Most of us have travelled I-90 many times in the past years, perhaps contemplating the completion, or the benefit to wildlife, of the project that is a cutting-edge design to restore ecological connectivity between the North and South Cascades ecosystems. Fifteen miles of I-90 east of Snoqualmie Pass is being widened and improved by the Washington State Department of Transportation. The mileage is a primary state-wide transportation corridor located on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

Besides building a safer, more efficient, and reliable highway from Hyak to Easton, wildlife bridges in the form of underpasses and overpasses are planned for 14 Connectivity Emphasis Areas. These crossing structures are designed to connect all habitats and species, including low-mobility species, such as terrestrial mollusks, as well as rare carnivore species, such as wolverine, lynx, and gray wolf.

Patty Garvey-Darga, wildlife biologist with the U.S. Forest Service in Cle Elum, and Brian White, licensed engineer and WSDOT interim regional administrator, have worked together for the past 16 years toward the success of this project. Join Kittitas Audubon to hear from our guests the discoveries, research, and successes of the project thus far.

October 15th Program will be a speaker informing us about the shooting of Double-crested Cormorants on Sand Island, located at the mouth of the Columbia.

All Audubon meetings, on the 3rd Thursday of the 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!
The following is a brief description of actions and discussions of the KAS Board on August 6th. Please remember that any person can attend Board meetings on the first Thursday of each month at 4:30 to 6:30 pm at the PUD building behind the PUD office.

1. The recipient of the KAS $2500 scholarship, Dusty Pilkington, gave a short report on his project. He will be examining core samples from lakes in the Okanogan area for insight into the fire regimes of the past. He will be able to access layers laid down approximately 7600 years ago. It is hoped the results will help determine where the hottest fires are likely to occur in the future in our region.

2. The Audubon Conference of Washington (ACOW) will be held October 24th in Mt. Vernon. All are encouraged to attend; birding field trips will be arranged.

3. Concern was expressed about the large amount (over 50%) of monies spent thus far for fire control by the U.S. Forest Service, which is leaving little money for other needed uses.

4. Under Wildlife Habitat, it was reported that the explosion of wild turkeys is a boon to mountain lions.

5. Barry Brunson, Climate Change Committee, is participating in an on-line course dealing with climate change.

6. Jim Briggs gave a report on the National Audubon Conference in Washington, D.C., along with his contribution to the sessions.

7. KAS has been asked to present the ‘Science in a Pint’ program on December 1st at Cornerstone Pie. A topic is to be decided.

8. KAS is sponsoring a film at the October Film Festival in Ellensburg.

The purchase of a digital projector for several KAS uses was discussed.

Next meeting is September 3rd. Do join us!

KAS Board Meetings are held at 4:30 PM on the 1st Thursday of each month in the PUD meeting room, 1400 Vantage Highway. 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!
First Saturday BirdWalk ~ August 1st ~

On this Saturday morning the temperature was already 80° at 8 AM when 11 scantily-clad bird lovers gathered near the river. There was a bit of a breeze which helped to cool our heels, so, undaunted, we headed out along the road where we were surprised by the abundance of bird activity.

Three new birders joined us from the Westside, including a very knowledgeable 12-yr-old boy and his mom. We were amazed at his “hearing-birds” skill as well as those sharp young eyes that can see way better than most of us! It was a pleasure to have a young person so interested in birding.

Highlights included: Yellow Warbler (seen! That vibrant flash of bright yellow with fine reddish streaks on the breast), MacGillivray’s Warbler, Cassin’s Vireo, Bewick’s Wren, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Violet-green Swallow. It was 90° by 11:00, and seemed warmer.

We took a rest in the shade by the bridge, then checked out the wetland, but saw only a pair of Mallards resting on the mudbank.

The walk back through the woods is always welcome in the summer—the river and the trees provide cooling relief. Best bird award went to the Spotted Sandpiper along the river in the same area where it was seen last month (July), exhibiting nesting behavior.

28 species total and a nice walk with friends old and new made for a satisfying morning.

~ Jan Demorest

Bethel Ridge field trip, August 8th ~

In August, the Red-breasted Nuthatch families are “yanking” everywhere in the woods, but you have to wait patiently to cross the path of a “migration flock” that will have a number of mixed species and tons of hard-to-identify juveniles. We eventually found flocks with Mountain Chickadees, Chipping Sparrows, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. On the drive south from highway 410, west of Yakima, we found a Rufous Hummingbird, Western Woodpeckers, and Steller’s Jays in fairly quiet woods.

Well up in forest at marshy McDaniels Lake (the site of occasional summer bird-banding workshops), 17 immature Mallards were being watched from an Osprey nest up a dead snag. Our big find near the edge of the pond was a White-headed Woodpecker, lazily feeding up a tree. Non-avian life was noticeable: a coyote pup, golden-mantled ground squirrels, deer. The incredible vista west from Timberwolf Mountain caps the forest road expedition with spacious views of 7,000 ft peaks on Nelson Ridge and cloud-shrouded Mt. Rainier.

It was quite a “lunch with a view” and since there were just the four of us, we had perfect seating!

Cash Prairie, an alpine meadow near the crest of the ridge, is a green paradise without many birds on this day, perhaps because of a cruising Sharp-shinned Hawk eyeing the inexperienced juncos moving in thickets. The road descends the south side of Bethel Ridge and loops back home via highway 12 and the Trout Lodge, open weekends for stream-side dining. 19 species.

~ Steve Moore

(~ photos by Jan Demorest)
Volunteer Wildlife Rescue Transport

Thanks to everyone who participated in this year’s Wildlife Transport Program. Many of you know Dr. Mike Fuller of Ellensburg Animal Hospital, who, for many years, has provided veterinary services to injured or young wildlife and arranged to get them to a rehab center. This last winter, Tim & Kathy Yoxtheimer informed Kittitas Audubon (KAS) that Dr. Fuller could use a little help. KAS established a small grant to Dr. Fuller to help with the cost of medicine and food, mostly frozen mice. Several KAS members volunteered to help transport mostly owl chicks to the Blue Mountain Wildlife Center in Benton City, 100 miles away from Ellensburg, near the Tri-Cities. [http://www.bluemountainwildlife.org](http://www.bluemountainwildlife.org). It seems that owls find hay stacks to be appealing nesting sites. Hay transporters know Dr. Fuller and regularly drop off chicks. KAS transported over 60 birds so far this year. Species were Barn Owls, Great Horned Owls, kestrels, Red-tailed Hawks, and a Bald Eagle. The eagle has a story.

On the eve of our nation’s birthday, a recently fledged Bald Eagle on Lake Chelan ventured too close to an Osprey nest. One of the Osprey parents forced the young eagle into the lake. Two fellows on paddle boards rescued the eagle and contacted a local wildlife volunteer. The eagle was considerably underweight. Lead poisoning is a problem with eagles and the decision was made to do some blood work. The Lake Chelan volunteer fed the eagle ten mice that evening. On July 4th morning, the eagle was transported to Vantage where KAS picked her up and took her to Benton City. She was “stuffed” in the back seat of a small car and taken to Umatilla, and again transferred for her final leg of the journey to the federally-authorized rehab center in Pendleton. The eagle was put on a diet of trout for 5 days and, after sufficient recovery, taken back to Lake Chelan for release, another journey of 300 miles.

Would you like to help? We need volunteers to help with transport, mostly from late winter through early summer. We also need someone who is home a lot to coordinate the transport volunteers with Dr. Fuller and Blue Mountain Wildlife Center. You can also make a donation.

~ Tom Gauron

Note: I wanted to share a bit of my own experience as a volunteer for this project. First trip, I had 3 kestrel chicks, about 3 weeks old, cowering in the corner of their high-sided cardboard box in the back seat. They were understandably frightened, peeping and hissing continuously, so I decided to try singing to them. Universal language, right? They immediately grew quiet. When I stopped for a moment (to get a drink!), the complaints were loud. I sang; they were silent. I stopped; they raised their voices in complaint. So I sang the whole way to the Prosser truck-stop exit where a nice woman from Benton City took over. I wonder if she sang…? So it’s a special and memorable experience, whether you sing or not. And a good feeling to be helping our wild feathered friends.

~ Jan Demorest

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HERE’S WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND AN INJURED OR ORPHANED BIRD OR ANIMAL:

- Put a towel in a box or crate with air holes.
- Using another towel, carefully put the animal in the box & secure the lid.
- Keep the animal in a dark, quiet place.
- Call Blue Mountain Wildlife right away at 541-278-0215!
- Never feed the animal! (Until you have instructions from a licensed rehab person)
Climate Change Communications

(with apologies to lovers of the spaghetti western
"The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly")

The Good: Here's a gift idea for friends or family. How to Fake a Moon Landing: Exposing the Myths of Science Denial presents solid science, in a comic book format! It'll be great for kids as well as for adults who may be math- or science-averse—and for those who aren't so averse also! The chapter on Climate Change includes incisive remarks on the financial connections of some well-known "denial" organizations. I got mine for just $8 at Half Price Books in Redmond. The author is Darryl Cunningham, Abrams, 2013, ISBN 978-1-4197-0689-9.

The Bad: Greenhouse gases caused glacial retreat during last Ice Age (Science Daily, 21 Aug 2015). Advances in instrumentation has allowed a recalculation of when a diverse collection of boulders were re-exposed to the atmosphere, after being covered by ice for thousands of years. Localized glacier melting can be influenced by slight changes in the Earth's orbit around the Sun, or by shifts in ocean temperature. But only greenhouse gases appear to explain the worldwide retreat. The new dates match closely with an increase in carbon dioxide concentrations from about 180 parts per million (PPM) to about 280 PPM, over a 7,000-year period. In current context, over the past 150 years, the CO2 concentration has surged from 280 PPM to 400 PPM!

Source: http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/08/150821082727.htm; this announcement is based on a paper published by a group of scientists at Oregon State University in the journal Nature Communications.

The Ugly: You may have heard about a supposed "hiatus" in the global warming, often said to have occurred 1998-2012. If you haven't heard about it, then don't worry, because it never happened. Any appearances to the contrary appear to have been an artifact of how ocean temperatures are measured: in buoys or ship-based. Prediction: it will take a long time for "deniers" of the reality of climate change to stop referring to "hiatus", and even longer for those who gleefully pointed to it in the past, to admit that it was a mirage.

Source: https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/news/recent-global-surface-warming-hiatus; this is from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The actual scientific paper appears in Science 26 Jun 2015.

~ Barry Brunson, chairman

Cheatgrass (Continued from page 6)

Kennedy explained that the bacterium, which she discovered, does not actually kill the cheatgrass. It seems to reduce its competitive advantage (described above) and allows the native grasses a chance to compete for soil moisture and nutrients. Current test plots indicate that, where used, half of the cheatgrass disappears after three years.

So there are some management techniques that can control this wildfire-causing pest. This might not be good news to Chukar and Gray Partridges, which came from the same steppes as the cheatgrass. On the other hand, the Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse will rejoice.

~ Jim Briggs

August Summer Social

Tom Gauron, KAS president, introduced the KAS ‘picnic-goers’ to black-bean burgers at the August Picnic Social. He and Jason Scribner also cooked beef burgers, while members added tasty salads and sweet treats to munch while they (as the photo indicates)* indulged in conversation among the trees and birds. Tom handed out praise with Blue Ribbons to: Barry Brunson for his efforts in leading the Climate Change Committee; Gloria Baldi for her perseverance in awarding the first KAS scholarship to a CWU student with educational plans that include habitat enhancement/protection, and Gary Cummisk for his willingness to facilitate discussion of the KAS sponsored film at the Ellensburg Film Festival, both last year, and again this year with the film, “The Sagebrush Sea”. A delightful evening with friends!

~ Jeb Baldi

*(see photo on page 7!)
Next time you are picking cheatgrass seeds out of your sox or taking your dog to the vet for the same problem, imagine the much greater role cheatgrass plays in the unprecedented wildfires we have been experiencing in Washington. In a recent article in the Seattle Times, a Twisp rancher was interviewed. He said his ranch was threatened by the fires “surging through cheatgrass slopes.”

Birders are familiar with the negative impact of invasive species like Starlings and House Sparrows, but they pale in comparison to the damage done to western rangelands by the invasive cheatgrass, *Bromus tectorum*, introduced in late 1890s in contaminated grain imported from Eurasia.

Its adaptations to life on the Asian steppes gave it several competitive advantages when it quickly made its way to the Great and Columbia Basins. Being a winter annual, it germinates in the fall if conditions are right. If not, it germinates in spring, before the native perennial bunchgrasses get going. So the cheatgrass root systems are already in place and get a jump on spring moisture and nutrients. Cheatgrass roots are shallow and widespread so they deplete water in the top of the soil. Seed production is rushed and the grass goes into senescence. While grazers relish the early green vegetation provided by the cheatgrass, it is not as productive as the natives because it doesn’t grow all season.

This becomes a serious problem because the cheatgrass growth is very dense and the plants dry up early. A report by the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (1996) stated that in one study “…cheatgrass became flammable 4-6 weeks earlier and remained susceptible to wildfires 1-2 months later than native perennials.” The report goes on to state that “…cheatgrass is usually dry by mid-July whereas perennial plants can still contain 65 per cent moisture on the same date…” One firefighter, Ken Frederick, said: “we call it ‘grassoline’ because it burns so hot and fast.”

So what can we do about it?

If the cheatgrass infestation is below a certain threshold, it is possible to manage cheatgrass with livestock grazing. This will not eradicate the pest but can control it. Above the threshold, reseeding with native grass is required, a time- and labor-intensive process.

This leads to the concept of greenstrips which are being used on the Yakima Training Center. This is a new–idea firebreak, with fire-resistant grasses being planted in the dirt strip which can slow the spread until intervention can have an effect. The strips are traditionally planted with crested wheatgrass, Siberian wheatgrass, Russian wild rye and others. The problem here is that you are replacing one exotic species (albeit super-invasive) with other exotic species. Why not plant with native bunchgrass which we know is more fire-resistant than cheat? The other problem with greenstrips is that the soil has to be worked extensively to eliminate the cheatgrass seeds which are viable for several years.

The most exciting possibility is biological control. Colin Leingang, the environmental coordinator at the Yakima training Center said they are excited about participating in a program with Dr. Ann Kennedy (USDA-ARS [Agricultural Research Service]) and Dr. Michael Gregg with the USFWS, to use a cheatgrass-inhibitory bacteria to control the pest. Kennedy is also testing the bio-control on the Wenas Wildlife Area.

(Continued on page 5)
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Make check payable to KAS and mail to: KAS, P.O. Box 1443, Ellensburg, WA 98926

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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
Upcoming KAS Field Trips

**SEPTEMBER**

PLEASE NOTE: in last month’s Hooter the Bird-Walk was announced for Sunday. We decided to return it to the usual schedule of First Saturday.

5th, **Saturday** ~ First Saturday Bird Walk, Irene Rinehart Park ~ Celebrate Rodeo weekend with a morning walk by the river. Still a few vireos, pewees and Ospreys around before their southward departure. Meet at 8 AM at Irene Rinehart parking lot by the river for a 3 hour walk. Tom Gauron leads.

15th-16th, **Tuesday-Wednesday** (tentative dates) ~ Potholes Canoe Trip Campout. Jud & Muriel Weaver will check water levels at Potholes Lake and if it’s OK will lead us to an island campout site, repeating a trip from some 5 years ago.

Migrating cranes, pelicans, and shorebirds are a possibility. Dates are still flexible so call Steve Moore, 933-1179, or Jud Weaver, 925-9297 for current plans and boat availability.

**OCTOBER**

3rd, **Saturday** ~ First Saturday Bird Walk, Irene Rinehart Park. Meet 8 AM at Rinehart parking lot at the river’s edge. Jeb and Gloria Baldi lead; 933-1558 for info.

KAS will again sponsor a film at the Ellensburg Film Festival the first weekend in October. “The Sagebrush Sea” features our own local ecosystem, the shrub-steppe, and the creatures that depend on it, especially the Greater Sage-Grouse. Watch the local papers or go on-line for scheduling. Hope to see you there!

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**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.

Get your bird seed here!