Get ready to hop, soar, swim, skip, or slither your way to the 9th annual Get Intimate with the Shrub-Steppe (GISS)! Join KEEN along with co-sponsor Y-ELF, (Yakima Environmental Learning Foundation) for a full day of fun exploration of the unique shrub-steppe environment. Held at the base of Umtanum Canyon, participants are surrounded on all sides by a range of outdoor education events including field trips, exhibits, hands-on activities, and possibly a wildlife sighting or two.

GISS provides a chance for the whole family to explore one of the unique ecosystems of Kittitas County. Kids can participate in a wide variety of hands-on activities and crafts like fish print making, nature scavenger hunts, and a chance to get down and dirty exploring the aquatic life of the Yakima River.

From 9am-2pm there will be a series of guided field trips that in past years have included everything from bird watching, ‘snake sneaking’, beaver tales, geology, native plants, and homesteads. Also on hand will be a wide variety of hands-on exhibitors such as the Wildlife Bridges Coalition and the USDA Forest Service that will help participants gain a fuller understand of the amazing ecosystems of Kittitas County.

**NEXT MEETING**

**Challenges and Opportunities in Alaska**

**DATE** THURSDAY 5/15/2008  **TIME** 7:00 PM

**PLACE** ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL ROOM - 232

Alaska is the largest of our states, encompassing more than 600,000 sq. miles of rugged mountains, grinding glaciers, endless tundra, diverse temperate rainforest, and winding coast lines. From the Spectacled Eider and Yellow-billed Loon found in America’s Arctic to the Black Oystercatcher and the Kittlitz’s Murrelet found on the southern coastline, Alaska’s birdlife diversity is astounding. Alaska also has an abundance of other iconic wildlife species including grizzlies, caribou, Bald Eagles, humpback whales and wolves, many of which are endangered elsewhere. The current administration and some members of congress have advocated vastly accelerating the extraction of oil, gas, and mineral deposits in this important ecological area. Audubon seeks a balance between resource extraction and protecting internationally critical habitat.

Taldi Walter joined the National Audubon Society’s Public Policy Office in Washington DC as the Alaska Outreach Coordinator, after the completion of her Masters degree in Biology. Taldi’s research took her to Brazil were she studied the exotic invasive plant species, Lonicera japonica. During her first year with National Audubon, Taldi traveled throughout the country taking Audubon members on a virtual tour to some of Alaska’s most stunning natural treasures through her multimedia presentation focused on top Alaska conservation issues. Taldi will present an informative slideshow showcasing some of the important natural areas and brilliant birds found in wild Alaska. The presentation will explore some of Alaska’s natural treasures set aside decades ago for the benefit of wildlife and the American public. She will highlight the imminent and compelling challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Tongass National Forest, Chugach National Forest, and National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

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

To contact the editors or to submit articles.
Email kashooter@kittitasaudubon.org. Please use Cricket at the beginning of the subject line
Or Email Jan Demorest at bobcat@kvalley.com
KAS Field Trips

May 3rd  First Saturday BirdWalk at Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park – 8:00 AM

Meet at the bridge parking lot. About a two and a half hour walk on uneven ground. Great for local birds. Bring a friend, optics, and we will find birds. Tom Gauron is the leader this month.

May 17 & 18th  Klickitat River country (overnight) detail & sign up. Limited space - Jan & Steve 509-933-1179


June 7th  First Saturday BirdWalk Irene Rinehart Park – 8:00AM Bridge parking lot. Details above.

June 8th  Cle Elum/Roslyn Area Warblers – James Begley USFS - 8:00AM. For details & sign up call Jeb 509-933-1338

Field Trip report

FIRST SATURDAY BIRDWALK.

Well, it is spring in Ellensburg! And spring brings the largest numbers of birders to First Saturday BirdWalk. On April 5th there were twenty-four, including three young children. We were also fortunate to have the artist, Ed Newbold, who is doing the graphics for our Central Washington Bird Trail, and Christi Norman from Audubon Washington join us. Spring also brings our typical Ellensburg breeze, and what began as a sunny morning turned a little chilly later in the walk. However, we had a great time spotting 30 species, while locating old nests to examine with the children.

Lots of Downy Woodpeckers, one diligently pecking a hole while a Flicker chipped away at his hole two feet away. The Tree Swallows are back and we hope to find them occupying our KAS bird houses on May’s BirdWalk. Raptors included a Bald Eagle, an Osprey, a Cooper’s Hawk, and a Northern Harrier. Two species not often seen were the Says Phoebe and the Varied Thrush. Of course, there is always lots of chatter and good times among the BirdWalk birdwatchers.

WEST ELLensburg PARK WORK PARTY

On Saturday, May 12th, a party of nineteen hardy workers gathered for the beginning of a huge project, that of rehabilitating a large area in West Ellensburg Park into an area for wildlife and birds. The natural area lies west of the soccer fields and is presently reached by walking along the north edge of the soccer fields, and crossing the culvert bridge to the pond area. The natural area is about twenty acres and will connect with approximately a forty acre project to the west which will re-route Reecer Creek into a natural riparian area with holding ponds for salmon release. When completed, it is hoped that the two combined areas of approximately 70 acres will serve as a restored habitat area for wildlife, birds, and people to enjoy.

Everybody was anxious to begin with shovels, hammers, rakes and tools in hand. Twenty-six plants went into the ground (15 black cottonwood and 11 woods rose). Six swallow boxes and one bat box were placed. Measuring pipes were placed in the ponds to determine the possible rise and fall of the water level in relation to irrigation time and seasons of the year. Large pieces of refuse and litter were collected and piled for disposal by the city. Since this was our first work party, we also took time to meander around the entire area looking at the soils, ponds, vegetation (including lots of weeds), and the remnants of the old cattle weigh-
station, gathering ideas for our master plan. The day was pleasant and we were finished by noon. The only concern remaining, that of a watering schedule for the new plantings, is being done by the volunteers on a 2/3 day schedule.

Besides planning the entire area, there are specific talents, or individuals with knowledge, needed. Topics include restoration of the cultural fences/weigh-station/former ranch, development of butterfly/moth areas, designing interpretive information posters or signs, the building of a wildlife blind, grant writing, as well as topics we have not thought of yet. We have individuals with plant expertise, photography (or a record of recovery), and computer designing. We will not be meeting for the next three weeks, but if you are one that would definitely like to be involved, send an email to Gloria Baldi at baldi@kvalley.com and it is guaranteed you will be called.

GB

THINK TWICE ABOUT RED DYE IN HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS

It is very difficult to convince the successful feeder of hummingbirds that the red dye in the nectar is NOT necessary to attract the little charmers. For years (probably since the 1976 banning of Red Dye No. 2 in the United States) there has been some question as to the safety of consuming ANY of the red dye by man or beast. Two recent articles seem to be at odds about this.

The April 2008 HOOTER has an article entitled "Top 5 Bird Feeding Myths". It states that we don't have any scientific proof that the dye may be harmful. It also classifies it as one of those "innocent until proven guilty things". One is left with the impression that it is okay to keep using red dye.

The magazine WILDBIRD May/June 2008 has an article entitled "Seeing RED Over Dye". It states that hummingbird experts have long discouraged the use of dye in nectar as unnatural and unnecessary.

Studies have shown that synthetic dyes have adverse effects on humans, lab animals, and even cell cultures. A university in Japan found Red No. 40, in very low doses, damaged the DNA of rats. Some hummers drink nectar two and a half times their weight. That would equal 10 times more than the rats were given. It is interesting to note that Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland have all banned Red No. 40, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved it over twenty years ago.

My feeling is that we should "err" on the side of caution. Just tie a big red ribbon 'round the old bird feeder.

PEGGY SCHNEBLY

*Ed note
I have never used dye and get great numbers of Hummingbirds and this photo from a Hummingbird garden in Montverde Costa Rica shows 3 of the dozen species that mob the undyed feeders.

Female Green Breasted Mango in back
Female White Necked Jacobin front left
Female Violet-Crowned Woodnymph front right
ID's are my best estimate — If I am wrong, please feel free to correct me.
BACKYARD WILDLIFE HABITATS

Now that you have provided food * provided housing * provided shelter * provided water and are gardening sustainably it is time to certify it with the National Wildlife Federation. Do it today and enjoy these great benefits!

A PERSONALIZED CERTIFICATE that recognizes your NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat™.

FREE NWF MEMBERSHIP which includes a full year’s subscription to the award-winning National Wildlife® magazine.

FREE SUBSCRIPTION to the quarterly e-newsletter, Habitats, full of wonderful tips and information on gardening and attracting wildlife.

YOUR NAME LISTED in NWF’s National Registry of certified habitats to recognize all you’ve done for wildlife.

All for just $15!

Go online to https://secure.nwf.org/backyard/certify.cfm?campaignid=WH08CPCRD

A “TWO-FER” DEAL
Certified Wildlife Habitat Partners

Like the National Wildlife Federation, several states also encourage the public to garden for wildlife and protect habitat. They have each partnered with the National Wildlife Federation so that you can certify your yard through "one-stop-shopping." You get the benefits of two habitat programs while doing the paperwork for one! Washington is one of only three states that offer partnership certifications. The other two are North Carolina and Texas.

Learn more about the benefits of certifying your yard with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/backyard/

To certify with this partner and NWF, it will cost $15 to certify with the National Wildlife Federation, and there will be an additional fee of $5 for the partner.

Registering with Washington is worthwhile. The registration packet contains information geared toward our specific habitat types, unlike NWF which has to be more general. You also get a permanent sign to post where all can see it.

Request the packet for the Eastside (East of Cascades Ridge) from
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program
2315 North Discovery Place
Spokane Valley, WA 99216-1566

The Backyard Sanctuary Packet contains:
* A pamphlet on Landscaping for Wildlife which tells you how to develop a plan, how to best locate your plants, how to arrange them, what height plants you should consider and finally, how to implement your landscape plan.
* A list of plants to attract birds specific to your area. Learn about the sun, soil, and water requirements and attractive features of each plant to help you decide which are best for your landscape.
* How to best feed birds, including information on the right kinds of seeds and feeders.
* The kinds of birds most commonly found in your backyard at different times of the year, along with natural history information for each bird.
* Tips for attracting hummingbirds. Including a list of the best plants and the use of feeders.
* Tips for attracting butterflies, including a list of the best plants and flowering times.
* How to design and make bird houses for wrens, chickadees, and other cavity-nesting birds.
* A list of references for more information on feeding, housing, landscaping, and other activities devoted to your backyard sanctuary.
* An application form to enroll your yard as an official backyard sanctuary. When you enroll you will receive an outdoor sign and a signed certificate.
* Much more!!!

You can register separately (I have) but if you go through the NWF website you can do both with one application.

Marianne Gordon
20th Anniversary of Bluebird Trails in Kittitas County!

A "Bluebird trail" is simply a series of nest boxes, of suitable dimensions for bluebirds, along a route: one can walk, drive, even ride a horse, from one box to the next to clean out boxes, then watch and record major bluebird life events during the nesting season (in our county, April to early August).

There are a dozen trails around the county, totaling more than 300 nest boxes. 2008 is the 20-year anniversary, more or less, of this heritage. Around 1988, Kittitas birders began hanging literally hundreds of boxes, many tacked together assembly-line style by Paul Sollie, from fence posts and trees, in places where bluebirds were known (or hoped) to frequent. Paul’s boxes are still in use today, patched and repaired, and identified by their grooved plywood roofs. Other generations of boxes have been added over the years – by builders unknown to us – at places like Colockum road and east Old Vantage Highway. In many areas, boxes have succumbed to weather, woodpeckers, rusty nails, cracked wood, and bullets, reducing the available real estate. Since 2005, Tom Gauron, has generously opened his fine woodworking shop (on his Monday afternoon off work!) to KAS members who volunteer to construct new nestboxes.

### Kittitas County Bluebird Trails

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trail</th>
<th>Monitors</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th># boxes</th>
<th>Blue-birds</th>
<th>Status 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vantage Highway</td>
<td>T. Gauron</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>MBB</td>
<td>Many MBBs; repairs, predator control &amp; new boxes in 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilomene</td>
<td>T. Gauron</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>MBB</td>
<td>Inactive; need to inspect &amp; maintain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colockum Road</td>
<td>Harris, Mee</td>
<td></td>
<td>33+</td>
<td>MBB</td>
<td>Inactive; predators; attrition from vandals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribou Canyon</td>
<td>J &amp; G Bald, P. Schmedly</td>
<td>thru 2008</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>MBB</td>
<td>Many MBBs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayward + Bettas Rd</td>
<td>Demorest, Moore, Mrey, Knucke</td>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>MBB</td>
<td>Many MBBs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manastash Ridge</td>
<td>C Hawkin</td>
<td>1988-2008</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>WBB</td>
<td>About 15% bluebirds; lots of wrens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watt Canyon</td>
<td>Demorest, Moore</td>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>About 20% bluebirds; many swallows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson Canyon</td>
<td>Demorest, Moore</td>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>About 20% bluebirds; many swallows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taneum Meadows</td>
<td>M Gordon</td>
<td>1988-1999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>WBB</td>
<td>Maintenance needed; 27 boxes originally; few bluebirds now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elk Heights</td>
<td>M Gordon</td>
<td>1988-2008</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>MBB</td>
<td>Most boxes active; 60% bluebirds, some swallows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swauk Prairie</td>
<td>D MacRae</td>
<td>1992-2008</td>
<td>18+</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>About 20% bluebirds; many swallows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the “charter-member” trail enthusiasts are still active, and contributed their records to help create this report. Our hope is to inspire a new generation of nestbox monitors who will eventually take up the tradition and help maintain and extend these trails. Starting from 2005, it’s now become our springtime recreation and passion; the challenges and questions keep us coming back for more.

**Attracting more Western bluebirds.**

Here’s an example from our experience: the Watt and Robinson trails, paralleling an irrigation canal, evidently aren’t ideal Western bluebird habitat – only 20-25% of the boxes are taken by bluebirds who arrive first each year – whereas the late-arriving tree swallows flock to these boxes. On the other hand, consider Yakima County’s Vredenburgh trail, (it actually extends into Kittitas Co. on (cont. page 6)
Mountain bluebirds love the sage. The experience of trail monitors over the years shows that Mountain bluebirds do well in Kittitas County. The trails that are in sage-steppe, such as Hayward Hill and Vantage Highway, abound with these bright blue birds as early as late February. Their presence is obvious enough that the interested public is aware of bluebirds in these areas – we’ve met people looking for them up on Hayward Hill. Nestboxes are the reason, since there are no natural cavities (in trees) available in sage terrain. By adapting to human-placed boxes, Mountain bluebirds extend their range to areas that are warmer earlier in the year. They also are occupying a habitat where they don’t have to confront house wrens, aggressive nesting competitors which often destroy bluebird nests in brushy Ponderosa country.

Vantage trail: a future showpiece? Despite some neglect, broken boxes, and evidence of predators (a layer of blue feathers on the nest and weasel scat in the box!), the Vantage highway bluebird trail is resilient enough to keep attracting birds, year after year (the story is told in the discernable layers in the old nest. We call is nest stratigraphy!). We decided this spring that this was the next best trail to put effort into, so we have repaired old boxes, added new, and remounted some boxes on steel posts, to keep out the weasels. Look for them next time you drive to Gingko State Park. The 50-some boxes that are there now could be added to, visualizing a future time when the interested person can’t drive east without seeing bluebirds along the roadside. As locals and travelers drive along the Old Vantage Highway on sunny weekends, the Mtn. BB’s could in time become public relations advocates for our beautiful sage-steppe landscape.

Getting more “fledgies”. Another challenge that adds to the fun and creativity of bluebird monitoring is trying to improve the effectiveness of a trail over a number of years. This means increasing the numbers of fledgling bluebirds. Last year, 4 trails that we monitored fledged 173 bluebirds: 43 Western and 130 Mountain from 91 boxes. Sounds great, but remember that two of those trails only have 20% bluebird occupancy. Compare our results again to YVAS’s Vredenburgh trail and there is definitely room for improvement.

The chart shows the number of bluebird fledges per every 10 boxes, for each of four trails over several years. The Vredenburgh trail has had its problems with wrens and predation at various times, but manages to turn out 25-35 fledges per 10 boxes each year. Watt and Robinson are lower because of the

(continued on page 7)
high number of swallows. The Hayward and Bettas trails show the fondness of Mountain bluebirds for their sagey home, and numbers seem to be increasing! Increasing the effectiveness of a trail seems to depend on: first, being in the right habitat, and second, keeping the boxes well maintained and dealing with problems that crop up like predators and competing cavity nesters.

**Trials and Wonders ~** The curtain rises repeatedly on new dramas, sometimes sad:

- As people expand into open land, house sparrows encroach on bluebird territory! (We repeatedly throw out their nests and eggs). A pair of Westerns on Bettas Rd. managed to raise a brood last year in the midst of a sparrow threat; this year, sparrows are facing off with Mountains near the ranches on Vantage highway.

- As the woods grow up and fill in, bluebirds move out. Our contacts report that wrens gradually take over groups of boxes in the forest.

- Swallows at Watt Canyon are suffering an epidemic?! Over the last two years up to 50% of chicks died in the nest. We cleaned out and disinfected the boxes this spring, hoping to make a change in that trend.

- Ash-throated flycatchers have left clutches of their beautiful streaked eggs in fur nests at 3 places, but abandoned them. If we find another, we’ll put up a door with a larger entry hole.

- Bluebirds have personalities! One pair on Hayward Hill *always* came to harass us in the truck, landing on the mirrors, perching nearby, and just generally indicating that we were in the way. It’s their home, after all.

*Steve Moore & Jan Demorest  (photos by Steve or Jan)*

**Wenas Creek Mammoth Project**

*Mammoth as in fossil, not “huge”, although together both apply!!!!*

If you want to be part of the exciting mammoth excavation project you can help out at CWU on campus and/or visit the site in the Selah Valley this summer. Volunteers are needed in the laboratory to sift samples on Saturdays through June. Site opens in mid-June. Info at 963-2654 or email mammoth@cwu.edu.

**Digital Projector for KAS Programs**

Since most speakers for our general meetings use Power Point presentations, the Board is considering acquiring a digital projector. (We have been borrowing one for each program). The options are to purchase one (less than $1000) or find someone willing to donate one (any ideas?). Maybe a donation fund toward purchase? We’re accepting input on what kind is best. Anyone with any ideas about this can contact a board member or the editor.

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**BOARD MEMBERS**

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* NON VOTING VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

Webmaster – Mark Whitesell  Email markwhitesell@hotmail.com
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.

Old Mill Country Store, Ellensburg
Provides a discount on bird seed to KAS members and prints our county bird lists.