Three species of rarely seen and poorly known snakes found in eastern Washington will be the focus of Dr. Robert Weaver’s presentation. Most people are familiar with rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, and even rubber boas, but few have come across a sharp-tailed or ring-neck snake, and even fewer have seen desert nightsnakes. The natural history of these lesser known species will be discussed, including where they live, their periods of activity, and what they eat. Management and conservation concerns, along with “why we should care” will also be discussed.

Live specimens will be available to view and handle, further enhancing the experience of learning about these amazing snakes.

Robert was raised in the Yakima Valley. Graduating from A.C. Davis High School in Yakima, he earned both his BS and MS in Biology from Central Washington University. Upon receiving his Ph.D. in Zoology in 2010 from WSU, he began teaching a variety of biology classes at CWU. He is also one of the lead researchers for the Amphibian Team for I-90 east (Snoqualmie Pass construction area). In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Robert continues his research, which is primarily focused on the ecology and behavior of snakes and lizards, along with salamanders, of the Pacific Northwest. Several on-going research projects are being conducted throughout the shrub-steppe of Washington and the high desert of Oregon.

When not chasing snakes or teaching classes, he enjoys spending time with his family.....his wife and two teenagers, plus his parents. He and his father share a special interest in classic car restoration.

This program is one for all ages, so join KAS and bring friends, children, and grandchildren.

All Audubon meetings, held on the 3rd Thursday of each month at the Hal Holmes Center next to the Library, September through May (except December), are open to the public. Please come and meet with us. A brief business session precedes the program. Stay afterwards for juice, treats, and conversation.

Many thanks to the Ellensburg Public Library for sponsoring our meetings here!
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*NON-VOTING 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 adjoin 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 Kittitas Audubon, published monthly except for July.

Submissions from members & other readers are most welcome and encouraged!
The editor reserves the right to edit for space, grammar, and/or suitability. Email text and/or photos to bobcat@kvalley.com or snail mail to Jan Demorest, Hooter Editor, 712 E 2nd Ave, Ellensburg, WA 98926. Submissions need to be in by the 20th of the preceding month.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE
Michael Livingston speaks for the vanishing shrub steppe. He is the director of the Central Washington Region for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. He spoke to a full house at the KAS March meeting. Like most wildlife biologists, he has lived and worked in many places, but his tenure in New Mexico probably gave him his best experience in sagebrush land management.

He said the shrub-steppe looks like a fairly simple ecosystem, but when you dig in, it is complex and fragile. “Steppe” refers to what the Russians call grassland (mainly bunchgrass) and the shrub part refers to our sagebrush, bitterbrush, and rabbitbrush. At least that’s the way it was. Washington once had 10.5 million acres of this ecosystem. Now 60 percent of it is gone—converted to other uses and the remainder is under assault from development and wildfire. Livingston pointed out that our Wyoming Big Sage (some call it Tall Sagebrush, Artemesia tridentata) takes decades to recover from a fire; the recent very large wildfires we have experienced mean that seed sources for the interior areas are often too far away for natural re-seeding to occur.

Livingston discussed the subtle differences in vegetation based on topography, soils and aspect. The soils are generally thinner on the ridge tops (lithosols) which are scoured by wind; south facing slopes are drier due to more exposure to the sun. Consequently the tall, lusher grasses grow on the lower north-facing slopes. The areas where different vegetation types intersect, called ecotones, are especially rich in species diversity, providing good wildlife habitat. Representative birds include Brewer’s and Sagebrush Sparrows, Sage Thrashers, and Loggerhead Shrikes. The lithosols support grasses like Steppe Bluegrass but there is much open space that is covered by mosses and lichens.

These soils have a crust that resists wind erosion and can help exclude invaders like cheatgrass. The lower, thicker soils support vigorous growth of Bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho Fescue and Indian Ricegrass, which, if properly managed, can provide forage for livestock. Unfortunately for the steppe, these soils are the same ones favored for irrigated agriculture. Add to that, invasive species like cheatgrass and knapweed and you can see why the steppe is in trouble.

Livingston chose three examples of shrub-steppe animals to illustrate one of the important features of ecology: energy transfer. First was an important herbivore, the Townsend’s Ground Squirrels which live in loose colonies in the southern part of Washington’s shrub steppe. A similar species, the Great Basin Ground Squirrel lives north of that and the Washington Ground Squirrel can be found east in the Palouse. These animals are important for two reasons. They provide a food source for a variety of predators and their dens provide habitat for all sorts of animals, including the Burrowing Owl which will be discussed below. They are also interesting in that they hibernate during the cold season and aestivate during the heat and drought of the summer.

(Continued on page 5)
March 1st ~ First Saturday BirdWalk ~ First Saturday BirdWalk on March 1st came in like a lion with 21 degrees and a SE wind blowing, and ten people searching for avian life while moving along a bit faster than on most BirdWalks.

It was definitely robin migration time; they were everywhere! As we left the parking lot American Robins were numerous in the juniper bushes eating the berries. (You can usually spot the difference between male and female robins by the brighter “red” head and breast in males, who normally show up before the females.)

Moving north along the road, we spotted two Bald Eagles flying, immature and mature, along with a Raven, a Red-tailed Hawk, and two Canada Geese. Only one Downy Woodpecker, a few Black-capped Chickadees and Dark-eyed Juncos were busy in the trees. Unlike us, the birds decided it was too chilly to be ‘hanging out’.

The ponds had little waterfowl......only three Ring-necked ducks, two Wigeon, and three Mallards. Similarly, the Reecer Creek Wetlands only produced a couple of Mallards. Back along the Yakima River, we found our resident Belted Kingfisher, a Killdeer, and European Starlings.

Next month with warmer weather we should discover more species. Plan to join us the first Saturday in April at 8:00 am as the daylight time change means one hour later in the morning for bird activity....and early migration should produce more species and higher numbers.

Gloria Baldi

March 19th ~ Nisqually NWR. For east-siders, it’s hard to catch those migrating shorebirds as they fly up the coast. Tides and timing have to be just right, and we were too early in the month to see those long-distance flyers. But for six of us from Ellensburg, there were other consolations, like an Anna’s hummingbird nest overhead (mama’s tail visible over the edge) and 3 fuzzy Great-horned Owl chicks dozing among a tangle of branches. Guiding us to these hard-to-find sights was Eric, a local Auduboner filling in for Phil Kelley on the regular Wednesday tour of the delta wetlands, a bird-walk of renown that attracts a couple dozen birders each week. Lots of school kids with clipboards were field-tripping on this day as well. We shared our scopes with them. Nisqually is a good place to clarify the Cackling/Canada Goose split: huge flocks of the Cacklers can be seen close-up - until an eagle flies by and the whole works goes airborne. The Cackling Geese have tan fronts and small bills, make lots of high-pitched noise, and don’t hang out with the larger, white-breasted Canadas much. The Canadas may stick around to nest here, but the Cacklers will finish the journey to the Yukon delta. There are plenty of ducks this time of year; we saw shovelers, teal, and wigeon in numbers on ponds, and close by the Visitor’s Center, pairs of Hooded Merganser and Gadwall, with their lovely reticulated plumage. Raptors were not abundant but there are always a few scope-able eagles and Redtails perched on the huge snags that have been “planted” beyond the main dike. A Northern Shrike repeatedly perched on a favorite leaning snag. Passerines of note in March are Yellow-rumped Warblers, Marsh and Bewick’s wrens, Golden-crowned Sparrows, and Tree and Violet-green Swallows. Our walk ended just as a late AM rain deluge drove birders and students together into the Visitor Center breezeway.

~ Steve Moore

And a note from one participant: I’m not competent to evaluate the birding on the KAS field trip, but the eating opportunities were exceptional ~ An overnight Audubon trip to Nisqually River Delta by Olympia—turned out to be mostly

(Continued on page 5)
Hummingbirds

There are not many bird species quite as fascinating as hummingbirds. They are tough, fearless, and beautiful, and are loyal to feeders hung to attract them, even in subsequent years. Remove your feeder, or even change it to a different container, and the hummer will twit about attempting to find the original. The end of March reminds us it is time again to put out your feeder!

When you feed hummingbirds, the syrup should never be stronger than one part white sugar to four parts water. Warm the water to dissolve the sugar, then cool before placing outside. Never use honey or make the syrup stronger as it can cause a fatal fungus in the tiny creatures. In hot weather, the feeder should be cleaned and refilled every day as the liquid can sour. In cool weather, it can be left four to five days. Do not add any food coloring; it is not necessary, and may even be harmful. Your colorful feeder will attract them. Rinse your feeder with warm water, or a weak solution of vinegar water each time you refill. (Making enough syrup to have more than needed also allows you to keep it in the refrigerator for easy refilling.) If you can hang your feeder just outside your kitchen window, it will allow you close-up viewing throughout the day.

Do you know Hummingbirds are only found in the western hemisphere? Central and South America have many more species than North America, but in Kittitas County four species are possible, depending on where you live in the county. The Black-chinned, Rufous, Calliope, and, occasionally the newcomer, Anna’s, are all possible. With a bird identification book and a little dedication, one can learn to recognize even the females and juveniles of the four species.

In 2013, National Audubon Society launched a citizen science project to build a continent wide network to help uncover how hummingbirds are affected by climate change. (The blooming of some plants two weeks earlier than the migration of the hummingbirds indicates the nutrition from those plants may no longer be available.) The data collected will guide Audubon in devising actions to help hummingbirds thrive despite climate change and other threats. If you are interested in recording your sightings, go to National Audubon’s “Hummingbirds at Home” website for more information and to log sightings.
We’d love some help.....

Being a member of Kittitas Audubon has many advantages. We have the opportunity to learn about birds, wildlife, and their habitat thanks to the wonderful programs that are put on at the Hal Holmes Center, our great monthly Hooter newsletter, or joining others on field trips and bird walks. There is always someone who knows something that you may not, or it may be the other way around that you are passing along some knowledge to someone else. This is a great way to enjoy and grow our passion for birds and their habitat.

However, these programs, newsletter publications, field trips, etc. do not happen on their own. It takes someone behind the scene to plan and organize everything. Soon, we will be starting a project to build a new chimney for the migrating Vaux Swifts. As much as your current board enjoys taking on these tasks, we would love to share that joy with you! So we are asking all of you to consider becoming a little bit more involved in keeping our organization....well.....organized. Are you, or someone you know, interested in helping out our very worthy organization? If so, we would love to hear from you. You can be part of helping the next generation of folks who appreciate wildlife, and birds in particular, to have a viable and progressive organization to join and learn from. Again, it doesn’t happen by itself. We’d like you to be part of the team, so please call Gloria Baldi or Sharon Lumsden. Their phone numbers are listed on page 2 under KAS Board Members.

Shrub Steppe (Continued from page 2)

Next to be discussed was the Greater Sage Grouse. It is mainly an herbivore but the chicks must have the greater energy provided by insects when very young, so it is technically an omnivore. There are still a few leks—breeding display grounds—in the state, but they are fairly small, with only a few displaying birds. This species is in serious trouble in Washington due to loss of habitat. Some contributing factors are noise from wind farms and other human activities which can interfere with their unique courtship ritual. A growing problem for the Sage Grouse is the increasing populations of Common Ravens—which follow roads and power lines. They are serious nest predators. But the main threat to the grouse is the loss of sagebrush to which they are obligated. Here is where the huge wildfires can be devastating.

Finally, Livingston told about a representative predator, the Burrowing Owl. As its name implies, it needs burrows for survival and here it needs the ground squirrels. It will use their dens if large enough, but often takes over abandoned badger and coyote dens. They eat rodents, insects and reptiles, but are also prey for larger raptors and mammals.

Livingston said his department and other agencies are working on ways to mitigate the loss of this unique ecosystem. A program to produce locally grown native species seed shows promise, and they have an ongoing land acquisition effort. In these days of tight budgets, that is not easy, but they are still trying (see www.wdfw.gov/lands/acquisitions). Also Livingston said researchers are getting close to a biological agent which targets cheatgrass. What a boon this would be to the bunchgrasses and all the other members of this Shrub Steppe (Continued from page 2)

Field Trip Reports (Continued from page 3)

a restaurant-eating-club. Tues evening we went to Mi Pueblito restaurant, Wed morning at 7 AM the excellent motel hot breakfast, by 8 AM we’d started on the 4-hour bird-walk with experts from Rainier Audubon; then finally our tasty luncheon at a Thai restaurant one mile from the Nisqually refuge. Since that refuge is right on the main west coast Interstate 5, we’ll have chances to visit there again and put to use what we learned Wednesday. My main bird-watching memory is those Westside birders with their telescope tripods attached to their knapsacks (specially designed) with the legs hanging down, for instant use when a bird appears!

~ Tuck Forsythe
We stayed at a condo on Ma'alaea bay on the Southwest side of Maui. Steve and Jan had forwarded their notes on where to bird and what to see, so we went prepared. The ponds, Kanaha, near the airport, and Keakia (boardwalk) bird sanctuary were both low because of no recent rain. We found Hawaiian Stilts, and coots at those locations. We discovered a better site, at the Kealia Ponds National Wildlife Refuge, which long ago were ponds where salt was recovered from the sea water, but now are a part of a protected wildlife area. We saw stilts and coots again, but also Black-crowned Night Herons, Ruddy Turnstones, Pacific Golden-plover, Northern Shoveler ducks, and a lone gull which we did not identify. That was the only gull we saw on the trip.

We drove to the top of Haleakala (volcano) National Park, the overlook area was at 10,023 feet. Only a few scattered clouds pushed up, so we had an excellent look at the main agriculture area of the island lying to the north, with our condo at Kihei in the distance. Coming down we stopped at Hosmer Grove to take a short hike, and were rewarded by spotting one of the colorful endemics, the (red) Apapane.

Some of our best birding was at the two botanical gardens, the one early on the road to Hana, and the other in the Kula district on the Northwest flank of the volcano. We saw:

Japanese White Eyes, Chestnut Manias, Nutmeg Mannikins, Java Sparrows, Northern Cardinals (M and F), a Red-crested Cardinal, and Nene (Hawaiian Canada Goose).

Our planned trip to Hana started out in clear weather, but by the time we got to the East side of the island and started down the Hana “highway” (only 30 miles), the rain came in; we wound our way to Hana, but rain and low visibility denied us any birding.

At many of the open air dining places, the very small Zebra Dove was common around our feet. We also saw Spotted Neck Doves, a Great Blue Heron, and Cattle Egrets foraging in tilled fields and pastures.

At our condo the most widely seen bird was the Common Myna. We also had a Pacific Golden Plover that came most afternoons to search the lawn for bugs. We could see whales breaching in the bay every day from our balcony. We also took a whale watch tour, and visited the very impressive Maui Ocean aquarium.

~ Gerry & Marilyn Sorenson

Welcome New Members!
Evie Kruse
Vickie Nesbit
Thanks to Renewing Members!
Roma Stokes
Sharon & Scott Lumsden

COMING IN MAY
Look for an eye-catching (and educational) window display by KAS in the Library/Hal Holmes lobby in May!!!
**Check out BirdKitt!!**

Get the latest news on bird sightings in Kittitas County from our very own regional "BirdKitt", an online "listserv" for all persons interested in bird sightings in Kittitas County. You can post your own sightings and sign on to have new postings sent directly to your email address.

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 Bird-kitt that you receive from "yahoogroups". To unsubscribe: send email to birdkitt- unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com . If you have difficulty, contact Chris Caviezel chris.caviezel@gmail.com

This is a great resource for finding places to look for birds in the valley.

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

For membership information contact Membership Chair, Tuck Forsythe ~ forsythe@fairpoint.net

*See The Hooter in **COLOR** on our website ~ [http://www.kittitasaudubon.org](http://www.kittitasaudubon.org)*
Upcoming KAS Field Trips

APRIL

5th, Saturday ~ First Saturday Birdwalk, Rinehart Park. A good time to see birds before the trees leaf out. Spring migrants arriving include swallows, kinglets, Osprey, vultures, and the first warblers. There’s an active Redtail nest too. 3 hour walk; meet 8 AM at Irene Rinehart bridge parking lot. Gloria & Jeb Baldi lead; 933-1558 for details.

26th, Saturday ~ Columbia Basin Birds. Marianne Gordon’s trips to the Columbia corridor and the basin wetlands frequently log 60 or 70 bird species. The itinerary includes the Vantage highway, Ginkgo visitor center, Lake Wanapum and The Cove, and lakes, wetlands and farm country east toward Othello. Expect waterfowl, an assortment of raptors, some shorebirds, sage-land songbirds, and with luck, pelicans, terns, etc. Contact co-leaders for details: Marianne, 509-925-1146; Jo Ellen Richards, 509-884-4444; or Cricket Webb, 509-674-4035.

MAY

3rd, Saturday ~ First Saturday Birdwalk, Rinehart Park. Meet 8 AM at Irene Rinehart Park riverside parking lot off of Umtanum Rd. Flocks of Yellow-rumped and Nashville Warblers are passing through; other arrivals are vireos, tanagers, Turkey Vultures, and maybe Wood Ducks? 3 hour walk. Steve Moore & Jan Demo- rest are leaders; call 933-1179 for info.

THANKS TO KITTITAS COUNTY BUSINESSES SUPPORTING KAS!

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!

Swallows are back! Varied Thrushes are calling! First Cassin’s Finches in our backyard! Ah! Spring!

The Hooter - April 2014
The Newsletter of Kittitas Audubon - http://www.kittitasaudubon.org