

This is the eighth in a series of "profiles" of Yakima Valley Audubon Society members who have played a major role in the chapter over the years.

PROFILES — The Early Days of YVAS

The track of profiles of early Audubon members, which we've followed in the Crier for the past several months, has led where we hoped it would: the very beginnings of the Yakima Valley Audubon Society.

Here are the major players in this review: Pauline Hager, a long-time birder who lived to be a centenarian; Hazel Wolf, then secretary of the Seattle Audubon society, another centenarian who died not long ago; (no surprise!) Jack Whitnall, at the time of this story the public relations man for Boise Cascade, who knew the Seattle Auduboners because they came to the Wenas campground each year; and (surprise) Lola Bartol, self-described non-birder but great organizer.

From her personal scrapbook, which encompasses Audubon, tennis and hospital guild, Bartol has pulled forth papers and memories.

Here are excerpts from her "Vignette of YVAS or how it all came about", written sometime in 1970:

"I was asked for the umpteenth time recently - - in view of my grave lack of ornithological knowledge - - how I happened to be the leader of this organization. Actually it was all Mrs. Hager's doing. Following her talk at the YWCA last November (1969) [part of the regular lecture program of the YW - - ed.] the audience was invited to organize and Audubon club. There was a vast silence. As it happened, I now had free time resulting from a 'tennis elbow' precluding further tennis for some time to come. After 12 years of active tennis my way of life had come to a mighty halt.

"Casting about for other interests, this idea had great appeal to me as a means of meeting people, exploring the Valley and state and maybe even picking up a thing or two about birds.

"So it came about at a December meeting (in 1969) our good friend and secretary of the Seattle Audubon Society, Mrs. Hazel Wolf rushed over to Yakima (at Mrs. Hager's invitation) and appointed officers as quickly as they walked in the door. She really had the foresight, as the neophytes have one and all helped in many crises to bring our embryonic group through the better of its first year.

"We have entertained Audubon royalty, urged legislation, written letters of protest, passed along petitions, planted trees, encouraged further conservation measures at Cascade Campground, joined with the kids on Earth Day, presented a plan for a natural bird sanctuary near Eisenhower to the Park Bureau and City Council, passed the cookies and coffee and carried out some really terrific field trips...

"So, audacious as a blue jay, vociferous as a magpie, and happy as a lark, your leader and Audubon staff will continue to finish out its first year in Yakima."

The group became the Yakima Valley Unit of the Seattle Audubon Society, with these first officers: Lola Bartol, president; Pauline Hager, vice-president; Joanna Nashem, secretary; Connie and Roger Ryan, treasurer and membership; Betty and Carolyn Lagergren (sisters married to brothers), editor and program chairman; E.J. Newcomer, conservation chairman; Jack Whitnall, publicity chairman, and Bob Prather and Ellis Bowhay, field trip chairmen.

Bartol recalls the frequent and enjoyable field trips, led by Whitnall, Harold Vredenburgh, Ellis Bowhay and Steve Layman. Some of them lasted until dark (even then!).

Later, in 1986, a letter about the start of Yakima Valley Audubon to the then-president Andy Stepniewski, Bartol wrote that

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"Jack Whitnall is really a cofounder with me, as without his tremendous professional and personal knowledge of Yakima and entrée to various representatives at the newspaper, City Hall etc., plus his aid on the field trips, I am afraid I would have floundered along the way."

The chapters original mission, taken from The Towhee, Tacoma Audubon's newsletter, is this: "Audubon is for people to improve the quality of the life support system of Planet Earth for all Creatures".

In 1971, after two years as a "unit" of Seattle Audubon, that chapter certified the Yakima group as an independent chapter.

In 1989, Yakima Valley Audubon celebrated the 20th anniversary of its founding and listed these "honored guests, charter members of Yakima Valley Audubon": Lola Bartol, Ellis Bowhay, Ray and Gertrude Dixon, Helen Doornink, Ornia Eustis, Doris Fisher, Joanna (Nashem) Frisque, Pauline Hager, Alice Horschel, Betty Lagergren, Carolyn Lagergren, Harold Vredenburgh and Jack Whitnall

— Jeanne Crawford —

In the NEXT CRIER, read about the Calliope hummingbird, how its name and picture became the title and logo of Yakima Valley Audubon's newsletter, and enjoy excerpts from Volume 1 of the Crier, dating back to 1970.