Mapping group, which includes representatives from Audubon Washington, local Audubon chapter members, and others, with the goal of producing maps of locations within Washington's Columbia Plateau where solar farm development would have the least environmental conflicts.

Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act requires Washington Utilities to meet 100% of their load with clean, renewable sources of energy by mid-century. The Washington State Legislature believes that utility-scale solar developments are needed to help meet these requirements, and it provided funding to complete this Least-Conflict Solar Siting Project, which is engaging stakeholders, tribes, and key agencies, to identify areas where utility-scale solar development can be located, while ensuring that important natural habitat, productive farmlands and ranchlands, and tribal rights and natural resources are protected.

This project will create maps and produce a final report by June 30, 2023.

I'm hopeful that this Least-Conflict Solar Siting Project identifies a viable set of acceptable solar development sites. Why? Because it is imperative that we, as quickly as possible, transition away from burning dirty fossil fuels, to sustainable, clean, renewable, carbon-free sources of energy, to supply our world's energy needs. The world as we've known it all our lives is changing dramatically, and we now must take quick, and maybe even drastic, action, to preserve this wonderful world we've loved, for future generations on Planet Earth.

*For more information about the Yakima Valley Audubon Society, or to join, visit our website, [yakimaaudubon.org](http://yakimaaudubon.org).*

*To contact us, email [info@yakimaaudubon.org](mailto:info@yakimaaudubon.org).*