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# The Hooter

Kittitas Audubon Society

April 2009

## FEBRUARY PROGRAM : *"Machu Picchu & the Galapagos"*

Presented by **Dale Comstock**

**THURSDAY, April 16th @ 7:00 PM ~ ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL ~ ROOM 232**

Dale Comstock, Emeritus Professor, will show slides on traveling the Sacred Valley of the Incas from Cuzco to Machu Picchu along the Urubamba River in southeastern Peru. He will also include slides of the animals and birds of the Galapagos Islands 800 miles off the west coast of Ecuador.



Web Photo

**All Audubon meetings, held on the 3rd Thursday of each month, September through May (except December), are open to the public, so feel free to come and meet with us. A brief business session precedes the program. Stay afterwards for juice, treats and conversation.**

## 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Get Intimate with the Shrub-Steppe



On Saturday, May 2, 2009 get ready to hop, soar, swim, skip, or slither your way to the 10<sup>th</sup> annual *Get Intimate with the Shrub-Steppe* (GISS). Join the Kittitas Environmental Education Network (KEEN), along with co-sponsors Yakima Environmental Learning Foundation (Y-ELF) and Puget Sound Energy (PSE) for a full day of fun exploration of the unique shrub-steppe environment and the Yakima watershed. We have a new venue this year! Just 2 miles south of Ellensburg at the mouth of the Yakima River Canyon at Helen McCabe Park, participants can join in hands-on science learning, native plant restoration activities, learn about the nature center planned for the park, and join expert-guided field trips into the surrounding shrub-steppe habitat.

Rattlesnakes, sagebrush and salmon...oh my! GISS provides a chance for the whole family to explore one of the unique ecosystems that influence and interact with the Yakima watershed. Kids can participate in a wide variety of hands-on activities like plant pollination, nature scavenger hunts, and a chance to get "down and dirty" exploring the aquatic life of the Yakima River.

Our day starts at 7:30 am with bird watching led by local experts from the Kittitas and Yakima Audubon clubs. The main event begins at 9:00 am with a series of guided field trips and lectures that will include everything from snake sneaking to geology, from native plants to the rich history of the canyon. Also on hand will be a wide variety of hands-on exhibitors that will help participants gain an understanding of the amazing ecosystems of Kittitas County.

GISS 2009 promises to be an educationally and recreationally diverse event, with activities to satisfy the most curious and adventurous souls. **For more information and a full schedule of the day's events check KEEN's website [www.kittitasee.net](http://www.kittitasee.net).**

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**\*NON-VOTING VOLUNTEER POSITIONS**

*KAS Board Meetings are held at 4:30 PM on the 1st Thursday of each month on the third floor of the CWU Science Bldg, Room 301 (above the elephant desk). These meetings are open to the public and all Audubon members; please come and join in the discussions. Meetings adjourn by 6:00 or 6:30, after which we all go out for a sociable dinner ~ NO business discussion allowed!*

*“A wise old owl sat on an oak,  
The more he saw the less he spoke;  
The less he spoke the more he heard:  
Why aren't we like that wise old bird?”*

– Edward Hersey Richards (1874 – ?)

I was loading the car with our fishing gear and saw a couple of big birds flying in formation a half mile away, 400 -500 feet high. They were matching wingbeats and flying so close together that they must have occasionally touched. As they drew nearer I could see their white heads. Eagles!



Image from the Web - dkimages

Muriel ran back to the house to get the binoculars. Suddenly the birds turned toward each other, flared their wings, and pressed their breasts together. Their tails opened wide, two quick white dots against the sky. They hung there for a brief moment then dove and swooped into another, and then yet another “flare and press”. A few wing beats and they had regained their original altitude and I had my binoculars. They did two more series of flares and presses as I watched with ten power. It was aerial ballet, the arc of the two bodies perfectly matched, the heads thrown back showing the blaze of white coming down the neck and onto the breast, the huge tail opened to three times its normal width, brilliantly white. For a moment all I could see was white. It only took a second for them to stall and they fell off in absolute unison, gained flying speed in ten vertical feet and repeated their *pas de deux*. They flew off across the river and separated as they grew faint in the distance. That was a bit of a disappointment. I had envisioned a session of passionate loving after that display, but maybe it was just a blind date.

*Thanks to Jud Weaver for sharing this story!*

**The Hooter**

**The Hooter is the newsletter of the Kittitas Audubon Society, published monthly except for July. Submissions from readers are most welcome and encouraged. The editor reserves the right to edit for space, grammar, or suitability. Email text and/or photos to [bobcat@kvalley.com](mailto:bobcat@kvalley.com), or snail mail to Jan Demorest, Hooter Editor, 1009 North B Street, Ellensburg, WA 98926. Submissions need to be in by the 15th of the preceding month.**

**It's Election Time Again!**

KAS by-laws require that we ask for nominations for all officers/board members during the two months preceding elections which take place at the general membership meeting in May of each year. If you are interested in becoming more active in the workings of KAS, or know someone who you feel is capable and dedicated (and willing!), contact any of the officers/board members listed above right on this page.

**Birding By the Map - March 21st**

In the midst of rainy windy and cold weather, the 3rd Saturday of March was a beautiful sunny warm spring day. Fourteen birders set out for the "Birding by the Map" field trip to location #13 McDonald Pond, in the upper county. The pond was almost ice-free and full of waterfowl. The biggest thrills were Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Trumpeter Swans and Common Mergansers. On the wire above our heads both Tree Swallows and Violet-green Swallows perched, the first of the season. In the bushes right in front of where were standing, three Spotted Towhees squabbled over territory, but in the process gave us all multiple bare-eyed views.

Given the choice of a hike up the John Wayne trail or a visit to the NP ponds to fill out the day, the group voted to go to the ponds. Turned out to be a good choice ~ the sightings there included a river otter playing right along the bank. No swallows were here yet, but this will be a great place to see them in a few days (or weeks, depending on the weather!). Red-winged Blackbirds were busy claiming territory. On the far bank, a pair of Song Sparrows were singing and dashing from bush to bush. On the water were a pair of Hooded Mergansers, a bright & beautiful but shy Wood Duck, a flotilla of male & female Buffleheads, and at least two male Barrow's Goldeneyes with a few females.

To finish out the day we went up the road to see if we could locate the Pileated Woodpecker who is a regular in the area. No luck on that search, but on our way back out, a pair of Western Bluebirds caught us. While watching them, Beth Rogers

spotted a Pygmy Nuthatch ~ exiting news to yours truly. Once I jumped out of the car to get a better view, everyone got out. Not only did we get a chance to see the Pygmy Nuthatch close up, it popped



Photo/Steve Moore

into a nest cavity and began removing wood scraps. What a wonderful way to end the day!

Cricket Webb

**First Saturday BirdWalk on 3/7/09**

A pleasant Kittitas Valley early spring morning with no wind (at least not until we headed back from the lakes) brought ten birders ready to find feathered species! Temperature was in the low 30's, but the sun was warming. Much evidence remained from the recent flood; that is one powerful Yakima River! Downy woodpeckers chased about the tree trunks while numerous Black-capped Chickadees collected spider webs and down. Nesting must be 'in the air', although it seems early. However, we witnessed scores of robins, another sign of spring. For some reason, there were no birds on the lakes except a pair of



Photo / Jan Demorest

Canada geese, along with a muskrat. We did total 19 species with an unusual sighting of a Merlin, as well as a beautiful view of a mature Bald Eagle. Always an enjoyable morning walk with friends!

Gloria & Jeb Baldi

**Your Stories Wanted!** Read Jud Weaver's story on page 2 about romancing eagles in Kittitas Valley . Have you had an experience that was especially memorable? Others would love to read about it....



You may not think of yourself as a writer (we are all writers!); please send the facts and the editor will be happy to make it a story for you, no extra charge!

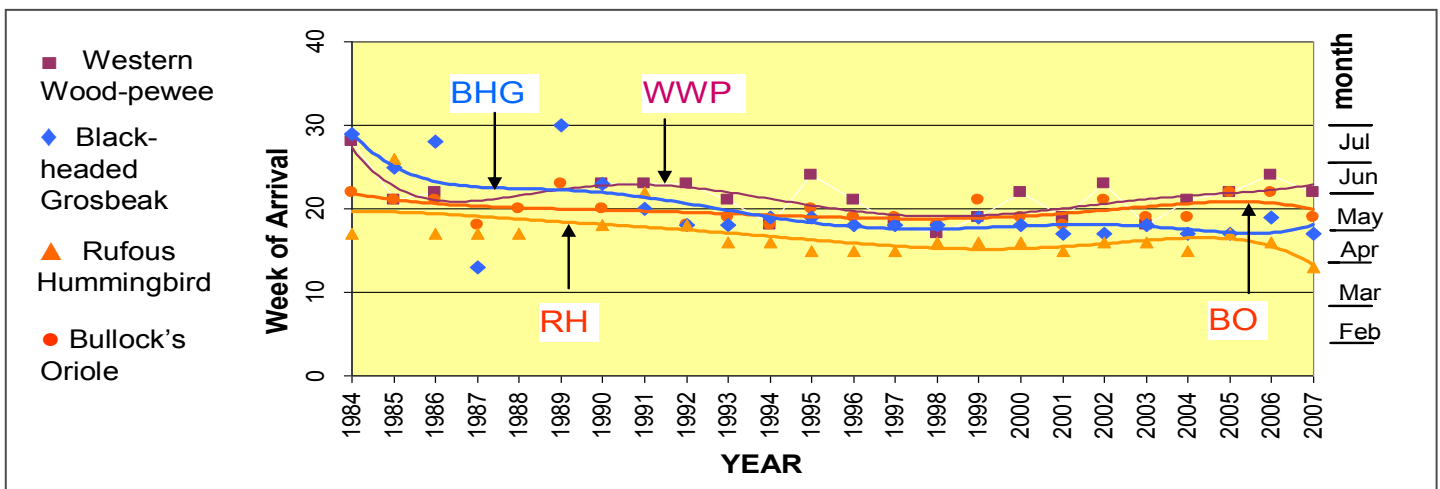
### **Are Spring Migrants Arriving Earlier in Kittitas County?**

Marianne Gordon has been recording the arrival of 14 different species of seasonal birds at her riparian-woods home near the mouth of Taneum Canyon – for 24+ years! She recorded the weeks of arrival of each bird, and found that the average arrival during the most recent dozen years was frequently *earlier in the spring* than during the first 12 years. Are birds coming back sooner because of warming climate? That's the big question.

The migrants recorded range from early returnees like the Red-winged Blackbird (February), through early spring arrivals: hummingbirds, meadowlark, and Black-headed Grosbeak, to later arrivals like Cedar Waxwings and Western Wood-pewees (late April to June).

Of the 14 species, 10 showed an earlier arrival in the last 12 years compared to the first 12 years, often of 2 to 4 weeks. The biggest changes in arrival (4 weeks earlier) were shown by the **Turkey Vulture**, **Black-headed Grosbeak** and **Red-winged Blackbird**, followed by the **Calliope Hummingbird**, **Mourning Dove** and **Red-naped Sapsucker**. Four species did show a slight opposite trend, arriving slightly later; these were the Western Meadowlark and Brewer's Blackbird (each arriving 2 weeks later on average), and House Wren and Cedar Waxwing (1 week later).

Another way to visualize Marianne's data is to plot the arrival by year on a line graph. Because there is natural "scatter" or variation in arrival year-by-year, it is possible, using the modern marvel of packaged statistics in computer programs, to "smooth" the curves to get more generalized trends in changes. On the chart below, the data points of arrival-week for each species are shown by symbols, but the curves show the *general* trend of these points over time (a 6<sup>th</sup> order polynomial smoothing).



The four birds in the chart are some of the ones that arrive at regularly consistent dates each year. Rufous (and Calliope) Hummingbirds arrive like clockwork at Marianne's place in April. The other migrants (except for some grosbeak "scatter" in the 1980's) also arrive at a fairly regular time slightly later in the year. For these data, the actual observed points and the smoothed curves are not too far apart.

A definite trend to earlier arrivals over time can be seen for the Rufous and the grosbeak, but the oriole hasn't changed. The Western Wood-pewee began to arrive earlier in the late 1990's, but in recent years is back to a later arrival.

Other species show more variable arrival dates - the Red-naped Sapsucker, Turkey Vulture, Mourning Dove, and Cowbird among others. Some of these show erratic March to June arrivals, so a clear-cut trend can be elusive. Of these, at least the sapsucker, now a solid March-April arriver, has gotten earlier on the average; the Turkey Vulture, and perhaps the Mourning Dove, arrive erratically, but the overall averages show them, recently, coming earlier. As Marianne points out, some of her species, e.g. vultures, meadowlarks and waxwings, depend on leaving the feeders and the cottonwood grove around the home to record an arrival – so some observational "scatter" in the data can be introduced there.

(Continued on page 7)

**Looking Ahead..... Potholes Reservoir Trip, May 16-17**

The Potholes Reservoir was created in the early 1950's to gather the water from Crab Creek and the Winchester and Frenchman Hills Wasteways and redistribute it over Royal Slope. Much of the reservoir is just what it sounds like, a large boring lake with a bathtub ring. But in the northwest corner of the reservoir the rising water flooded hundreds of acres of sand dunes creating a maze of sand dune islands separated by narrow channels. When I was a kid the islands were pristine sand, but now, fifty years later, most of them are covered with willows and weeds. There are still plenty of good camping spots, however, and we plan to spend a night on our own private island. It is important to spend the night because the best birding is in the evening and early morning when the flights from the rookeries spread out into the lake. There are great long lines of cormorants, herons, and pelicans, and at the right time, (we'll be too late) cranes. Loons nest on tiny floating islands of their own making, and there should be a great selection of ducks.

We'll be leaving Super One at nine on Saturday, it's about an hour to the put in. It's an easy paddle to where we'll camp, just two or three miles down well-protected channels - no problems for inexperienced canoeists. It *is* a maze; bring GPS if you have one. Dinner will be pot luck - bring your own lunches and breakfast. I have several extra canoes for people who would like to go and don't have one.

For further information and to sign up **contact Jud Weaver: 925-9297 / [jweaver2@charter.net](mailto:jweaver2@charter.net)**

**SPECIAL OFFER!*****"Bird Songs of the Pacific Northwest"  
5-CD Set***

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has published a CD of the Bird Songs of the Pacific Northwest. The CD is an excellent tool for those interested in learning the songs of the birds of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. They are making a special offer to the Oregon & Washington Audubon chapters. These CD sets are available at the wholesale price until mid-May.

The 5-CD set features the voices of 316 species. It is the most comprehensive collection of bird songs of the Pacific Northwest of which we are aware. Recordings average over a minute for each species and include region-specific dialects and a comprehensive treatment of most species' vocal repertoires. Many of the vocalizations have not been previously published. Species include the Harlequin Duck, Marbled Murrelet, Spotted Owl, White-headed Woodpecker, Wandering Tattler, and Hermit Warbler.

The retail price for the 5-CD set is \$38.95. KAS will offer these for \$29 (a \$10 savings!), plus the cost of shipping. A small profit will go into our treasury to help support our programs and projects.

**Orders must be received by April 30th:** Contact Beth Rogers at 674-1855 or [kittitasaudubon@inlandnet.com](mailto:kittitasaudubon@inlandnet.com)

**And the Robins.....**

Robins were mentioned in the First Saturday BirdWalk report, and we wonder if others have noticed the large numbers that we have seen this spring. For several weeks it seems scores of our most common thrush have been observed in fields, on lawns, in berry trees, and even devouring the old fruit on the ground. Outside Yakima Federal Savings Bank on March 10<sup>th</sup>, there was a fruit-bearing tree with approximately sixty robins eating from the tree and on the ground below. An employee at the bank said about ten had hit the window, glancing off, as if perhaps they were a little woozy. If the berries were fermented, and there is a good chance they were, the robins could indeed have been a bit drunk. A concern we had was that groups of European Starlings were also competing for last fall's fruit. Hope the robins got their fill!

*Gloria Baldi*



*Web photo*

*Continued from last month.....*

**WHAT'S NEW:** Audubon Washington has just released the annual **State of The Birds report**. It can be found at <http://wa.audubon.org/> under *How Climate Change Affects our Birds*. Lots of info on what is happening or can happen with climate change, and what **you** can do to help.

There is also a new **NATIONAL STATE OF THE BIRDS report** just released by the Dept of the Interior. Read more at <http://www.audubon.org/>.

**The Wild Horse Windfarm Expansion DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) Comment to EFSEC.** The proposal to add 22 turbines to the windfarm, expanding the substation slightly and adding 960 acres of PSE-owned land to the project, would result in 149 turbines which is below the 158 turbines authorized. KAS sent in a comment letter on the project.

Important events that occurred prior to or in the DEIS:

- PSE removed two strings of turbines which would have been very close to the Quilomene at the request of WDFW. Impact on raptor nests and Sage Grouse was a concern. This was a major change which benefited wild-life.
- The conservation easement between WDFW and PSE was finalized. It will apply to the expansion area as well as the original Wild Horse Wind Project.

As a result of the Environmental Impact Statement:

- Yard lights at the substation will be hooked up to motion detector as is required in the Site Certification Agreement (SCA).
- There was a bat study done on the project which is a first for Kittitas County.
- Post-construction avian studies will be done for a full year instead of a full season.
- PSE will extend landscape restoration monitoring for an additional 2 years as well as re-seed in some areas of the Wild Horse where germination was not successful.
- The 2 years of post-construction avian and bat monitoring will be extended to the original Wild Horse WPP.

**KAS CONCERNS:**

- Possible increased risk of bat and avian mortality in the vicinity of string S, between a forested area and springs. WA Attorney General's Counsel for the Environment requested further studies.
- We take issue with a prediction of no cumulative impacts. No studies have been done to support this.
- We supported the mitigation parcel. We also supported fencing of original mitigation parcel and springs and new parcel if grazing is to occur. Movable fencing could be appropriate if it is deemed best for wildlife, to be responsibility of PSE.
- Road size on the WHWPP ended up being very large. We asked that the size be kept to a minimum.
- We asked that habitat restoration be worked on for the life of the project rather than only a few years.

The FEIS (Final Environmental Impact Statement) for the project is out and there were no substantive changes made as the result of the comments made (including WDFW's) other than a map with the proposed mitigation parcel shown. The letters are all in the published FEIS (Final Environmental Impact Statement) with a list of answers. Should be at the Ellensburg library.

*Janet Nelson*

**(Next month - Continues with: WA DFW Windfarm 2009 Guidelines Committee results)**

*(Continued from page 4)*

How about the weather during these years – was this a factor in some of these ups and downs of arrival time? Average temperatures for the months of April and May in Ellensburg during this period show *lots* of variation, and a net increase in temperature is not at all evident. Local weather doesn't always show us the regional and global warming trends we see in the headlines. Also, Marianne says, "Taneum weather (15 miles closer to the mountains) does not always follow Ellensburg's. We have more sun when it is dark and foggy in Ellensburg which is 400' lower. We get cold snows blowing in from the west that don't make it as far as Ellensburg. Our last frost in the spring is earlier, our first frost in fall is later." The hunters in her woods *know* it's getting warmer: nowadays, you take your chances dressing game in the open in October and early November.

The conclusion? I'd say it looks like *some* of the birds showing fairly regular arrival dates are definitely coming a couple of weeks earlier, and some of the more erratic ones too, though it's less certain. On the other hand, some birds that arrive irregularly, maybe don't need to pay attention to the details of climate change, or maybe haven't gotten the message yet!

*Steve Moore (interpretation of records kept by Marianne Gordon)*

***BECOME AN AUDUBON MEMBER!!***

**Receive The Hooter ~ help support education and conservation activities and projects!**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Become a member of Kittitas Audubon \$20 (includes monthly newsletter)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Join as a National Audubon member \$20 (renewals \$35)  
(includes local membership & monthly newsletter)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make a donation. Amount enclosed \$\_\_\_\_\_



*Checks payable to Kittitas Audubon*

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*At the beginning of each month we'll send you an email with quick link to the new Hooter.*

## *Upcoming KAS Field Trips*

**April 4<sup>th</sup>: First Saturday Bird Walk** at Irene Rinehart River Front Park. Meet at 8:00 AM at the bridge parking lot off Umtaneum Rd. Dress for valley spring weather, bring binoculars and a friend, or two. Spring birds are returning so we will see who's visible before the leaves appear.

**April 5<sup>th</sup>: Yakima Training Center for Sage Grouse.** (Trip is full: waiting list only. Call Jeb-933-1558) **The Army is only allowing two groups this year to view these birds.** A big thank you goes to Charles Hawkins for making the arrangements.

**April 18<sup>th</sup>: Birding by Map (Site #19 Hayward Hill/Bettas Rd)** - Marianne Gordon (509-964-2320) & Cricket Webb (509-674-4035)

**April 25<sup>th</sup>: Wetlands of the Columbia Basin WETLAND WONDERS!** This is the date of our annual trip to the Columbia Basin wetlands. We should see many beautiful shorebirds that are not our usual fare in Kittitas County.

In past years we have seen American Avocets, Black-necked Stilts, Great Egrets, cormorants, yellowlegs, sandpipers, snipe, phalarope, Dunlin, and ducks-ducks-ducks: eighteen different species of ducks over the years.

If you want to join us call Marianne Gordon at 964-2320 or email [marianne@elltel.net](mailto:marianne@elltel.net)

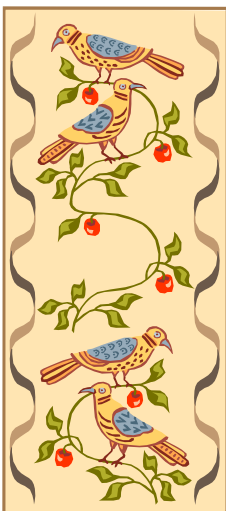
**May 2<sup>nd</sup>: First Saturday BirdWalk** - Irene Rinehart Park (see above)

### **THANKS TO KITTITAS COUNTY BUSINESSES SUPPORTING KAS!**

**Inland Internet**, Roslyn, donates Internet service for our Website: <http://www.kittitasaudubon.org>

**Old Mill Country Store**, Ellensburg ~ Provides a discount on bird seed to KAS members and prints our county bird lists. Get your bird seed here!

*Kittitas Audubon Society*  
*P.O. Box 1443*  
*Ellensburg WA 98926*  
<http://www.kittitasaudubon.org>



*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.*