



Darling Bird Studios, ©2007 UNA

The Hooter

Kittitas Audubon Society

April 2010

Membership Meeting - Thursday, April 15th

7:00 PM ~ Hal Holmes Center

"Vaux's (Swift) Happening Audubon" presented by Larry Schwitters



Vaux's Swifts entering chimney of Old Ellensburg Hospital

Most of you may not be aware that we have right here in Ellensburg an amazing event every spring and fall ~ hundreds of Vaux's Swifts (pronounced "vox's") pass through on their migration ~ north in the spring, south in the fall. They need a place to rest for the night, so they find chimneys (since most of the old-growth dead hollow tree snags where they would naturally roost are gone). The chimney of our old Ellensburg Hospital on East 3rd Avenue is one of these sites, where hundreds of these tiny birds gather for a night or two on their long journeys.

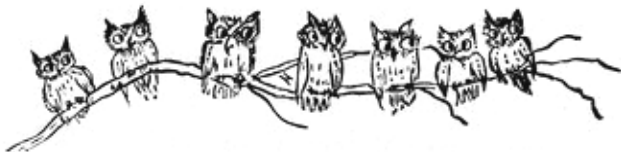
Larry Schwitters will present a fast-paced PowerPoint presentation on the natural history of North America's Swifts and our attempts to study and protect them.

With a Biology MS and Masters in Broad-field Science, Larry has spent 30 years in the trenches of public education, mostly as a middle school science teacher in Renton. In 2003, he began doing Black Swift/waterfall

field research for the American Bird Conservancy. He is currently Audubon project manager for "Vaux's Happening" which, in its first year, documented more than a half-million Vaux's Swift/chimney migration interactions in a four-state area.



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.



Future Programs (mark your calendar!)

May 20th: Hummingbirds ~ Chris Caviezel

No general meetings in the summer. See you in September!

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 to foster a vibrant active organization recognized in Kittitas County.





KAS BOARD MEMBERS

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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!

Send in your stories & photos!

The Hooter is the newsletter of the Kittitas Audubon Society, published monthly except for July.

The editor reserves the right to edit for space, grammar, and/or suitability. E-mail text and/or photos to 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.

Eagle Scout Organizes Bluebird Nestbox Trail on Manastash Ridge Westburg Trail

In order for a scout to earn the rank of Eagle, he must complete many requirements, including completing a project of his choice. The project must be helpful to a religious institution, school, or community. The scout must plan and carry out all aspects of the project using whatever resources are needed. It is critical that the scout demonstrates leadership throughout the process.

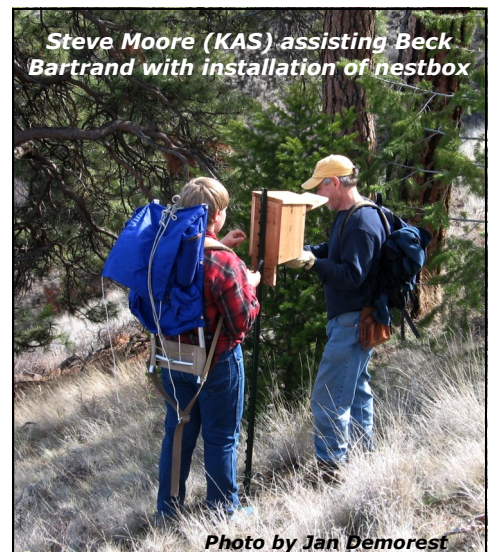


Ryan Johnson chose to do his project on the Manastash Ridge trail area because he has been hiking the trail since he was very young and has a fondness for it. There are several parts to his project, including:

- ◆ Constructing 12 bluebird nestboxes and placing them along the Westburg trail
- ◆ Building 2 small retaining walls using railroad ties to prevent further erosion of the trail along the "switchback"
- ◆ Improving the Westburg trail by digging water bars to help drain water from the trail
- ◆ Leveling approximately 100 feet along the Girl Scout trail to improve trail surface
- ◆ Removing larger rocks from the Canyon Road trail

Scouts, adult leaders and specialists (including a road engineer and members of Kittitas Audubon) assisted Ryan in completing the nestbox and retaining wall portions of the project last weekend (3/14). The remaining projects will be completed next month.

Jill Johnson



March 6th ~ First Saturday BirdWalk ~

What a beautiful morning to be out-doors, sunny with no wind and above 35 degrees. Twelve birders, first-timers and old-timers, joined to see what birds could be added to the eight-year record for March. Birds were more shy than on some BirdWalks as we had to search for each one. However, we did witness an event we termed the "flying food chain". Hearing the rattle of a Belted Kingfisher, we discovered it being chased by a Cooper's Hawk, which in turn was being harassed by a Red-tailed Hawk. The occurrence happened in a flash, but several viewed the chase. You can never predict what will be seen on a BirdWalk. There were not huge

numbers of birds that morning but there was always something in nature to observe.

Twenty-one species were compiled: Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, Red-tailed Hawk, Black-billed Magpie, European Starling, Brown Creeper, Killdeer, Red-winged Blackbird, American Kestrel, Mallard, Canada Goose, raven, Great Blue Heron, Black-capped Chickadee, Belted Kingfisher, Cooper's Hawk, Steller's Jay, Evening Grosbeak, & Mourning Dove.

Jeb & Gloria

NOTE: Reports from the 3rd Saturday on March 20th and the Columbia Basin National Wildlife Refuge trip on March 27 & 28th will be published in the May issue of **The Hooter**.

Hayward Hill Bluebirds Ready to Start Families!

We were up on Hayward Hill Road yesterday (March 16th) putting up nestboxes to replace some that were taken down during the widening of the road in preparation for the wind farm construction. After contacting Horizon Wind Energy and explaining our on-going bluebird project and field study program, we obtained permission to put up boxes along the new (temporary) fence at the top of the hill along DNR land.

It was a fine practically windless day, nephew Zach was along to help, and the Mountain Bluebirds were looking for real estate! At two locations, as soon as we put up a box, a pair would grab it, chase off other pairs, and then begin the scary process of approaching the box and going inside to check it out. There was a lot of excited chatter between the male and the female, and much fluttering of wings and peering at the box.



"Waddya think, Sweetheart?"

Photo by SCM

~ Jan Demorest and Steve Moore



"Hoooo's got mail?"

GET YOUR HOOTER ONLINE

Save paper, printing, postage. If you would prefer to receive the electronic version, send your name, mailing address, & email address to: info@kittitasaudubon.org

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

11th Annual "Get Intimate with the Shrub-steppe!"

For the 11th consecutive year Kittitas Environmental Education Network (KEEN) along with local experts is inviting you to explore and discover the local ecosystem (shrub-steppe) at "GET INTIMATE with the SHRUB-STEPPE!" This event is fun for the whole family with hands-on activities, field trips, **storytelling**, **snake handling**, and so much more. You will learn about the local history, native plants, **birds**, **aquatic insects**, **beavers**, **snakes**, and **geology**, to name only a few.



Butterfly boy gathering pollen from a flower

Photo by Dierdra Petrina

Please join us on **Saturday, May 1st** at **Helen McCabe State Park**, located at the corner of Thrall Rd. and Canyon Rd.

(Shuttles for field trips at Umtanum will be available with limited space.)

7:30 AM Birdwalk
9 AM to 2 PM event
FREE!

For more information contact Dierdra at 509.962.1654 or diedrap@casadeland.org



www.kittitasee.net

The Hooter is now printed on "Grays Harbor 100" paper ~ 100% post-consumer waste, manufactured in Washington State, using 100% renewable, zero-carbon-footprint energy.



Check out the Grays Harbor Paper website at:

<http://www.ghplp.com/index.html>

Your KAS membership dues working for a better environment!

Let us know what you think!



Spring Beginnings ~

"If naturalists had their way, they would not begin the calendar year in January when the world is asleep. They would follow the ancient Jews, Egyptians, and Greeks, all of whom started their year in March. March is the month when life begins ~ when sap flows, buds swell, and birds return. It is the month when the bird watcher, who perhaps has not taken his binoculars from their case since the Christmas Count, goes out to see if the redwings are back in the cattail swamp or if the meadow-larks and killdeers are on the pasture-lands. Actually, the fall ~ September and October ~ with its wind-drifted strays and lost juveniles, is a better season for rarities; but for every bird watcher abroad in autumn there are perhaps five in the spring. The annual re-awakening and the return of the birds must be examined, for these are signs of eternity."

~ an excerpt from **The Bird-Watcher's Anthology** (1957)

by Roger Tory Peterson



Originally published Monday, August 31, 2009 ~ By MICHELLE McNIEL
"The Wenatchee World" ~ WE-NATCHEE, Wash.

The Great Blue Heron: graceful flier, stealthy hunter, solitary explorer.

Backyard bandit? ~ That's right. The tall, slender bird that graces the shorelines of rivers, lakes and ponds of North Central Washington has been turning up in residential Wenatchee Valley yards, pilfering goldfish and koi from ponds.

"One day in the spring, I looked out my window and said 'What the heck is that?' " said Rick Bryant, who watched a heron eat a dozen of his backyard fish in just over a week at his home on Schafer Street. "I went out to scare him off, but he just flew up on my neighbor's roof and looked at me. It would be back out there in the pond the next day. We've lived in this house for 22 years and I've never seen a heron in town," he said. "You always see them along the river."

Wildlife experts can't say for sure why they are doing it, but they do know that the numbers of blue herons nesting along the Columbia and Wenatchee rivers near Wenatchee took a big jump this year (2009). And more people in the past couple of years have reported seeing them feeding in urban areas of the valley.

"With an increase in the numbers of nests, we are starting to find them (birds) in places not found before," said Von Pope, fish and wildlife director for the Chelan County PUD. "They are normally sensitive to human activity. But that does-

n't appear to be the case anymore with some of these birds."

He added that with more birds feeding along the river banks, some may be looking elsewhere for food. "They are becoming accustomed to the residential way of life," he said.

For several years, there was just one nesting rookery near



**Great Blue Heron
aka "Backyard
Bandit"?**

Photo by Doug Kuehn

Wenatchee, just upriver from Rock Island Dam, which has about a dozen nests. Each nesting pair can produce up to three young, Pope said.

Last year (2008), a second nesting site appeared near the mouth of the Entiat River. And this year a third was built by herons near the Appleyard just south of Wenatchee. Nests have also been built at a fourth site near Earthquake Point, north of Entiat, but no birds are nesting there yet, Pope said.

The PUD added herons to the list of fish-eating birds it surveys each year after the birds' numbers appeared to be growing in the Rock Island and Rocky Reach dam reservoirs. The utility keeps tabs on birds

that prey on salmon smolts in the reservoirs.

Last year, the surveyors counted an average of 25 blue herons a day in the two reservoirs in July and August. This year (2009), the number jumped to 53 a day.

Thursday, Pope and two other PUD wildlife specialists counted 44 of the majestic birds along the shoreline. Most were standing still at the water's edge, hunting for food. One was perched on a basalt outcropping. "Great Blue!" they would call out when they spotted one of the birds.

While they are increasing along the Columbia, state biologists have seen fewer blue heron nests in other areas, such as Lake Wenatchee and Fish Lake, said Jon Gallie, a wildlife biologist with the state Department of Fish and Wildlife in Wenatchee.

Because no agencies keep a close eye on the birds' populations throughout the region, no one knows if the population is increasing overall, or if they are moving around. But there is nothing to indicate that their habitat has been disturbed, their food sources diminished, or their predators are increasing ~ all reasons for the birds to relocate, he said. "We do know they are more visible in the Wenatchee area," he added.

Nationally, Great Blue Heron numbers have increased steadily in recent years, and they are now one of the most abundant wading birds in North America, according to the National Audubon Society. The birds commonly nest and fish along the shores of open water

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Here's a selection of recent listings from our very own regional "**BirdKitt**", an online "listserve" for all birders interested in bird sightings in Kittitas County.

If you are not already signed up, here's how to do it: send an email to subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Reply to the first email about Birdkitt that you receive from "yahoogroups". To unsubscribe: send email to birdkitt

- unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com. If you have difficulty, email Beth Rogers kittittasadudbon@inland.net or Chris Caviezel chris.caviezel@gmail.com

Thanks to Beth Rogers and Cricket Webb for getting this up and running! This is a great resource for finding places to look for birds in the valley.

2-28-2010 ~ Steve and I drove out the Old Vantage Highway this morning, with the main objective of hiking the Gingko trees trail in search of Sage Sparrows. We were delayed when we spotted male Mountain Bluebirds on several of the first nestboxes along the fence. They seem to be seriously checking them out for spring housing, perching on the roof, then flying down and hanging on the entry hole, peering in to check out the interior layout. All the way down to Gingko we stopped to watch and listen for their sweet spring call - some we only heard. We also heard and then saw Say's Phoebes and Horned Larks. Hiking the Gingko trail, high up near the top of the hill in a stand of Big Sage, we were treated to close-up views of a Sage Sparrow, who came out of skulking in the shelter of the bushes to perch and sing, then appeared about 10 feet away, foraging in the grass and low plants! A beautiful little bird... The plants are also welcoming the warm weather - the tiny salt-and-

pepper Lomatium ("biscuitroot") is in bloom; little mounds of Thyme-leaved Buckwheat are putting out their new leaves, along with the *Artemesia rigida* (Little Sage), and there were four little Yellow Bells blooming all in a row! All this and sunshine with no wind - what a morning!
~ Jan in Ellensburg

3-1-2010 ~ It is spring in the upper county too. As I read this a Western Bluebird appeared on the roof of Craig's shop. Guess I need to clean the boxes out!

~ Beth Rogers

3-7-2010 ~ This morning we are hosting two pairs of Evening Grosbeaks at our feeders--the first this year! Exquisite bird, albeit a bit of a bully when it comes to sunflower seeds. Several Killdeer arrived last week in our pasture, and we've had Pine Siskins traveling through lately. The Dark-eyed Juncos in the yard are starting to sing, so they'll be leaving for high country soon.
~ Yesterday we jeeped up Parke Creek, headed north along the

Beacon Ridge and eventually down Colocum Pass. Lots of snow up high (4600 feet elevation at top) but good conditions and no winching, digging, or cussing involved. A few Western and Mountain Bluebirds (saw them last weekend, too), along with Mountain Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, d-e juncos, and robins. A few Townsend's Ground Squirrels are out already in the valley, as are the rockchucks. Still quite a few Bald Eagles here; last week I saw a large kettle of raptors that included 6 Bald Eagles, 3 Red-tailed Hawks, and about 12 ravens right over the house. ~ Deborah on the Brick Mill Rd north of Kittitas.

3-13-2010 ~ Add one to your list of birds arriving early this year, an **Osprey** was sitting in a snag at Cle Elum NP ponds yesterday. Oddly, in contrast, there was a Rough-legged Hawk on the ground in the field along I-90 that has the Party Barn sign. Osprey and Rough-Legged Hawk in the Kittitas county in the same 24 hr period.

~ Cricket

(Continued from page 5)

and wetlands. They feed on small fish, frogs, and salamanders, and generally stand alone and very still as they hunt.

They are found everywhere from high mountain lakes to small ponds in wheat fields in NCW, Gallie said. They typically stay away from people, though, and Gallie said he was surprised to hear that people were finding them in residential yards. Pope said the PUD has received calls from valley residents whose ponds have been raided by the birds.

Randy Whited decided not to stock his backyard pond this year (2009) after a blue heron depleted it last year and the year before. He said the bird would usually show up in the early morning or

late evening. It would fly away if it saw him, but then it would come back.

He said the bird "made the rounds" in the neighborhood on Valley View Boulevard in East Wenatchee, eating other people's fish, too. His neighbor put in a decoy plastic heron this year because the birds hunt alone and usually don't land where other herons are feeding. "This year I didn't feed him, so he didn't come back," Whited said. "I thought they were great birds right up until they started eating on my fish. Now I just call them pests."

~ Information from: The Wenatchee World, <http://www.wenatcheeworld.com>

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Thanks to Marianne Gordon for forwarding this article.

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and binocs. Include water and lots of snacks in your lunch. We will not take a long lunch break. It is more likely we will eat a sandwich while admiring those pretty Black-necked Stilts with their striking red legs. For more information and to sign up call Marianne Gordon 964-2320 or email marianne@elltel.net.



MAY

May 1st ~ First Saturday BirdWalk @ Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park: 8:00AM @ bridge parking lot. (See April) Gloria & Jeb

May 15 ~ 3rd Saturday Birding-by-the-Map ~ Lake Easton State Park, Site#3 ~ Details to follow in the May Hooter. Please call Cricket (674-4035) or Marianne (964-2320) if you would like to join us!

BECOME A KITTITAS AUDUBON MEMBER!! (Or renew your membership)

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

Two options are available:

OPTION 1: Membership in National Audubon includes a subscription to the magazine, *Audubon*, membership in the local chapter (KAS), and KAS monthly newsletter, *THE HOOTER*

- ____ Join as a new National Audubon member \$20 (includes KAS membership)
- ____ Renew a National Audubon membership \$35

Make check payable to: National Audubon Society Include this form and mail to: Membership Data Center, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235

Name _____ Address _____
 City _____ State, ZIP _____
 Chapter Code COZY220Z

OPTION 2: Membership in only the local chapter, KAS, includes the monthly newsletter, *THE HOOTER*

- ____ Join the local Kittitas Audubon Society (KAS) chapter \$20
- ____ Renew your KAS membership \$20
- ____ Make a donation to KAS \$_____ (amount)

Make check payable to KAS and mail to: KAS, P.O. Box 1443, Ellensburg, WA 98926

Name _____ Phone _____
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Would you like to receive The Hooter electronically?
 Yes _____ No, prefer paper edition _____

*Kittitas Audubon is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational society.
 All memberships and donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.*

Membership forms are also available on our Web site: Kittitasaudubon.org.

For membership information contact Membership Chair, Tuck Forsythe ~ forsythe (at) fairpoint.net

Check out our website ~ see The Hooter in COLOR at www.kittitasaudubon.org

Upcoming KAS Field Trips

APRIL

Saturday April 3rd ~ First Saturday BirdWalk
@ Irene Rinehart Riverfront Park. Meet at the bridge parking lot at 8:00AM for about a three-hour walk. Be sure to dress for the weather (layers); bring binoculars and a friend to help us spot our spring migrants. Gloria & Jeb Baldi

Saturday April 17th ~ Birding by the Map Site #27 ~ Quilomene & Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas, plus the Old Vantage Hwy ~ **"BIRDS AND BLOOMS"** ~ April is the time of year when our so-called "desert" looks its best and the old Vantage Highway is a good place to see the show. Color isn't limited to flowers. We should see bluebirds, meadowlarks, and other colorful birds. Harder to see will be those shrub-steppe sparrows who sing from the top of a sage way at the top of the hill! If time allows we might con-

tinue on to Ginkgo Trails. Bring binocs, bird book, water, and snacks. Dress for changeable weather. Please call Cricket (674-4035) or Marianne (964-2320) if you'd like to join us.

Saturday April 24th ~ Columbia Basin & Crab Creek ~ "BLITZ THE BASIN" ~ This is our annual all-day trip to the Columbia Basin wetlands to find as many migrating and nesting ducks and shorebirds as possible with a few more land-bound species. In previous years we have found from 60-75 total species. Our total list from over the years is 100 which includes 25 ducks and their kin, 17 waders and 35 passerines. This will be a great opportunity to see birds that we don't normally see in Kittitas County. ~ Dress for changeable weather. It usually gets warmer the farther east we go. Bring a camera, bird book,

(Continued on page 7)

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



The Hooter - April 2010

Newsletter of the Kittitas Audubon Society - <http://www.kittitasaudubon.org>
