I guess we expected a bluebird season pretty much like 2005, but have been surprised – whether delighted, puzzled or grieved – by this year’s events. We launched a second season checking 90-some bird boxes around the valley, trying to visit each box bi-weekly to monitor the nesting season and its big events – nesting, laying, hatching and fledging of the chicks – from May to August. Our three trails take us along the southwest valley canal near Robinson or Watt Canyons where we walk along the LT Murray elk fence, or by car to Hayward and Bettas roads in the northwest valley, a mix of sage-steppe and grassy farmland. Personal events, work and illness intruding halfway through June made us miss 7 great weeks of fledging and the start of a second brood for many bluebird pairs. So here we are in early August, picking up the pieces by peering into deserted nestboxes and trying to fathom what’s been going on in there.

Last year Mountain and Western bluebirds sorted themselves out on opposite sides of the valley, Western BBs sharing the canal with swallows, and Mountain BBs choosing the sagey uplands. This year it was fun to see some Mountains move in along the canal, and Westerns and Mountains pretty much sharing the farmland side by side on Bettas road.

NEXT MEETING

Falcons, Hawks and Accipiters

The speaker will be Bud Anderson from the Falcon Research Group.

DATE
THURSDAY Sept 21th
PLACE
ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL
TIME
7:00 PM
ROOM 131 - Watch for signs

Over the last five years, volunteers from the Falcon Research Group have been studying the fall migration of raptors along the Pacific Flyway. A banding station has been established on Entiat ridge. There is a field trip planned for the following Saturday to the banding station. See the field trip column for more information.

Bud will also talk on urban Peregrine Falcons. If you remember Bell and Stewart from the Washington Mutual Bank tower, well her young and others have done quite well on Seattle, Tacoma and Spokane’s urban cliffs. As well as many other cities.

Recently discovered, Long-billed Hawk Syndrome is another issue that Bud and the FRG have been studying. The abnormal growth of the beak can lead to starvation. Bud will let us all know how we can help them to better understand and combat this problem.

All Audubon meetings and field trips are open to the public, so feel free to come and meet us with us. Stay after the meeting for juice, treats and conversation.
KAS Field Trips

September 2nd: First Saturday BirdWalk at Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park. Meet at 8:00 AM at the bridge parking lot. Bring optics, field guides, and clothes for the season. Cricket has graciously agreed to guide this walk of about 2 to 3 hours on uneven ground. The birds are already migrating so there should a good variety of species. (This week we have had Western Tanagers in winter plumage, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and an Olive-sided Flycatcher, at our home.)

September 23rd: Falcon Research Group (Sept. program) has offered KAS to join them on their winter migration count at Entiat Ridge north of Leavenworth. For details call 933-1558.

October 7th: First Saturday BirdWalk: See above for details.

ART! ART! ART at the Clymer Museum!

In the month of October, the Clymer Museum in Ellensburg has scheduled a bird and wildlife art display titled ‘A Walk on the Wild Side’. Several artists will be in attendance and KAS will be the sponsor of that show. Some of our members will have a few works on display accompanied by a little history on John James Audubon, the National Audubon Society, and KAS. One member will have some small paintings for sale. Each of you are to receive an invitation to the opening show we will be hosting on Friday evening, October 6th--and we hope you will attend. (A reminder will appear in the October Hooter.)

Field Trip report

Saturday, August 5, birdwalk
8 people attended, 5 Audubon members and 3 guests. The weather was warm and the winds calm.

We saw the following birds going up the road:
Blackcap Chickadees Killdeer
Western Wood Peewee Robins
Song Sparrows Kestrel
Flicker Mourning Dove
American Goldfinch Crow or Raven (far off)
Belted Kingfisher

On the lake: Pied billed Grebe

On the trail back through the wood lot we saw:
Barn Swallows
Downy Woodpecker & very young chick
Osprey Western Tanager
Cedar Waxwing Great Blue Heron
Spotted Sandpiper Warbling Vireo
Starlings Common Night-hawks
Warbler California Quail

Thanks to Jan Demorest and Steve Moore, for Identifying the Warbling Vireo
Gerry Sorenson

Other things to do

MORRO BAY, CALIFORNIA – Come to where the birds are and join Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) for our 11th Annual Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival. Located on California’s scenic Central Coast, Morro Bay is an important stop on the Pacific Flyway and one of the country’s pre-eminent birding spots. The area is recognized worldwide for its diversity of both resident and wintering birds, and at last year’s festival, over 200 species of birds were identified!

The Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival is sponsored by MCAS and gives you the chance to join local and national birding experts on a variety of field trips and workshops. Field trip group sizes are limited to maximize spotting and identification opportunities. The Festival also offers workshops aimed at sharpening your birding skills, as well as evening programs with outstanding speakers.

For more information about the Festival, check out our new website at www.morrobaybirdfestival.org, or call (805) 772-4677. You can request that your name be added to the mailing list for our 2007 brochure, or register online. Both the brochure and online registration will be available in October 2006. The registration deadline is January 4, 2007 and early signups are encouraged as the most popular events fill up quickly.
Each August Kittitas Audubon is requested by Audubon Washington through National Audubon to submit an annual report. Ours has just been sent and I thought you may like to know of the many accomplishments throughout the past year.

Kittitas Audubon is one of the smallest of 27 chapters in Washington State with 150 members (19 more than last year) of which 38 are local chapter members not wishing to receive the Audubon magazine. Of the remainder some are members only because they wish to receive the Audubon magazine, with the balance being people who hold both local and national memberships. Being a non-profit organization means all of our activities are planned and carried to fruition by volunteers. And our volunteers have done a marvelous job!!!

During the fiscal year 7/1/05 to 6/30/06 twelve newsletters, the Hooter, were published, with ten produced on-line electronically. Twenty-four field trips were offered, including 12 First Saturday Bird-Walks and one four-day trip to SW Washington. Eight programs were presented to the public and each was attended by 25 to 40 people. Some of those programs were given by KAS members while others were by professionals in their field. Statistical counts for citizen science programs on a national level were done by many members for the Thanksgiving Bird Count in November, the Christmas Bird Count in December, the Great Backyard Bird Count in February, and the Cornell Feeder Count. Data is collected from throughout the country to try to determine species trends and note diminishing populations.

In the area of education Audubon Adventure monthly publications were supplied to five teachers who incorporate natural habitat awareness in their classrooms. A KAS interactive display was provided at two KEEN events, The Bubble Planetarium and Get Intimate with the Shrub-Steppe. A member was a naturalist for a three day Girl Scout Horse Camp, as well as, a guide for families involved in an annual Kittitas Historical Museum program. Another member continues to work with a third grade class providing expertise and materials in setting up a bird feeding station outside its classroom window. Still other members have given presentations with associated field trips to a high school class and an elementary class. Additionally, our first Bird Identification Class was successfully conducted this spring with an attendance of twenty-one participants. And seven members continue to be involved with the maintenance and information signage of the USFS Discovery Trail in the Blewett Pass area.

Publicity is a constant duty and many notices and numerous reportings for all meetings, field trips, and several special events, have appeared in the Daily Record, the Upper County Tribune, and special flyers issued by those publications. Our KAS website was re-designed to give more information about our chapter.

The Bluebird Trail program has been greatly expanded. Lumber donated by an individual allows numerous bird houses, feeders and bat houses to be built by members. Two members compiled the year’s statistics on fledglings, always noting what is successful—or how we might improve.

Stylish hats were designed and sold by another member to note our hobby/concern for the avian species. Also, this year our financial situation was rearranged to be easily understood, and that member assisted another to compile all this data to submit the annual report mentioned above.

Conservation issues are always present and with diminishing habitat, we could use a thousand people doing this work, but we had individuals at testimonial hearings asking for denial regarding the Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project because of the bird migratory flyway in that area, as well as, the effects wind towers appear to be having on the deaths of bats. A member is also on the steering committee for the I-90 expansion concerning wildlife crossings to assure species connectivity. The Northern Spotted Owl issue not only has a member on the NSO Caucus WA team, but has involved written and verbal testimonials at hearings in both Olympia and Yakima by additional members. These issues, the Kittitas County Comprehensive Plan, and the ‘defeat I-933’ campaign, continue to keep several members ‘on their toes’.

What else? I am sure I have not remembered all the projects, but I am so thankful to you all who have donated time to help on the accomplishments we have completed. You are ‘top drawer’ terrific!! Thank you!! Thank you!!
Goria Baldi

P.S. Next year’s projects are coming!
CLARK’S NUTCRACKER

Jim Briggs

It is very appropriate to designate Clark’s Nutcracker as the Bird of the Month during the Bi-centennial of the epic journey of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It is interesting to note that the Clark’s nutcracker is the only species named after William Clark, the co-leader of the expedition and the Lewis woodpecker is the only one named after Lewis. They were both first observed in the Rocky Mountains on the outbound leg of the journey. Both names were bestowed by the prominent ornithologist, Alexander Wilson. Wilson’s original sketches of both birds, based on Lewis’ descriptions, are still on display in the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

The Clark’s nutcracker is an important member of the family Corvidae, the jays and crows. It somewhat resembles the gray jay but has a much larger and more powerful bill which it uses, not to crack nuts, but rather to glean seeds from the cones of high altitude pine trees. In the Rockies this includes the pinyon and limber pines and in the Cascades and Sierras, mainly the whitebark pine.

During the late summer and fall the nutcracker collects and caches thousands of pine seeds in the ground on south-facing slopes. It utilizes a unique throat pouch beneath its tongue and can carry dozens of seeds at one time. Then it uses these caches to feed throughout the winter. Apparently snowdrifts are not a problem, they just dig through them.

Naturally they can’t retrieve all the seeds they bury and for that reason they may be responsible for “planting” new stands of pine trees. Over time a mutualistic relationship has developed between the nutcracker and its primary pine tree in the Cascades, the whitebark. Michelle Ferenze, a graduate student at Utah State University, explains it like this: “Neither species can do without the other, and they both benefit each other.” Ferenze is studying the relationship in the Naches Ranger District of the Wenatchee National Forest.

The study is being conducted because the whitebark pine populations are declining due to mountain pine beetle outbreaks and blister rust infections. The whitebark is a significant high altitude species in our area above the aspens, Douglas fir and subalpine fir, finally petering out at timberline. Robin Shoal, an ecologist with the Olympic National Forest, says the trees play a critical role in retaining the snowpack that is so important for water production for the summer.

So the relationship between the Clark’s nutcracker and the whitebark pine is important for orchardists, kayakers and non-bottled water drinkers. The Forest Service biologists would appreciate reports of Clark’s nutcracker sightings. Just contact them at either the Naches or Cle Elum District offices.

Photo credit—Marrianne Gordon.
Wrens were a problem last year at Robinson and on Bettas road. House wrens are aggressive nesters and the male will oust bluebirds by pecking and ejecting eggs from the box – or worse. Yakima Valley Audubon also reported for the Vredenburgh bluebird trail (along Umptanum road) that 2005 was “the year of the wren”. Lucky for the BBs, the male wrens weren’t much in evidence this year – but then: sparrows invaded Bettas road. House sparrows took up in one box after another, moving outward from farmhouses, and we retaliated by discarding or piercing their eggs – acts (quite legal, by the way, for sparrows) that don’t always permanently discourage mama sparrow. On our final August check, there were four sparrow nests in our boxes including two with active eggs or chicks. Subdivision and new construction on Bettas road place the bluebird trail out there at risk if sparrows continue to move in aggressively in future years. Another stealthy predator moved into Bettas road: weasels, we think, are helping themselves to midnight treats. In 2005, a box on a telephone pole got raided; we installed a sheet metal baffle (stovepipe) in time to help some mountain BBs raise a successful late-season brood. This year we got hit several times – a mess of gray feathers inside and a trail of gray down out the door and away, was what we found at 4 bluebird nests. Given the warning, we can deal with this problem: make the box inaccessible to the nimble fellows – a 7-inch shorttail weasel can climb a wood post and squirm into the 1 7/16” entry hole. That means installing more tin baffles or switching the boxes to metal posts that the carnivorous rascals can’t climb. Some boxes present a head-scratching mystery when the door is lifted. On Hayward hill, a two-layer tree swallow nest contained broken bluebird eggs below, swallow eggs above, and a suspicious-looking (weasel?) fecal pellet but no dead birds – did someone leave in time and never come back? At a nearby box, a thin layer of grass tufts and fur had a beautiful egg with linear brown streaks. Broken eggs and a trace of bird lime around complicate the picture, but the nest and egg suggest to us that an ash-throated flycatcher (rare here!) made a home for a spell.

The tree swallows had a pretty good summer. In the first weeks of May, like last year, they filled up the vacant boxes around the bluebirds. They moved in in greater numbers this year, and all at about the same time. Dozens began laying eggs around May 22-24, and the clutches hatched within days of each other. Just as they seem to return to Kittitas Valley on April 20 (did we read this in The Hooter?), they also synchronize their nesting. Then bad luck struck. Opening lids in August, we began to notice a pattern that the swallows had unusual mortality this season: 1 to 5 nestlings dead in many nests. Even so, we found that in many nests one or more nestlings survived and fledged (clutch size minus the unhatched eggs and skeletons found.) We think the heat wave of late June killed many swallow babies but tough little survivors fledged from most boxes. The bluebirds don’t seem to have been affected much. Despite the mortality, numbers of new fledglings are reassuring. At Watt Canyon: 28+ WBBs, 5+ MBBs, 67 swallows; at Rattlesnake (north from Watt): 11+ WBBs and 48 swallows; at Robinson Canyon trail: 20+ WBBs, 4+ MBBs, 23+ swallows; and on Hayward/Bettas: 10+ WBBs, 39+ MBBs and 4 swallows. And the grand totals: 69 WBBs, 48 MBBs, 142 swallows. (All BB numbers could be upped 50%, since many fledged two broods and we missed it!). In all, the birds had a pretty respectable showing and seemed “to get along without us very well” (as the old song laments) although we sure missed checking up on them every week or two, and we’d rather not be left with all those mysteries! It’s definitely the surprises that sustain our interest in getting out there and having another look.

Steve Moore and Jan Demorest
What I (we) did on my (our) summer vacation

Simply put we found two new species for us and we weren't even looking. The first we were just out walking the dog in Beth’s hometown (Riverton, WY) and realized that all the "mourning doves" we were seeing were really Eurasian Collared Doves that are taking the country by storm. About the same time Beth was reading back issues of the local paper and found a local columnist (non-birder) with nearly all her bird facts wrong including the collared dove id. The letter-to-the-editor that Beth wrote was published and acknowledged by the columnist.

The second sighting was much more exciting. We were mountain biking near our cabin in Ryan Park, WY when a large striped hawk flew from the ground in the moderately dense forest and landed in the top of nearby tree. We had binos but no bird book. We studied the field marks and memorized the call and the answer from a second bird that we couldn't see. Our best guess was a Northern Goshawk just based on habitat and size. Back at the cabin we poured over Sibley and determined that a juvenile goshawk was a possibility. The confirmation was the call. Just before leaving home Beth purchased an iPod and loaded it with BirdPod software. The juvenile Northern Goshawk begging call was identical to the call we memorized. We credit the ID to the BirdPod.

We will have the BirdPod at meetings this fall. Feel free to ask us for a demo. And don’t forget to ask Craig about flying his plane to Oshkosh.

Beth Rogers and Craig Johnson

Just say NO to I-933

It was mentioned in the presidents message last month but it is so important that it must be mentioned again, and again! Please be aware of this initiative in the November election which supporters have labeled as the 'Property Fairness Act'. Indeed it is an attack aimed at destroying land use planning, zoning, the Growth Management Act, and virtually all environmental protection laws in the state of Washington. You are urged to check the website at www.protectcommunities.org. Zoning would essentially cease to exist as a way of planning and protecting our neighborhoods.

One effect: Washington’s Forest Practices regulations protect the states 100,000 miles of rivers and streams from erosion and maintain cool, clean water for salmon and other fish and wildlife. I-933 would force the state to pay lumber companies for the value of the trees left along the banks or allow them to cut these trees regardless of the impacts on fish, wildlife (our Northern Spotted Owl) or flooding. Please tell all your friends to Vote No on I-933!!

ACOW (Audubon Council of Washington
Lake Samish, Bellingham, October 6, 7 & 8

North Cascades Audubon is hosting the Fall Audubon Council Of Washington, emphasizing “Local Partnerships”, at Camp Lutherwood 3 miles south of Bellingham, just off I-5. The camp is is on 100 plus wooded acres between the west end of Lake Samish and Chuckanut Mountain.

Camp Lutherwood has facilities for camping (tents and RVs but no hookups), open bunkhouses and shared rooms only. (All guests must supply their own bedding!) Excellent motels can be found 3 to 5 miles north in Bellingham. Please register early, as the camp needs final counts ten days in advance. Late registration fees will be assessed after September 15 and no registrations can be accepted after September 25.
For more information on programs and field trip or to register please go to www.northcascadesaudubon.org/php/index.php?acow.

Please join us for a unique experience on beautiful Lake Samish and get connected with your Audubon partners.
VOTING BOARD MEMBERS

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CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

______Kittitas Audubon Membership includes a subscription to the monthly Hooter, and the opportunity to support local activities for $20.00 per year.

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DONATIONS are appreciated and give you the opportunity to further support and fund KAS Chapter activities. If you have a National Audubon membership, donations are especially important since KAS no longer receives a portion of your National Membership dues to defray cost for the Hooter.

$15.00 American Goldfinch  $100.00 Great Blue Heron
$50.00 Red-tailed Hawk  Other - Donations in any amount are appreciated

Make check payable to Kittitas Audubon Society

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Membership forms are also available on our Web site Kittitasaudubon.org.
Webmaster – Mark Whitesell  Email markwhitesell@hotmail.com
WISE OWL TRIVIA

1. How can you keep shorttail weasels out of your bird houses?
2. Who named the Clarks Nutcracker? - trick question (it wasn’t Clark)
3. How many teachers have participated in the Audubon Adventures this year?
4. Where are you going to be on October 6th?
5. Bonus Bird Trivia Question. What is the name of the pouch the Clarks Nutcracker uses to transport seed?

The mission of Kittitas Audubon Society is to develop an appreciation of nature through education and conservation, with a focus on birds. The goal for KAS is a vibrant active organization recognized in Kittitas county.