

THE PRAIRIE OWL



PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 30, Issue 4, March, 2002

PROGRAMS

March 13 – 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow, 7:30 p.m. - *Bird Conservation from the Backyard to the Boreal Forest*. Dan Casey, the “Birdman of Kalispell”, will give an entertaining and informative overview of why these are exciting times for bird conservation in northern Idaho and adjoining states. Come learn what Black Swifts, Black Terns, Black Rosy-Finches and Black-backed Woodpeckers have in common.

Dan is the Northern Rockies Coordinator for the American Bird Conservancy, and is working on bird issues from southern Wyoming through central British Columbia.

April 17 – 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow, 7:30 p.m. - *Lolo Trail and the Corps of Discovery* - Mary Aegerter, local author and hiker, will provide a program on the Lolo Trail and the route of the Corps of Discovery. Mary has been walking trails off of the Lolo Motorway for the past two summers and has assisted several authors attempting to retrace the Corps of Discovery's trail of 1806. Mary knows the area well and will certainly pique your interest about this close yet remote area of Idaho.

CALENDAR

MARCH

- 4 PAS Board Meeting - 7:30 pm
- 9 Field Trip - *Birding Sites in Nez Perce County*
- 13 Membership Meeting, Dan Casey – *American Bird Conservancy*
- 16 Field Trip - *Harrison and the Chain-of-Lakes*
- 22 *Othello Sandhill Crane Festival* – Friday through Sunday, March 22 – March 24. Visit <http://www.othello-wa.com/sandhillcrane.htm>

APRIL

- 1 PAS Board Meeting – 7:30pm
- 6 Field Trip - *Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge*
- 13 Field Trip - *Famous, Unbeatable, Bluebirds*
- 17 Membership Meeting, Mary Aegerter – *Lolo Trail and the Corps of Discovery*
- 28 Field Trip - *Whitman County and Snake River Parks*

MAY

- 6 PAS Board Meeting – 7:30pm
- 11 *International Migratory Bird Day*
- 15 PAS Membership Meeting – 7:30pm, TBA
- 17 Over-night Field Trip - *Field Springs State Park*

JUNE

- 2 PAS Board Meeting – 7:30pm
- 7 Weekend Field Trip - *Boundary County, ID*

VISIT US ON THE WEB AT

<http://www.palouseaudubon.org/>

You may have noticed that our website is more responsive than in the past. This is largely due to our new host. The Chapter wishes to thank and recognize member BILL MOORE and his company FIRST STEP INTERNET of Moscow for hosting our website. The website contains current and past *Prairie Owl* newsletters, Rare Bird Alert Hotline reports, field trip reports, event schedules, Christmas Bird Count results, birding checklists, and much more. Thanks so much Bill and First Step!

The mission of the National Audubon Society is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems
- focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats -
for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

CHAPTER NEWS

From the Prez:

Will winter ever end? Despite some of our recent weather extremes, reports from Washington's central basin indicate that spring is here. The Sandhill Cranes are starting to return to Othello - just in time for the annual festival. I have also enjoyed the beautiful song of a male House Finch in our front yard for nearly two weeks now. Their song always reminds me of the scatting done by an accomplished jazz vocalists. Numbers of Red-winged blackbirds defending their favorite cattail patch and Meadow Larks perched on wire lines and fence posts have also been noted. Evidence of spring is increasing daily. We will miss it if we don't get out to experience it.

We had some really great programs during these past months. I wish to thank **Dr. Michael Scott** for his excellent presentation in January on *Issues Affecting Bird Populations During the Next Century*, and to **Randy Hill** for an enjoyable February program on *The Columbia Wildlife Refuge and Othello Sandhill Crane Festival*. We had very good turnouts at each of the programs. I also wish to thank all who participated or contributed to the success of our 3rd Annual Nest Box Project. This year's program was about establishing bluebird trails and building nestboxes for small cavity nesters. Over 25 nest boxes were constructed after the presentation. A special thank you is extended to **Potlatch Forests Inc.** for supplying the materials; to **Gina Richardson** and **Moscow Parks and Rec** for furnishing the facilities, advertisements, and help during the program; and to members **Tom Partington** and **Diane Weber** for assistance throughout the morning.

We have some great programs, activities, and field trips scheduled for the coming months. I hope you will have the opportunity to attend some or all of the events. **Charles Swift** and the other field trip leaders, **Jane Westervelt** and **Joe Lipar**, are to be commended for the variety of trips being offered. I hope to see you on one of them. Until then, good birding and enjoy the spring.

Tom Weber

FIELD TRIPS – Charles Swift

March 9 - *BIRDING SITES IN NEZ PERCE*

COUNTY (sponsored by Canyon Birders)

Participants are to meet alongside Gart's Sporting Goods in Lewiston at 8:00am to carpool. We will cover Mann Lake, Spalding Park, Central Grade and Genesee Pond. This can be a half-day trip for those who wish. Contact Carole Vande Voorde for further information.

March 16 - *HARRISON AND THE CHAIN-OF-*

LAKES - Our trip will be in search of Tundra

Swans, waterfowl, Bald Eagles, and early spring migrants. Participants should meet at 8:00am at Rosauer's on N Main in Moscow. For information, contact Charles Swift at (208)883-0553.

April 13 - *THE FAMOUS, UNBEATABLE,*

BLUEBIRD TRIP (sponsored by Canyon Birders)

Participants are to meet at Swallows Park Marina at 8:00am. The trip is a bit later this year than in years past so it will be interesting to see what different sightings will surface. Hopefully the weather will be wonderful, warm and sunny. The spring birds will be arriving, filling the air with song. Expect both fur and feathers with sightings of elk, deer, mountain sheep, and birds. Bring lunches if you are going all day.

April 20 - *TURNBULL NATIONAL WILDLIFE*

REFUGE - Our trip to Cheney, Washington, will be in search of waterfowl, nesting raptors, and early spring migrants in the ponds, marshes, and Ponderosa Pine stands around Turnbull. Please meet at Dissmore's IGA parking lot on N Grand Avenue and Stadium Way in Pullman at 8:00am

April 28 - *WHITMAN COUNTY AND SNAKE*

RIVER PARKS - Join us in our search for spring

migrants and local nesters at Washtucna, Palouse Falls, Lyons Ferry Park, Central Ferry Park, and Whitman County. Participants are to meet at Dissmore's IGA parking lot on N Grand Avenue and Stadium Way in Pullman at 8:00am.

MAY 11 - *INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD*

DAY - The second annual Moscow International Migratory Bird Day Celebration will be held at the 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams. Information booths, displays, and local field trips will be available throughout the day. Check the web site and local newspapers for more information.

MAY 17 - MAY 18 - FIELD SPRINGS STATE PARK - This over-night field trip will be on the lookout for White-headed Woodpecker, Williamson's Sapsucker, and other woodland and shrub nesting landbirds. During the optional Friday night camp-over we will listen for Flammulated Owls and Common Poorwills. Check the web site for meeting information or contact Charles.

JUNE 7 - JUNE 9 - BOUNDARY COUNTY, ID - Join us on a weekend trip to Boundary County, ID to explore the Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge, Nature Conservancy's Ball Creek Ranch, the Boundary Creek Wildlife Management Area, and the Selkirk Mountains. We expect a wide variety of nesting land and water birds including American Bittern, Black Swift, Boreal Chickadee, and Least Flycatcher. We will stay in or near Bonner's Ferry. Contact Charles Swift at (208)883-0553 for meeting information.

STATE COUNCIL NEWS

SPRING IAC 2002

Susan Weller, newly elected president of the Idaho Audubon Council, has announced that the spring meeting of the Idaho Audubon Council will be held at Camp Taylor in Pocatello on June 7-9, 2002. The agenda will include: Kristen Berry, Regional Grassroots Coordinator for National Audubon; Rita Dixon, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and coordinator of Idaho's IBA program; Terry Rich, US Fish and Wildlife Service on Sage Grouse; Janet Callen, Coeur d'Alene Audubon, on financial planning and strategies for saving money on chapter newsletters; and Chuck Trost who will present a birding journal and slide presentation on the Birds of Australia.

SPRING ACOW 2002

The Audubon Council of Washington (Spring ACOW 2002) will be hosted by the Willapa Hills chapter during the weekend of April 12-14 at the Ocean Park Retreat Center. The Center is located just north of Ocean Park, Washington. A program commemorating the bicentennial observation of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition will be featured.

A complete package of registration, five meals, and two nights lodging will cost \$120, with lesser amounts for fewer meals or lodging nights. For those who don't bring their own sleeping bags and towels, a \$10 fee will be charged for "linens." The center has RV space for \$15 a night for 1 or 2 people (\$7 for each additional person). A late fee of

\$10 will be charged for registrations mailed after March 12. Motels are also available in the area. For complete information and a registration form, e-mail Ruth Deery <ruthd@kalama.com> or write her at 3148 Laurel Rd., Longview, WA 98632.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OFFICERS & CHAIRPERSONS WANTED

The Chapter is in need of individuals willing to serve as officers and chairpersons. Elections for the 2002-2003 year will be held during the May meeting. Please, consider leading the chapter during the next year. It is a rewarding experience - especially when many are involved and donate of their special talents. There is always room for interested and enthused members. For further details, contact Tom Weber or any of the chairpersons listed on the back page. Your assistance and service to the Chapter is greatly needed and appreciated.

CANYON BIRDERS ANNUAL MEETING

The Canyon Birders Annual Meeting (their only meeting of the year) will be held at the Clarkston Library Meeting Room on Wednesday, March 6 at 7:00pm.

The featured speaker will be Rita Dixon who will talk on the "Important Bird Areas" program and on Citizen Science. Officers will also be elected. If you are interested in any of the positions, please notify Carole Vande Voorde. All officers would very much like to be replaced. Punch and snacks will be served.

GRAYS HARBOR SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL

Each spring, hundreds of thousands of shorebirds stop to rest and feed in Grays Harbor Estuary on their migration northward. Some birds travel over 15,000 miles round trip! The Shorebird Festival works to bring people together for this incredible natural phenomenon.

The 7th Annual Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival will be held on April 26 through April 28 in Hoquiam, Washington. Complete information on events, registration, and lodging are available on the Festival web page: <http://www.ghas.org/> or by calling toll-free: (800)303-8498.

BIRD RECORDS NEEDED

Catherine Rideout, Idaho Department of Fish and Game has contacted the Chapter requesting assistance in the collection of Idaho species records. Below is the text of her message. Please contact her if you can be of assistance or have information to share.

Dear Idaho Audubon Chapter Presidents,

I am working on a project for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Boise to collect occurrence records in Idaho for the following songbirds: Brewer's sparrow, sage sparrow, sage thrasher, and willow flycatcher. These species will be added to the BLM sensitive species list and are not currently being tracked by the Idaho Conservation Data Center (CDC). Historical and current species occurrences and distribution will be added to the CDC database, which will aid conservation planning efforts.

I know that many members of Audubon are accomplished birders who keep detailed notes of their sightings. I hope to use records of willing participants as a source of information for this project

I would appreciate your mentioning this project at your next Audubon meeting and/or including the above description with my contact information in your next newsletter. I can be contacted via email at: <crideout@idfg.state.id.us> Thank you.

Catherine Rideout

NEW NON-GAME BIRD BIOLOGIST

In a recent communication, Rex Sallabanks <rsallaba@idfg.state.id.us> announced his appointment as the new Non-game Bird Biologist for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. In addition to coordinating the Idaho Partners in Flight program, his responsibilities encompass all issues relating to non-game birds on a state-wide level.

Rex looks forward to establishing a collaborative partnership with local Audubon chapters and is forging ahead on a state-wide bird monitoring program.

BECOME A CITIZEN SCIENTIST - JOIN PROJECT FEEDERWATCH!

Project FeederWatch (PFW), a winter-long survey of bird populations throughout North America, is conducted by thousands of birders who put their hobby to work for science. Participants count the birds at their feeders every two weeks and periodically enter their counts through a data entry form or on-line at the *BirdSource* website. This information helps ornithologists track changes in the abundance and distribution of numerous bird species.

The easy-to-follow PFW protocol and Research Kit allow citizen scientists to easily count and identify birds that they see at their feeders and send their data to ornithologists at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The information is

analyzed and the findings published in a special annual report of *Birdscope*. Findings are also published in scientific journals, ornithological books, birding magazines, and other publications.

How to participate: Project FeederWatch is a self-sustaining program. Participants pay a \$15 fee to cover costs and materials. You may join PFW on line at <http://birds.cornell.edu/PFW>, or by calling (800)943-2473, or by mail. Send your \$15 fee to: Project FeederWatch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, PO Box 11, Ithaca NY 14851-0011

GUEST ARTICLES

MAJOR MONARCH BUTTERFLY COLONIES DEVASTATED BY STORM

After a severe winter storm in mid-January, in the mountains of central Mexico, dead monarch butterflies lay in piles on the ground, in some places more than a foot high. Researchers estimate that between 220 million and 270 million frozen butterflies rained down from roosts where they normally festooned towering trees. "It was really macabre," said Dr. Lincoln Brower, a butterfly biologist. "I've been going down there for 25 years, and I've never seen anything like it."

According to a report by Brower and a team of researchers from Mexico and the United States, most of the monarchs in the two biggest colonies in Mexico were killed in the storm. The loss of life is not expected to threaten the species, they said.

In the report Brower and his colleagues estimated that 74 percent of the monarchs at the Sierra Chincua colony and 80 percent at the Rosario colony had been killed. Along with a few smaller colonies, which scientists have not surveyed, the butterflies in these major colonies make up the entire breeding stock of monarchs for the eastern United States and Canada.

The spectacle of the monarchs' long and rugged mass migration north from Mexico each spring has made the species a favorite of nature lovers. The monarchs' epic migration is so exceptional that scientists have called it an "endangered biological phenomenon." Although saying it was unlikely that a single event could ring the death knell for the Mexican monarch populations, researchers said the radically reduced numbers left the butterflies vulnerable to future whims of weather and disease and continuing deforestation in and around their winter resting grounds in Mexico.

Scientists noted that the species as a whole is not in danger, because other smaller populations of monarchs that do not migrate to Mexico can be found elsewhere, such as in the western United States. Scientists will know in coming weeks how

precarious the situation of the devastated populations has become, as they get a better sense of how many millions survived and what shape the butterflies are in as they begin to move north.

A bad winter followed by a bad spring could be catastrophic," said Dr. Karen Oberhauser, a monarch ecologist at the University of Minnesota. Casual observers are unlikely to notice an obvious drop in monarch numbers this spring, in part because of the natural variability in population size from year to year. The Rosario and Sierra Chincua colonies are thought to harbor two-thirds of all the butterflies in Mexico's monarch sanctuaries, which are located in mountains in the state of Michoacan, west of Mexico City.

According to the report, the storm Jan. 12 and 13 dropped around 4 inches of rain in the area and was followed by freezing temperatures. Although noting that records were spotty, Brower said temperatures after the storm were the lowest recorded in the winter colonies in the past 25 years. Because forest trees can act as an umbrella against the rain and a blanket that can retain heat, scientists and conservationists have been warning for years that the thinning of the forests could threaten the butterflies by increasing their exposure to the elements. An earlier study showed that in the past 30 years, nearly half of the prime forest in the area had been degraded or destroyed.

Scientists still do not have precise estimates of the typical numbers of monarchs that die in Mexico each winter, but researchers agree it is considerably lower than the estimates of mortality from January's storm. Scientists say monarch butterflies tend to gather in similar densities in the colonies from year to year. As a result, the number of acres covered by monarchs and counts of monarch-filled trees are thought to provide reliable estimates of colony size.

"This is the lowest known number of butterflies at these sites over the last 27 years," Taylor observed. The team also took random samples throughout the two colonies to estimate total numbers of dead monarchs in the forests. Brower said he feared that the numbers were, if anything, an underestimate of the actual death toll, as researchers counted only the butterflies on the ground. He said he had just received word from researchers still working in Mexico that the storm had left monarchs dead everywhere, including at their roosts in the trees. "Some of these clusters hanging on the trees are just all dead," he said. "It's terrible."

Carol Kaesuk Yoon - NEW YORK TIMES

FLYING SNAKES ON THE SNAKE

For thirty years in the Palouse we have enjoyed bird watching from our living room window and tramping the Snake River breaks at all times of the year. Raptors are nearly always overhead with Rough-legged, Red-tail, Northern Harriers, American Kestrel, and Merlins being the most common. On occasion we have seen one take a mouse or a songbird from our feeder but until last summer not anything larger.

In July of 2001, we were volunteers at the Pittsburgh Administration site of the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area on the Oregon side of the Snake River about 75 miles south of our home in Pullman. While snakes may or may not have given the river its name, garter snakes, bull snakes and rattlesnakes can be found there with a little effort. I don't know why they are so readily encountered there but one thing for sure is that it is not for lack of predation.

After dinner we would sit outside our cabin to watch the flurry of bird activity that came with the cool evening breeze. We noticed that raptors were not as common in the canyon as they were in the Palouse and began to pay more attention to them. Routinely each evening three hawks cruised overhead but because of the back-lighting we could not give them an identity. One evening a hawk flew over with a good size snake twisting and turning in its talons. "WOW! I bet I will never see that again." Then a few evenings later a hawk stooped and struck something on a rock ledge above the cabin and began to dance. I had ten power binoculars and could clearly follow the action. Quick as a wink a large hawk plunged out of the sky to alight within two feet of the first hawk. This second hawk was a large Ferruginous Hawk. The evening light reflected off its white under side, head and neck feathers bristled, open beak and its glassy eyes glaring, it reached over and, with one foot, snatched the snake from under the first hawk. With the limp snake in one foot, the victor gracefully lifted off the rock and flew over the ridge. What luck, twice in one week. Never again I said, but to my surprise these scenes were repeated once more during our stay. I had heard that snake predation by raptors was common but, having not seen it in the Palouse, I didn't realize it occurred so close to home. Now I am inclined to believe that snakes may make up an appreciable part of the hawk's diet in Hell's Canyon and the lower Snake River.

John Kramer

Palouse Audubon Society
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PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY - NEW MEMBERSHIP ONLY

Includes *National Audubon Society* membership, subscriptions to *AUDUBON MAGAZINE* and *THE PRAIRIE OWL* Newsletter.
Send your check payable to **National Audubon Society** to: Palouse Audubon Society, PO Box 3606, University Station, Moscow
ID 83843. Please include this coupon. For more information call: (509)334-3817

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PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY

2001-2002

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WEBSITE

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BIRDING HOTLINE

(208) 882-6195

MEETINGS

BOARD - 1st Monday (normally)
1/7, 2/4, 3/4, 4/1, 5/6, 6/3, 7/1
MEMBERSHIP - 3rd Wednesday
1/16, 2/20, 3/20, 4/17, 5/15, 6/19