The mission of Kittitas Audubon is to develop an appreciation of nature through education and conservation, with a focus on birds.

Saturday, December 14th
It’s Christmas Bird Count (CBC) time again!!

On Saturday, December 14th, Kittitas Audubon will hold its 41st year of participating in the longest-running community science survey in the world, the Christmas Bird Count. The very first count occurred 120 years ago this December, a result of the concern for decreasing bird populations harvested for ladies’ fashions. Last December, over 77,000 dedicated volunteers submitted 2585 counts from the US, Canada, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands, where approximately one-quarter of the world’s bird species were spotted.

Here’s how each count works! No matter the weather, teams of people cover a slice of a 15-mile diameter circle. (Ellensburg’s circle is centered near the west interchange.) Every species and how many birds of that species seen are counted. Some teams begin before sunrise to count night species, such as owls. Some areas require a fair amount of walking, but much counting is done from the car as the roads are slowly traveled. Birds seen at feeders within the count circle are of equal importance. For those who prefer the ‘Armchair CBC,’ your sightings this day are also needed (for any amount of time).

Most team areas require the best part of the day to cover, but at 5:00PM, we gather for a potluck at the home of Steve and Linda Hall, where bird species and counts are tallied. Phil Mattocks tallies and submits the statistics, and writes a synopsis of our count day that will appear in January’s Hooter. The compiled results of all these counts over the years, added to additional counts and research, help to track fluctuations in bird populations and are used to guide conservation programs around the world. Critical data indicates species population trends...significant as the climate changes and habitat decreases.

If you have never before participated and would like to, or if you have attended and cannot do it this year, please call Gloria Baldi @ 933-1558 or email baldi@kvalley.com. (Please use this number or email for directions on reporting feeder counts.)

Note: For those in the upper county, the Cle Elum CBC is scheduled for Monday, December 16th. For more information contact Michael Hobbs at birdmarymoor@gmail.com or 425-301-1032.


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*CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
Phil Mattocks

KAS Board Meetings are held at 4:30pm on the 1st Thursday of each month at the Methodist Church across from The Ellensburg Library. These meetings are open to the public and all Audubon members—please come and join in the discussions. Meetings adjourn by 6:00 or 6:30pm, then we all go out for a sociable dinner—NO business discussion allowed!

*Non-voting members

Board Notes

By Gloria Baldi

Following is a brief summary of the November 7th Board minutes:

- Bird reports included large sightings of the Snow Geese at the Columbia Wildlife Refuge, and one Snow Goose in the Manashtash. Anna’s Hummingbirds are remaining in the cold weather in Ellensburg with heated feeders. An American Three-toed Woodpecker was seen in the Suncadia area.

- **Steve Moore** has outlined KAS’s participation in the proposed raptor survey. Three sites in the valley will be done once each month from December through February. (See elsewhere in this Hooter.)

- Copyright infringement was discussed, which led to a discussion for backup plans for checking the Post Office Box and the KAS email.

- A discussion ensued on advertising the monthly meeting.

- **Meghan Anderson** has children’s activities planned for the Nature of Night event at CWU. (THANK YOU, MEGHAN!)

- **Barry Brunson** participated in the October webinar promoting the new Audubon Climate Report.

- Barry published a letter-to-the-editor in the Bowling Green KY Daily News encouraging people to support residential renewable energy, contrary to the possibility that the TVA will do away with a renewal energy program.

- **Meghan Anderson** had a letter to the editor in the Daily Record discussing how good intentions should be paired with action, especially concerning climate change.

- **Jan Demorest** is preparing the KAS annual report for NAS.

- The Government Relations Director for Washington Audubon will be in Ellensburg Nov. 21st for an afternoon meeting to give interested individuals information on the climate solutions bipartisan legislation for Washington State, with the goal of reaching 100% clean energy.

Join us at 4:30 on December 5th for our next Board meeting!

KAS is looking for passionate individuals to fill these board positions:

**PUBLICITY CHAIR** • **EDUCATION CHAIR**
**HISTORIAN**

Please email Judy Hallisey:
hydrojude@gmail.com if you are interested.
We know that wintertime Kittitas Valley is a good place to spot raptorial birds, right? Many of us have cruised farm roads on past KAS field trips or on our own to spot and maybe count hawks, eagles and falcons from the car window.

An Oregon birder now proposes to collect and archive uniform data on the abundance of raptors in eastern Washington. Jeff Fleischer of East Cascades Audubon in Bend has coordinated surveys in Oregon and Idaho for 15 years, gradually expanding the extent of the survey to 280 routes in 3 states, and utilizing the efforts of hundreds of volunteers! This year he’s contacting Audubon chapters in eastern WA to set up raptor survey routes in the Columbia Basin. In our valley, 3 routes are proposed that embrace much of the rural road network in the valley. The driving routes are named West Ellensburg, SE Ellensburg and Kittitas, but consult the maps to see the extensive tracts of farmland that are included.

We will organize this locally by scheduling three field trips, one for each month of winter, December through February. Each route can be covered by one car load of 2 to 4 persons. The procedure is similar to a Christmas Bird Count – driving a set route and logging all the birds seen – but restricted to raptors only. The first trip will be Tuesday, December 10 (with favorable weather). Each route will be repeated twice more, and we hope to continue these counts in future years as well. Please join us for fun raptor viewing!
The Butcher Watchman

Story and photos submitted by G. Thomas Bancroft

Movement caught my eye, and I glanced up through the windshield. The flight seemed labored, heavy, something a little different, unusual in this robin-sized bird. The individual was 15 feet above the ground and flew across the grass field along Rawlins Road. It came right over the car. Maybe it was headed for a large bush behind me. I stopped in the middle of this dead-end road on Fir Island, jumping out.

Sitting on top of the bare bush was the unmistakable silhouette of a Northern Shrike, a plump body, a big head, upward stance. It glared out across the fields, moving its head back and forth. Last week, my birding group had found a juvenile individual along the dikes, not a quarter-mile from this location. I moseyed back along the road, keeping my eyes averted.

Sure enough, dark eye mask, the bill with a stout hook and a large tooth, black wings, scalloped cream breast feather, this was a perfect-plumage juvenile. It was alert, hunting, but seemed to be ignoring me. This was my fifth trip to the Skagit in two weeks, and on each trip, we had spotted a Northern Shrike. On one trip, it was at Wiley Slough, on another at Hayton Reserve, once in the Samish Flats, and then here. These were probably four different individuals, and all had been juvenile birds. Possibly, this was turning into an irruptive year for shrikes.

These birds nest across Northern Canada and Alaska, coming south in winter. Most winters, a few can be found in Washington, but in some years, vast numbers will come south. Perhaps this happens when they have had an exceptionally successful nesting year, or when northern winters become particularly hard or food supplies low.

These are voracious predators, capable of taking small birds and mammals. They store prey by sticking it on thorns or barbwire, coming back later to eat more of it. Often, they sit and wait for a prey item to show itself before darting off the perch. This species occurs in Europe and Asia, too.

The bird bolted from the branch, dropping down to just above the field and flying rapidly away from me. I couldn’t tell if it was chasing something or just heading to another hunting spot. It probably makes the rounds of a series of good lookouts. Their scientific name is *Lanius excubitor*, which translates as “Butcher Watchman.”

See my favorite photographs at www.thomasbancroft.com

“Christmas gift suggestions: To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, your heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To yourself, respect.”

—Oren Arnold
The Feather Thief

A book review by Gloria Baldi

The Feather Thief, a non-fiction book by Kirk Wallace Johnson, is a book of obsession, crime, greed, and true story of the natural history heist of the century. The book begins with a description of a 2009 break-in. Therefore, from the beginning, the reader knows who the thief is that stole hundreds of rare bird skins, some 150 years old, from the British Museum of Natural History in Tring, England.

Two years after the heist, the author hears of the bazaar theft from his fly-fishing guide on a trip to New Mexico. He becomes obsessed with wanting to discover what would make a person steal dead birds; what became of the stolen skins; what was the sentence dealt to the thief. The obsession to know the answers sets him on a fascinating detective trail for several years...and he knows how to tell a story. The book is difficult to lay aside once you have opened its pages.

In the 1800s European naturalists were obsessed with collecting every living thing in nature, and the origin of much of the stolen collection is documented in the adventures, sufferings, and mishaps of Alfred Russel Wallace, who risked his life for years to gather specimens of rare and spectacular birds in New Guinea. Later during the two World Wars, his bird collections were so precious that they were moved to outlying private estates for protection from bombings. One small museum was in Tring on the Rothschild estate, one of the wealthiest families at the time. The museum itself had been a gift to the son, Walter Rothschild, who needed a place to store his own obsessive specimen collections of all natural things.

What was the obsession of the thief? A talented musician, he had become obsessed with fly-tying to the point that each fly had to be more beautiful than the last, and fly-tying comes from bird feathers, beautiful feathers from rare birds, worth a staggering amount of money. Therefore, of what worth were all those dead birds in a museum?

The author’s travels, interviews, and investigative abilities to discover answers to his questions make for a great read! I am grateful to the friend who gave me the book, stating he knew I would like it. I definitely did. Let me know if you would like to borrow it.

Note: We still collect dead birds for the Burke Museum in Seattle. They may not be the fantastic Birds-of-Paradise, but each yields knowledge.

“The bird is powered by its own life and by its motivation.”
— A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

Neonicotinoid Effect on Bird Migration

That neonicotinoids harm bumble bee populations is well known, but the effect on honeybees is not as settled (with lab studies clearly showing harm but field studies showing limited effects [see the article by the Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at https://tinyurl.com/sknwxqj]. The first experiment addressing the effects of those pesticides on wild birds suggests that weight loss may occur, and that migration may be delayed. The experiment involved feeding White-crowned Sparrows one of two low doses of a commonly used neonicotinoid (the highest dose of which would correspond to eating one-tenth of one single pesticide-coated corn seed). Within hours, the birds “lost weight and ate less”. When released, the dosed birds lagged behind control birds that had been fed only sunflower oil. “Even a slight delay in migration could affect a bird’s chances of finding a mate and nesting,” says a quoted exotoxicologist. See the 12 Sep Science News article by Maanvi
Banks and Fossil Fuels

The European Investment Bank is seeing the writing on the wall, and will stop funding fossil fuel projects, although not until the end of 2021. The EIB vice-president for energy says “This is an important first step - this is not the last step.” See the 14 Nov BBC News article at https://tinyurl.com/vqxl4w4. This is in line with a statement by by Munich Re, one of the world’s two largest reinsurance companies (see the May 2019 Hooter Climate Communications).

More EV Pickups & SUVs on the Horizon?

The Mustang Mach E is an all-electric SUV, and was unveiled Sun 17 Nov. The Ford F-150 pickup long has been the best-selling vehicle in the US; both full electric and plug-in hybrid F-150 versions are expected for the 2020 or 2021 model year. The long-awaited Tesla EV pickup truck is to be revealed Thu 21 Nov (after the deadline for this issue of The Hooter). General Motors has an EV pickup planned, which “will ride on GM’s third-generation global EV platform, which will underpin many of the automakers’ new electric vehicles in the coming years”, according to Forbes contributor Jim Gorzelany. Three startup companies also are in the mix. Rivian plans to introduce its R1T for 2020, to be built at a former Mitsubishi plant in IL. Bollinger will introduce its B1 SUV in 2020, and a B2 pickup a year or two later. Lordstown Motors has purchased the enormous assembly plant in Lordstown, OH, which was closed by GM earlier this year, and EV pickups will start being made there next year.

For background and more details, see https://tinyurl.com/srgabvr (Mustang, Reuters article in 18 Nov New York Times); https://tinyurl.com/qv35vj3 (Tesla, 19 Nov Barron’s article by Al Root); https://tinyurl.com/u773w7w (Lordstown, 8 Nov CNN Business article by Chris Isidore); https://tinyurl.com/tvrxfgx (all mentioned makes but Lordstown, quoted 2 Jul Forbes article by Jim Gorzelany).

XKCD Earth Temperature Timeline

Randall Munroe is a very talented artist with a degree in physics; his comics feature stick figures, biting wit, and generally very accurate science. Some of his comics are quite complicated and require much scrolling. One of them is “A Timeline of Earth’s Average Temperature (since the last Ice Age glaciation)”. This is a great one to which to refer honestly uncertain folks who say “the climate has changed before,” as a reason to dismiss concerns about our current climate catastrophe. See https://xkcd.com/1732/. Thanks to Judy for reminding me of this.

Birds are indicators of the environment. If they are in trouble, we know we’ll soon be in trouble.

— Roger Tory Peterson
Thank You in Advance for Your Membership!

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Please make checks payable to:
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PO Box 1443
Ellensburg WA 98926
THANK YOU!
Christmas Bird Count
December 14th!

No Thursday Program for December

December 2019 🎄 Kittitas Audubon *Hooter*

Mark Your Calendars!

**First Saturday BirdWalks**
Irene Rinehart Park on Umptanum Road at 8 AM for a 3-hour walk
December 7th

**Board Meeting**
Meet at 4:30pm at the Methodist Church on the corner of 3rd and Ruby. ROOM 3
December 5th

**Valley Raptor Surveys**
See page 3 for all the details!

**Christmas Bird Count**
December 14th

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**Thank You!**
Kittitas County Business 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.

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