

Volume 52 Issue 5

May/June 2022



Calliope Crier

Newsletter of the Yakima Valley Audubon Society

YVAS May Program

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.

Bluebirds: Yakima Valley Audubon's Vredenburg Bluebird Trail Marks its 40th Year!

Speaker - Andy Stepniewski

Thursday, May 26th on Zoom.

Sign in to visit with others at 6:45 pm, program begins at 7:00 pm

In 1982, when nest boxes for bluebirds were first put out in the nearby Wenas Valley, little did this intrepid group of Yakima Auduboners know that 40 years later that the Vredenburg Bluebird Trail, as it was later named, would still be going strong. To date, more than 17,000 bluebirds have fledged from this program. This is an amazing tribute to the numerous volunteers who have built and erected nest boxes. They also faithfully monitored the birds' nesting progress through the spring and summer season each year and compiled the data of numbers fledged for both Western and Mountain Bluebirds.

Join us to hear about both species of bluebirds and about the other birds and critters who use the same nesting cavities and boxes. In the nearby lower east slopes of the Cascades, bluebird populations had been severely depleted through widespread logging and habitat loss, eliminating many of the cavities in mature pines in which bluebirds historically nested. Nest box programs have helped augment both bluebird species. Come learn how to visit the bluebird trail, see the birds and their habitats, and how you can help monitor and maintain the trail.

Recently, Richard Repp has retired as Vredenburg Bluebird Trail chairperson after more than 20 years of service. Karen Zook has taken over the helm of the committee. Thanks are due to Richard Repp and Karen Zook who provided many recent photos and insight for this program.

The next program after the summer break will be Thursday, August 25th. Speaker and topic to be announced.

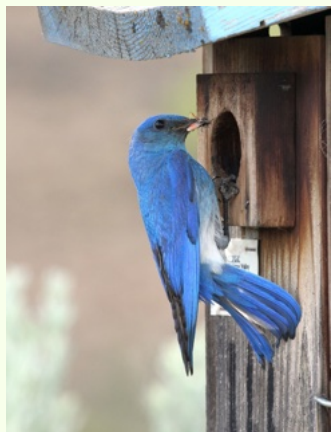


Photo Mountain Bluebird with insect at a nest box. Photo by Karen Zook.

How to View YVAS Zoom Programs

Zoom event name: Yakima Audubon May Program

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

iPhone one-tap : US: +12532158782 **Telephone:** +1 253 215 8782 **Webinar ID:** 844 2557 6656

To view previous programs that have been recorded, please see our website at www.yakimaaudubon.org .

Events Calendar

Thursday, May 26th, 7:00 pm (Zoom)	YVAS May Program <i>Bluebirds: Yakima Valley Audubon's Vredenburg Bluebird Trail Marks its 40th Year!</i> with speaker Andy Stepniewski.
Friday, May 27th–Sunday, 29th	Tentative: Wenas Audubon Campout. Contact Richard Repp, bbirder247@gmail.com , for information.
Saturday, June 4th	Conboy Lake Wildlife Refuge. All-day event. Birding the numerous trails and habitats of the Conboy Refuge, Glenwood, WA. Expect to see Sandhill Cranes, many species of songbirds, and woodpeckers. Contact Sarah Shippen at ses1440@outlook.com to sign up.
Saturday, June 11th	Second Saturday Bird Walk. Tieton River Nature Trail. Meet at Oak Creek Wildlife Recreation parking lot. Bird for approximately two hours. Discover Pass required. Co-leaders: Kathy Howell and Sarah Shippen, contact ses1440@outlook.com .
Friday, August 12th	August Calliope Crier deadline (send articles, questions to newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org)
Thursday, August 25th, 7:00 pm (Zoom)	YVAS August Program <i>speaker and program to be announced.</i>

Membership – Joy McKinney

Welcome New Members!

Eleanor Hungate, Yakima

Leonard and Graciela Black, Yakima

Muffin, Cookie, and Elizabeth Chicken, Yakima

Thank You for Renewing Your Membership

Robert Chicken, Donna Homer, Anita Osterhaug and Job Rabinowitz.

Field Trips – Sarah Shippen

Conboy Lake Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, June 4th, 6:00 am – 4:30 pm

Meet at 6:30 am in Yakima.

Join us for an all-day field trip to Conboy Lake Wildlife Refuge in the foothills of Mt. Adams. This refuge is a treasure of micro-habitats, all easily accessible on well-maintained trails. We will park at the Refuge Headquarters Parking lot (unfortunately, closed for COVID) and head off walking from there. The trail follows along the edge of the marsh, where we will hope to see Sandhill Cranes and their young. The riparian edge is home for Yellowthroats, Flycatchers and numerous songbirds. This trail ends in a marsh overlook with a spectacular view of Mt. Adams. We will head back through the mixed pine and fir forest where we will see Woodpeckers, Wrens, Chickadees, and Bluebirds.



We will meet in Toppenish and car caravan to the Refuge (an approximately two-hour drive), bird for about four hours and be back to Toppenish around 4-4:30. This trip will not involve any strenuous hiking, but the capacity of walking for extended periods of time over trails is necessary.

This trip will be limited to 12 people. More trip details will be forwarded when you sign up. We hope you will join us!

What to bring: Dress for weather, bring lunch, fluids, sunscreen, hat.

Leaders: Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky

To sign up and for further details, email Sarah at ses1440@outlook.com.

Second Saturday Bird Walk: Tieton River Nature Trail

Saturday, June 11, 2022 9:00–11:00 am

Tieton River Nature Trail

Leaders: Kathy Howell and Sarah Shippen

The Tieton Nature Trail is a part of the Oak Creek Wildlife. We will meet in the parking lot of the Elk Feeding station. The Trail starts across 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, Lewis's Woodpecker, and Bullock's Oriole.

WDFW parking permit required. Please confirm your attendance with Sarah Shippen at ses1440@outlook.com.

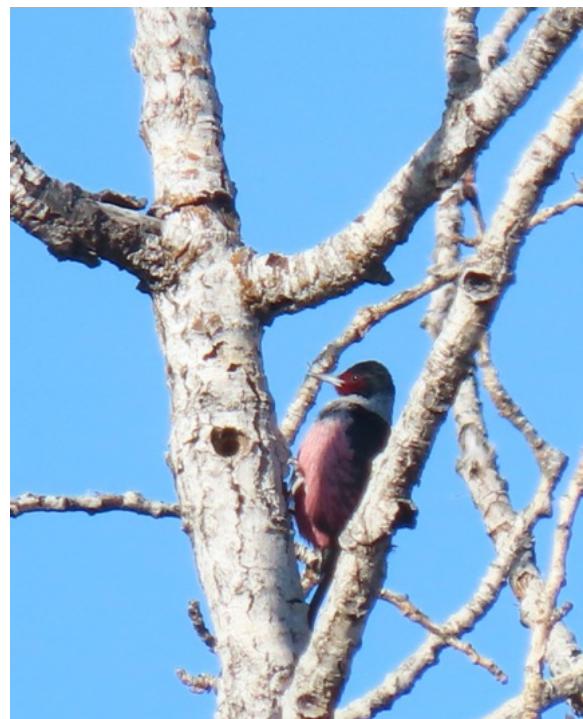


Photo Lewis's Woodpecker. Photo by Sarah Shippen.

Bluebird News – Karen Zook

Bluebird Monitor Opportunity

There are still a few slots open for Bluebird Monitoring on the Vredenburg Bluebird Trail. Monitoring is a fun activity for all ages. Enjoy the great outdoors in the Wenas and help bluebirds at the same time! If you are interested, please email bluebirdtrail@yakimaaudubon.org and we will be happy to sign you up.

—Karen Zook

Calliope Crier and Other News – Anita Osterhaug

We hope you've enjoyed the new format of the *Calliope Crier* these last couple months and found it convenient to have a more readable, printable version. Starting next program year (August 2022) we'll be making another change. We will go to a bi-monthly printable newsletter with shorter electronic-only newsletters on the alternate months. This change will allow us to dedicate more time and resources to timely announcements and reminders of programs, upcoming field trips and other events, and opportunities for members to have an impact on projects and issues affecting our local environment and avian populations.

Longer, printable newsletters will be published for September/October, November/December, January/February, March/April, and May/June. Newsletter deadlines for all issues will continue to be published monthly and, as always, you can send notices, articles, and inquiries to newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org.

We are also seeking volunteers with communication, Microsoft Office, and/or web skills to join our Communications committee and help us support YVAS mission and outreach to the general public. It doesn't require a lot of time, and your creativity will be welcome. If you're interested in sharing your skills and ideas, please contact Anita Osterhaug, osterhaug@gmail.com.

Conservation – Stan Isley

Update on Two Local Solar Energy Generation Projects

Goose Prairie Solar Energy Generation Project

At the end of 2021, Governor Jay Inslee approved the Goose Prairie Solar Energy Generation Project, based on the approval recommendation of the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC). This approval allows OneEnergy Renewables of Seattle to construct an 80 MW solar generation project on 625 acres located 8 miles east of the City of Moxee.

The developer, OneEnergy Renewables is required to pay a fee to either the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) or a third-party conservation organization to mitigate for the project's impacts to shrubsteppe lands and lands enrolled in the Federal Conservation Reserve Program. Mitigation would likely mean buying and preserving quality shrubsteppe land in the area, with the goals of ensuring no net loss of shrubsteppe acreage and providing wildlife migration corridors.

I submitted timely comments to EFSEC last fall on behalf of our Yakima Valley Audubon Society (YVAS) chapter, generally supporting the development of renewable energy generation projects like this Goose Prairie Solar Energy Project, provided that negative impacts to shrubsteppe and agricultural lands, and to wildlife, are fully mitigated by the developer.

Black Rock Solar Energy Generation Project

Black Rock Solar LLC is currently seeking Conditional Use Permit (CUP) approval from Yakima County to construct its proposed Black Rock Solar Energy Generation Project on approximately 694 acres of land located along Highway 24, about 20 miles east of the City of Moxee. The project developer has modified and reduced the size and scope of its original proposal and has worked with Yakima County and WDFW staff to develop a project with minimal negative impacts to the environment. Some

question remains as to whether the mitigation the company is currently offering to make, and that Yakima County is currently requiring on its proposed CUP, will adequately and fully mitigate for the project's negative impacts to shrubsteppe habitat on the property and to potential wildlife passage corridors on the property and in the area.

Yakima County held a hearing before the hearing examiner on Thursday, May 5, 2022, to receive comments on the county's proposed Conditional Use Permit for the proposed Black Rock Solar Energy Project. I offered comments on behalf of the Yakima Valley Audubon Society at this hearing, noting that YVAS generally supports the development of renewable energy generation projects, like this Black Rock Solar Energy Project, but that our support is contingent upon the project proponents fully mitigating for negative impacts to shrubsteppe habitat and wildlife.

WDFW comments offered at the hearing indicate WDFW's concerns that the county's proposed CUP's required mitigation is inadequate and doesn't fully mitigate for the project's negative impacts to shrubsteppe habitat—a key discussion point is that the county permit does not require the project proponent to mitigate for impacts to a portion of the project land that the proponents are characterizing as 'grassland', but which WDFW believes should be classed as shrubsteppe habitat that requires mitigation. An additional WDFW concern is that the proponent proposes to install chain link fence along the project area boundary along Highway 24. WDFW believes this chain link fencing would block wildlife movement through the fence and is not necessary. WDFW prefers a multiple-strand wire fence be required instead, which would allow for birds and other wildlife to navigate through the fence.

I commented that YVAS shares WDFW's concerns and wants this proposed Black Rock Solar Project to fully mitigate for its negative environmental impacts. I encouraged the project proponents to continue to meet with WDFW staff to come to final agreement on a plan for full mitigation of impacts that satisfies everyone.

Discussions will continue among the Black Rock Solar Project proponents, Yakima County, and WDFW, to resolve these final issues prior to Yakima County's issuance of its Continual Use Permit and the ultimate construction of this solar energy generation project. The hearings officer will issue his decision on the proposed Black Rock Solar Project CUP within 10 working days after the May 5th hearing or about May 19th, 2022.

The Bigger Picture

Development of renewable energy sources to transition us as quickly as possible away from the burning of fossil fuels to generate energy is imperative. There is a renewable energy generation project boom of sorts going on in eastern Washington and elsewhere around the country and the world. It is entirely possible to develop these new renewable energy generation projects in an environmentally sensitive way, without causing negative impacts to wildlife, shrubsteppe habitats, and other sensitive habitats. We just need to ensure these projects are developed with the proper care and consideration for preventing negative environmental impacts where possible and fully mitigating for unavoidable negative impacts.

For more information about the Yakima Valley Audubon Society, or to join, visit our website, yakimaaudubon.org.

To contact us, email info@yakimaaudubon.org.