

A Chapter of the  
National Audubon  
Society

# 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.

March – April 2024

Volume 53, Issue 3

*Yakima Valley Audubon Society presents:*

## ***WHOSE TRACK IS THAT? Exploring for Wildlife Sign***

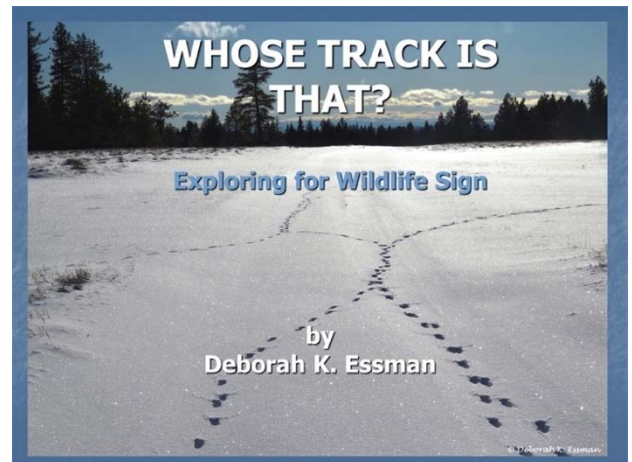
**With speaker, Deborah K. Essman**

**at the Yakima Area Arboretum and Via Zoom**

**Thursday, March 28, 2024, 7:00 PM (Zoom meeting opens at 6:55)**

*Discover the secrets of wildlife tracking* and decipher the hidden language of animal tracks, signs and behaviors.

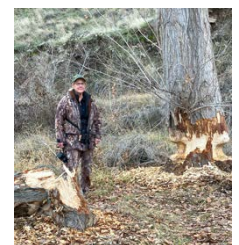
- Time of Day insights: Understand how animals' movements vary throughout the day.
- Ground Examination: Learn to read the landscape and tracks on different terrains.
- Habitat Awareness: Understand how animals interact with their environment.
- Seasonal Observations: Discover how tracking changes with the seasons.
- Geographical Context: Delve into the unique characteristics of our local area.



**Deb Essman** considers herself an avid amateur naturalist with a special love for birds. She majored in Natural Resources Mgmt. at Cal-Poly San Luis Obispo and was a seasonal naturalist at Morro Bay State Park while attending college; co-founded and ran a raptor rehabilitation center in California for almost a decade; was a veterinary technician at the Woodland Park Zoo and ran their Earthwatch program releasing bald eagles on the San Juan Island; worked for the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife as a Game Warden (the only woman in that position at the time). She has been volunteering for over 30 years teaching wildlife classes and led many birding and "wildlife tracking" field trips for various organizations including Kittitas Environmental Education Network and the Teanaway Community Forest. She is past-President of the Kittitas County Field and Stream Club, with them doing lots of volunteer work doing various habitat restoration and other projects for WDFW and DNR. She has been teaching Hunter Education classes for WDFW for almost *20 years*.



Bull Elk, photo D. Essman



Beaver tree, photo D. Essman

***To Join Zoom Meeting click on link below:***

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

**Meeting ID: 857 5124 1932; Passcode: 385168**

## Last Month's Recorded Program



The recording of *“Waterfowl of the Yakima Valley”* will be available to members only for the next 60 days. If you missed this comprehensive program from Master Birder, **Connie Sidles**, (or want to watch it again and take notes!), click here to view: <https://youtu.be/p-mwvd2j050>



Barrow's Goldeneye, photo: Sarah Shippen

## Upcoming Events

Fri-Sun, March 22-24	Sandhill Crane Festival, Othello, <a href="http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/">www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/</a>
Thursday, March 28	YVAS Program: Deb Essman, “Whose Track is That? Exploring for Wildlife Signs”, 7:00. In person at YAA and on Zoom
Fri-Sat, April 5-6	Bluebird Box Cleanout. Contact Karen Zook, <a href="mailto:gadzooks7@charter.net">gadzooks7@charter.net</a>
Monday, April 8	<i>Go Live of New YVAS Website! Same website address, <a href="http://yakimaaudubon.org">yakimaaudubon.org</a>, but with a new look and more information!</i>
Tuesday, April 9	YVAS Board Meeting via Zoom, 7 pm
Saturday, April 13	Selah Cliffs Natural Area Reserve, 9- noon. Leaders: Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky
Saturday, April 13	Arborfest, Yakima Area Arboretum, for information <a href="#">click here</a>
Saturday, April 20	Sunnyside Wildlife Refuge, morning. Leader: Kerry Turley, <a href="mailto:kdturley@gmail.com">kdturley@gmail.com</a>
Thursday, April 25	YVAS Program: Eric Heisey
Saturday, April 27	Yakima Training Center, all day. Leader, Scott Downes. <i>This field trip is full.</i>

## Education

Yakima Valley Audubon Society is partnering with the Yakima Area Arboretum(YAA) to sponsor **Bird Brains Nature Camp**, July 14-19. From YAA’s website, “...campers learn about birds, focusing on their sounds and identifying their tracks, while also cataloging the many bird nests on grounds and figuring out who they may belong to thanks to the week’s sponsor the Yakima Valley Audubon Society!”.

The weeklong day camp is for 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> graders and is the first project YVAS will use the funds set aside last year in honor of Ellen and Andy’s service to Yakima Valley Audubon Society. YVAS volunteers will also lead the kids on a short “field trip” around the Arboretum. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife are also supporting the camp with a loan of binoculars for the week to make this an authentic birding experience. [Click here](#) to learn more about the camp or to sign up.

## News from the Board

**Please join us!** Volunteers needed for the Board to assist with the newsletter, education, and conservation. Audubon is a network of chapters and there is so much exciting work happening at the Chapter, State, and National levels, won't you join us! Below is some of the work of your Board:

- Our newest Board member, Sandra Hulteen, has stepped up and engaged some amazing programs for the year—please give her a shout out!
- Bill Drenguis and Kerry Turley have lined up a very busy schedule of field trips and we are already off to a roaring start (see announcements and field trip reports below). Field trips are a relaxed and enjoyable way to meet other YVAS members—don't be shy, everyone is welcome!
- Deborah Severtson-Coffin and Rich Mathieu work tirelessly to keep the lights on.
- Karen Zook, Joy McKinney and Sarah Shippen, under the capable leadership of Mary Lane, have been working on a new website for YVAS. The user-friendly website software will allow the Board to maintain the content ourselves and we will do our best to have the most up to date information about our activities. The current address of [yakimaaudubon.org](http://yakimaaudubon.org) will remain the same—you will just be redirected behind the scenes to our new website starting on April 8. Please visit and let us know what you think.

JOIN, RENEW, DONATE



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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.

*Here is the new look!*

## Bluebird Box Cleanout 2024!

*"Oh, how the waiting countryside thrills with joy when the Bluebird brings us the first word of returning spring. Reflecting heaven from his back and the ground from his breast, he floats between sky and earth like the winged voice of hope." - W.L. Dawson*

***You may be thinking that it is a little early to be thinking about Bluebirds, but is it ever too early?*** Joe and I drove up along the Vredenburg Trail in late February. We found a bit of snow, a LOT of mud (no surprise there) and one bluebird. I was expecting that our first bluebird of the year might be a Mountain Bluebird, since they tend to start nesting earlier, but our first bluebird was a male Western Bluebird. He was perched on top of Box 63. He was not a cooperative photo subject, but I snapped a couple of quick photos:



*Male Western Bluebird, photo: Karen Zook*

Are you looking forward to spring? Would you like to do something that will help the bluebirds? Please consider joining us for the annual cleanout of the bluebird boxes along the Vredenburg Trail. This year (weather permitting) we will clean out the boxes on April 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. If the weather does not permit, we will plan on cleaning the boxes April 12 and 13.



*Western Bluebird at Box 63, photo: Karen Zook*

As we usually do, we will be meeting at the end of the pavement on North Wenas Road at 9:30 AM. If you have not been there before, there is a small area there where we can park and gather before the clean out. If you have not participated in the clean out before, we'll be happy to show you how to approach and clean a Bluebird box. You will need to bring some type of work gloves (i.e. garden gloves), wear shoes or boots that are sturdy, and dress for weather that can change quickly. It's also a good idea to bring snacks, water, and lunch. We will supply scrapers and a list of boxes for you to monitor. When we are finished with the clean out, we will meet at the Umptanum Falls Parking lot for lunch and to turn in our sheets. We can eat in our vehicles or outside in the parking lot if the weather permits. If you prefer not to do lunch, you can turn in your sheet there and head home afterward.

If you are interested or have questions, please contact Karen Zook ([gadzooks7@charter.net](mailto:gadzooks7@charter.net)), so that we know how many people to expect, and who to contact in the event that we need to change or cancel our plans. If you have a specific day that you can participate, please let us know that as well.

We hope to see some of you there!  
~Submitted by Karen Zook

## Upcoming Field Trips - Kerry Turley and Bill Drenguis

### **Selah Cliffs Natural Area Reserve**

**Saturday, April 13, Second Saturday Bird Walk, 9 - 11 AM**

**Leaders: Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky, [ses1440@outlook.com](mailto:ses1440@outlook.com).**

Discover Pass required at the parking lot. The cliffs provide nesting and roosting habitat for raptors including prairie falcons, red-tailed hawks, kestrels and Great Horned Owls. Approximately half mile loop trail. No need to sign-up in advance for these walks.

**Directions to Selah Cliffs Natural Area Preserve:** An access road and parking lot are just off of Highway 821, south of mile marker 3. The entrance is approximately 7 miles north of Yakima or approximately 28 miles south of Ellensburg. No restroom facilities are available onsite.



Great Horned Owl chicks and "whitewash" at Selah Cliffs, photo: Sarah Shippen



Yellow-headed Blackbird, photo: Karen Zook

### **Sunnyside Wildlife Area,**

**Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 AM to noon**

**Leader: Kerry Turley, [kdturley@gmail.com](mailto:kdturley@gmail.com)**

We'll head to this state wildlife area south of Sunnyside to walk around the flooded "rice fields." In the ponds and marshes, we should see a nice selection of ducks such as the beautiful Cinnamon Teal. Various migrating shorebirds will be moving through, too and the very showy Black-necked Stilt may be here in good numbers. Other marsh birds such as Virginia Rail and Sora might be lurking in the cattails. Swallows of various species should have arrived, flitting low over the water hawking insects.

We'll walk 1.5-2 miles on a dike track encircling the ponds on the lookout for other birds like Yellow-headed Blackbird. Raptors should be about, too. Expect to be homeward bound by about noon or so. Contact Kerry to sign up.

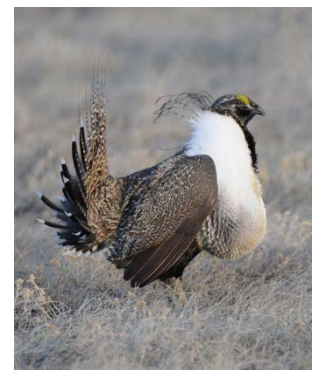
**What To Bring:** Binoculars, scope, camera, dress for the weather and bring footgear you don't mind getting a little muddy.

### **Yakima Training Center. *This field trip is full.***

**Saturday, April 27, all day**

**Leader: Scott Downes**

Scott Downes will lead the group to join a YTC biologist for a morning visit on the Yakima Training Center. We will look for shrub-steppe songbirds such as Sage thrasher, Sagebrush sparrow and Loggerhead shrike. We may have an opportunity to observe rare birds such as Greater Sage-grouse or Burrowing Owl, but that will be determined closer to the fieldtrip date.



Greater Sage-grouse, photo: George Vlahakis

# Field Trip Reports

## Two Saturdays, February 10 and March 9 at the Poppoff Trail, Yakima.

Leaders: Sarah Shippen and Gene Miliczky

With both February and March Second Saturday Bird Walks at the Poppoff trail, 9 and 13 birders, respectively, had an opportunity to study a habitat through the season. Poppoff is so rich in birds, we could easily go there every month, but find exploring other hotspots in Yakima enriching too! We still had some frozen areas on the ponds in February and the trail was slow to wake up on the chilly morning. In the Russian Olive grove near the entrance we saw American Robin, Northern Flicker, Bewick's Wren, White-crowned Sparrow and a couple of Varied Thrush. The ponds were active with Ring-necked Duck, Canada Goose, Bufflehead, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, and Green-winged Teal. Later in the morning on our way back, we caught sight of a shy Pacific Wren. A month later most of the waterfowl were still present in good numbers, but also more variety of songbirds, raptors and herons including a Great Egret, Belted Kingfisher, a number of Common Mergansers on the River, Cedar Waxwings, Juncos, Pied-billed Grebe. ~Submitted by Sarah Shippen

	10-Feb	9-Mar
Canada Goose	35	31
Wood Duck	2	6
Northern Shoveler	23	20
Gadwall	2	0
American Wigeon	18	6
Mallard	13	20
Green-winged Teal	22	12
Ring-necked Duck	36	1
Bufflehead	8	0
Common Merganser	0	14
California Quail	1	0
Pied-billed Grebe	1	3
American Coot	16	9
Killdeer	0	2
Double-crested Cormorant	0	3
Great Egret	0	1
Great Blue Heron	2	3
Cooper's Hawk	0	1
Bald Eagle	0	3
Red-tailed Hawk	2	4
Belted Kingfisher	0	3
Downy Woodpecker	2	3
Northern Flicker	20	7
Common Raven	0	3
Black-capped Chickadee	1	2
Pacific Wren	1	0
Bewick's Wren	5	2
Varied Thrush	4	2
Hermit Thrush	2	2
American Robin	22	8
Cedar Waxwing	8	10
House Finch	1	8
Dark-eyed Junco	0	4
White-crowned Sparrow	16	17
Song Sparrow	3	1
Spotted Towhee	3	2
Red-winged Blackbird	6	15
Yellow-rumped Warbler	8	8

29 species 34 species



Pacific Wren, February 11, photo: Ross Bornfleth



Birding at the pond, Feb 10, photo: Sarah Shippen

**Saturday, March 2: Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge,**

**Leaders: Sarah Shippen and Kerry Turley**

Thirteen birders met to view Spring Migration at the Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge. Volunteer Refuge manager, Kerry Turley, met us in the lookout parking lot and opened the gate and headquarters building for our convenience. I also want to give him a shout out for pitching in to help lead the group when Gene Miliczky become ill at the last minute. Thank you Kerry!



Porcupine at the Headquarters, photo: Sarah Shippen

The Lookout ponds were sparsely populated by waterfowl, but we did see a number of Northern Pintail and a Pied-billed Grebe. The action picked up when we headed to the pond behind the headquarters building. We were rewarded with a large group of Tundra Swan, more Northern Pintail, American Wigeon and a pair of Gadwall. Kerry then took us into the grove on the other side of the headquarters to show us the Great-horned Owl nest. She was on her nest, but Kerry said he had not seen any sign of chicks yet. However, he was expecting them shortly, as she had been on the nest for more than a month. We also saw a large, agreeable porcupine in one of the trees who let us take photos. From there we headed out to check on the ponds along Old Goldendale Road. There were a few Ring-necked Duck at Toppenish Creek and more Northern Pintail at the ponds. We continued west along Pumphouse Road and were rewarded at the duck blind pond with a very large group of Northern Pintail, American Coot and American Wigeon, where Kerry spotted a Eurasian Wigeon among them! We also saw a pair of Northern Harriers who gave us an amazing aerial display. Our last stop was on Lateral C where we spotted a Golden Eagle, a few more Tundra Swans and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. It was a good day for raptors, a total of seven!

~Submitted by Sarah Shippen

Canada Goose	34
Tundra Swan	18
Gadwall	2
Eurasian Wigeon	1
American Wigeon	24
Mallard	36
Northern Pintail	280
Green-winged Teal	24
Ring-necked Duck	4
Pied-billed Grebe	1
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pige)	1
American Coot	4
Killdeer	2
Golden Eagle	1
Northern Harrier	4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Bald Eagle	1
Red-tailed Hawk	1
Great Horned Owl	1
Northern Flicker	1
American Kestrel	1
Black-billed Magpie	2
Common Raven	2
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1
Dark-eyed Junco	4
Spotted Towhee	1
Western Meadowlark	1
Red-winged Blackbird	24
<hr/> 29 species	

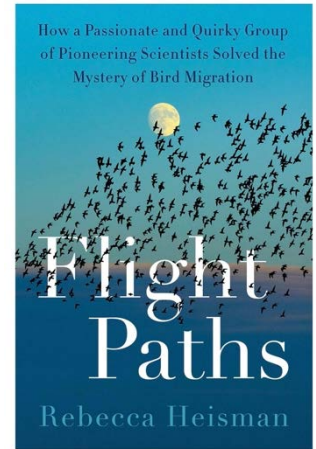


Birding at the Headquarters Pond, photo: Sarah Shippen



Golden Eagle at Lateral C, photo: Sarah Shippen

**Did you know that hundreds of thousands of birds pass overhead through Yakima County each night during Spring migration?** YVAS member, Kathy Howell, shares a link to [BirdCast.info](https://birdcast.info), a website sponsored by The Cornell Lab and Colorado State University. Satellite images are used to track migrating birds with information searchable by county. Peak migration here is the month of May, check it out! Want to learn more about bird migration? Eastern Washington author Rebecca Heisman has a new book, *Flight Paths-How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration*. The more we learn about birds, the more we realize how amazing they truly are.



Northern Shrike, photo: Sarah Shippen

## Membership - Joy McKinney

### Welcome new members!

Jennifer Parsons, Yakima  
Theresa Mottet, Yakima

### Thanks for renewing your membership!

Sandra Hulteen, Christopher and Nancy Condie,  
Connie Estep, Marjorie Peters, Margarita and Fred  
Lopez, Deb Brown, Ron Rabin, Kerry Turley, Peggy  
Schwartzengerger, Cheryl Meenach, Jennie Hodge,  
Dotty Armstrong and Vera Backstrom, Joy McKinney,  
Bill Drenguis

## Conservation

Planning is underway to protect the Sunnyside Wildlife Area. Water supply to this important wetland will be impacted by future required upgrades to the City of Grandview water treatment plant. The ponds have been in place for more than 70 years and this wetland habitat is home to numerous migrating and nesting waterfowl. Recent concerns by the Department of Ecology about the potential for ground water contamination from the pond treatment method have resulted in a requirement to upgrade treatment to a mechanical method for processing waste. Without additional mitigations the upgrade will eliminate the water supply to the ponds. The City engineering team has a proposed solution involving an additional pump and piping system and is taking the lead finding support for this additional work. They have brought together a group of concerned agencies to study the problem and develop funding to protect this habitat. Members of YVAS have been included in the planning meetings and we look forward to working in collaboration with other concerned public and private agencies to help protect this important wetland area. This project is in early stages; there will be more information as it progresses.



# Meet Your Board

Please consider joining the Board, we would like to meet you!

President	Sarah Shippen
Vice President	Volunteer needed!
Secretary	Deborah Severtson-Coffin
Treasurer	Rich Mathieu
Director	Bill Drenguis
Bluebird Trail	Karen Zook
Newsletter Chair- <i>volunteer needed</i>	Interim: Sarah Shippen & Gene Miliczky
Conservation - <i>volunteer needed</i>	
Education Chair- <i>volunteer needed</i>	
Field Trips Chair	Kerry Turley & Bill Drenguis
Director/Programs	Sandra Hulteen
Membership Chair	Joy McKinney
Toppenish Refuge Volunteer	Kerry Turley
Toppenish CBC	Volunteer needed
Yakima CBC	Scott Downes
Yakima Migration Count	Scott Downes
Arboretum Bird Blind	Kathy and Joe Howell
Website Administrator	Mary Lane



American Goldfinch eating pollen from Pussy Willow catkin, photo: Sarah Shippen

## To Contact YVAS

YVAS Information: [info@yakimaaudubon.org](mailto:info@yakimaaudubon.org)  
 Newsletter  
 content: [newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@yakimaaudubon.org)  
 Bird questions: [birds@yakimaaudubon.org](mailto:birds@yakimaaudubon.org)  
 Donations: [donations@yakimaaudubon.org](mailto:donations@yakimaaudubon.org)

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