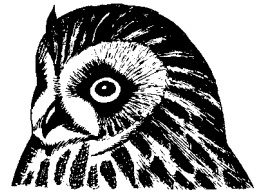


THE PRAIRIE OWL



PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 33, Issue 4, March 2005

THE PROBLEM WITH LISTING

Many birders keep lists of the birds they have seen. A “Life List” records all the species seen in any location, at any time, and in any part of the world. The maximum number of world species that can be seen is 9838. Of all the current “listers” in the world, Tom Gullick has seen the largest number of species — 8324. In addition to a life list there are regional lists. These lists may include ABA, North America, Lower 48, individual state lists, and county lists. One of the most fun and easiest to keep lists is a “Yard List”. This is a record of all the bird species that visit your yard. It is surprising how many species can be seen during the course of a year. Last year I visited some friends who live in Minneapolis. I decided to start a yard list for them. In the course of a weekend the list stood at 30 species and has been growing!

In addition to lists based on location there are lists based on time. A “Big Year” records all the species seen in a single year. The North American Big Year record stands at 745 species and was achieved by Sandy Komito in 1998. Mark Obmascik wrote an account of this amazing and irreproducible feat in *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession* Free Press, New York and published last year. Not many birders have the time or money to mount a North American Big Year. On the other hand a Big Day is doable.

The problem with bird lists is that they grow! Not only do the number of species in each list increase with time, but the number of lists that are kept grow. I have long kept a Life List. When I moved to Pullman, I started a Washington State list and then added a Whitman County list. Last year I did a Washington State Big Year—another list! Whenever I visit a new state I start another list. Last summer I went to Salt Lake City and started a Utah State List. Although summer is not the best time to bird Utah I still got 100 species in a weekend. I don’t know when I will get back to Utah again but now there is a very good reason to go — to add to my Utah State List!

Kenn Kaufmann the well-known birder and author wrote an article not long ago in *Bird Watchers Digest* about listing. Kenn is one of the top birders in the country and is near the top of several different lists. He wrote the story of

his 1973 “Big Year” in *Kingbird Highway* Houghton Mifflin, Boston (1997). This is one of the best birding books I have ever read and it was a real pleasure to meet Kenn several years ago at the Salton Sea bird festival. In terms of birding recognition Kenn can’t get much higher. So his new approach to listing is to list birds he has helped in some way. This seemed to me a great idea for a new list and a way of consciously giving something back to the birds we enjoy so much. It is also an easy list to keep and any novice or backyard birder can compete with the most advanced birders.

How are species added to this list?

If you put out seed in the winter and your feeder is visited by an American Goldfinch you can add that species to your list. That is a species you have helped through the winter months when natural sources of food may be scarce. If you put out a bird bath and watch American Robins taking a splash that is another species you have helped. If you put up blue bird nesting boxes that is another species you can add to your list of birds I have helped. Preserving bird habitat is a way to help many species. There are lots of things that we can do to help birds. Compared to the joy and pleasure they bring us anything we can do to help them is a small price to pay.

In this issue there are several announcements about upcoming bird festivals. These are great opportunities to meet other birders and see species that are not found in the Palouse. Last year I went to the Leavenworth Bird Festival. It was a great experience, everyone was really friendly, and there were lots of birds.

Grant Norton, Editor

Many thanks to Jim Storms for his article on the Great Backyard Bird Count — it just goes to show that you don’t have to travel far from home to have a great time birding.

If you would like to write an article for inclusion in the *Prairie Owl*, or if you have an interesting bird story, or a field trip report please send it to me at norton@mme.wsu.edu.

Thanks

MARCH

1 - **BOARD MEETING:** All are welcome. Contact Charles Swift.

12 - **FIELD TRIP:** Mann Lake w/ Canyon Birders, Gart's Sporting Goods in Lewiston at 8:00 AM.

19 - **FIELD TRIP:** Wolf Education Research Center in Winchester, contact Terry Gray to sign up by March 14.

** note: there is limited space available and a fee associated with this guided tour of the wolf center.

20 - **FIELD TRIP:** Lewiston Valley w/ Coeur d'Alene Audubon, Jack-in-the-box in Lewiston 7:45 AM. Contact Terry Gray.

23 - **PROGRAM:** *Natural History of Tropical Northeast Australia* - 7:30 PM 1912 Center, Moscow.

** note: the March meeting is 1 week later than usual due to area University spring breaks

26 - **FIELD TRIP:** Bluebird Trip w/ Canyon Birders, Swallows Park Marina in Clarkston at 8:00 AM

APRIL

5 - **BOARD MEETING:** All are welcome. Contact Charles Swift.

2 - **FIELD TRIP:** Heyburn State Park and vicinity, Rosauers in Moscow at 8:00 AM. Contact Charles Swift.

6, 13, 20, 27 - noon bird walks, meet at 12 PM at the entrance to the UI Arboretum (next to UI Golf Course)

16 - **FIELD TRIP:** Clearwater R. and Camas Prairie. Rosauers in Moscow at 8:00 AM. Contact Terry Gray.

20 - **PROGRAM:** *Galapagos Islands: Geology and Biology* - Dennis Geist 7:30 PM 1912 Center in Moscow.

23 - **FIELD TRIP:** Western Whitman County. Dissmore's IGA in Pullman at 7:00 AM. Contact Tom Weber.

24 - **FIELD TRIP:** Latah County Lakes/Ponds. Rosauers in Moscow at 8:00 AM. Contact Terry Gray.

Contact Information: Charles Swift, (208) 883-0553, charless@uidaho.edu; Terry Gray, (208) 285-1639, clgtlg@genesee-id.com; Tom Weber, (509) 334-3817, tweber@wsu.edu

PROGRAMS

MARCH 23 - *Natural History of Tropical Northeast Australia*, Deb Stenkamp & Charles Swift 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow, 7.30PM

Deb and Charles traveled to Queensland, Australia in August of 2004 and spent 10 days exploring and learning about this diverse region. The area is home to 2 world heritage sites, The Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rain Forests. Based out of the city of Cairns, it is not difficult to find over 200 species of birds, a variety of marsupials, marine life, and a diversity of habitats from wet to dry, fresh water to salt water, wetland to semi-desert. Cultural heritage of the local aboriginal groups and a rich history of exploration is also evident. Join us for an interesting evening exploring this area through image and sound.

APRIL 20 - *Galapagos Islands: Geological effects on biodiversity*, Dr. Dennis Geist 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow, 7.30PM

Dennis Geist, Chair of the Geological Sciences Department at the University of Idaho, has made many trips to the Galapagos Islands. Here he has studied the island's volcanoes and their effects on the island's biodiversity through time. This is sure to be an exciting and interesting talk about a place that has intrigued and attracted scientists and naturalists since Charles Darwin.

FROM THE CO-PRESIDENT

With the mild late winter weather, the feeling of spring arriving is even more enhanced than most years. The last weekend in February, while hiking up on Paradise Ridge, I found juncos in nesting habitat and wildflowers (buttercup & grass widows) in bloom! In many years there would still be snow on the ground here. As a skier, I would much rather see the snow and as a naturalist I am concerned about the effects of this mild, dry winter on the upcoming growing and fire season.

Long-term drought in the west is undoubtedly having many direct and indirect effects on our region's avifauna. Climate change has been predicted to have wide spread effects on our native ecosystems. We can only hope for our usual spring rains to provide some measure of relief in the immediate future - the long term future is less certain.

Spring is probably the peak time for birding on the Palouse and we are gearing up for it. We have several opportunities in March to join with other area bird clubs on field trip and visit with birders from other parts of our region. We have 4 trips planned in April and starting in mid-April weekly Wed. noon walks to look for migrants at the UI Arboretum. We hope to see you on one of these or at one of our upcoming programs.

Good Birding! Charles Swift

BIRD OF THE MONTH

The Short-Eared Owl

Photo by A. Wilson



The Short-Eared Owl

(Credit: U.S. Geological Survey/Photo by A. Wilson)

The featured bird this month is the short-eared owl. The short-eared owl has been the banner bird of this newsletter since its inception. The short-eared owl can be seen year round in our area but is most common in the winter. It is less nocturnal than other owls and is often seen during daylight. Roosting during the day the short-eared owl can be seen on the ground in fields. At night it courses low in search of small mammals, mice and voles are particular favorites. Short-eared owls can hover hunt, not unlike an American kestrel. Owls are predators at or near the top of the food chain, but small owls always need to be alert for and wary of larger owls. A great horned owl will prey on all the other owl species in its territory if given the opportunity. In winter small numbers of short-eared owls may roost together. It is believed that this grouping is used to provide protection against predators.

Short-eared owls can be recognized as medium sized, relatively slender owls. The underside is streaked and there is a dark triangle around each eye. The adult male may show short ear tufts.

If a short-eared owl is disturbed at the nest the adults will feign injury, like a killdeer, to draw the intruder away. The nest, a small depression in the ground lined with feathers, will contain between 4 and 9 white eggs that will be incubated for about 3 weeks.

Grant Norton

THE BACKYARD BIRD COUNT— A NOVICES VIEW

This will probably be old hat for you regular birders; however, as a novice birder I want to share my experience in getting involved with the 8th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count.

I have a friend, Alice, who has recently retired from teaching. She has tremendous energy that now pours into areas that she didn't have time to explore while she was teaching. Because I have become part of Palouse Audubon Society, I share my enthusiasm with her. She picked up on the bird count idea, and I gave her the brochure from Cornell. She then looked up the site and printed out the Idaho list. Sunday afternoon, my wife, Mary Ann, and I joined her at their home east of Harvard, ID. She said that one of the birds that she wanted to see was the Pileated Woodpecker. I thought that the bird was rare and doubted that we would see one.

The day was gray and pretty cool. The light was not the best for spotting birds or for getting good identifications. At first the landscape felt empty and barren. As we walked up the hill behind their house, I joked that because I was carrying my new binoculars with the digital camera feature, we could be assured that we would see absolutely nothing. In the deep timber I heard my first bird. I called it a Flicker but we still didn't see any birds. The first bird that we spotted was a Red-tailed Hawk soaring above. It was just close enough to see the red tail. Bird #1!

We next moved through some Christmas trees and admired the newly sheared stand. Not a bird. Then we crossed a fence and worked up a logging road and through a clearing. I heard my "Flicker" a couple of more times. The next portion of the road had a fairly thick screen of young Grand fir trees on either side with standing "snags" behind the screen. We spotted first one and then two woodpeckers. Species #2! Hairy or Downy? Woodpeckers anyway. Our field guides were on the kitchen table, so correct identification would have to wait.

A flash of another bird caught our eyes. By working quietly so that the screen hid us from the snag, we were able to observe that bird for a long period. I focused those new binoculars on the bird and Whoa! There was an honest-to-God Pileated Woodpecker! There was no doubt. It looked to be about a foot tall.



Pileated Woodpecker
(Photo by Terry Grey)

Now for the picture of my lifetime. Nothing. A Kodak moment lost because a Senior Moment had neglected to add the 2 AAA batteries (not included). The Pileated Woodpecker would knock on the snag, stop and turn its head back and forth and then hammer some more. Then I heard the "flicker" call again and an answer from back in the area where we had first heard the call. I'm pretty sure, now, that we didn't hear any flickers but were hearing Pileated Woodpeckers all along.

There were two small dark birds, not Juncos, darting around but they didn't stay still long enough for us to make any identification. I couldn't see any white markings so they weren't Chickadees either.

We saw the smaller woodpeckers again as we moved out of that area. On the way back toward the house, I heard a drumming in thick woods. My wife and Alice went to the left and I went around to the right. The "elk" crashing through the brush turned out to be the women but I managed to flush one Ruffed Grouse that I could see instead of just hear. Species #4!

Back at the house, we spread out the Peterson's and determined that the smaller woodpeckers were Hairy and not Downy. We confirmed that the larger woodpecker was truly the Pileated and then discovered that what we had viewed was (probably) the male. I think that the red on the

head went clear down the front to the bill. The pictures in Peterson's Guide show that the red feathers stop higher up on the head of the female. The devil is in the details! Now if I had had batteries, if I were able to capture an image, and if I were able to download the image, we could study the image at our leisure and be sure which one we observed.

Since Alice had been counting species all the way home after church in Garfield to the farm at Harvard (we have really big back yards!) and also during our walk, she had quite a few more species than my wife and I did. There was a memory search as to which duck Alice and her husband saw on the Palouse River - Common Goldeneye or Bufflehead. I think what they saw was the Bufflehead because they remembered a larger white patch on the head.

On Monday, I sent in my counts to Cornell for Saturday, Sunday and Monday. I finally read the fine print and printed Sunday's count "for my records", Record ID S1851134, and Monday's, Record ID S1859157. I recommend that any one interested bookmark the Cornell GBBC web site for future reference:

www.birdsource.org/gbbc/results/statelinks.html and got to WA and ID lists.

I don't believe I have enjoyed anything this much since I bought my first computer!

Great Birding!

James Storms

PAS MEMBERSHIP REPORT

As of January 30, 2005 Palouse Audubon Society membership is 166 members. Of that number, 59% (98) are dues paying local members for 2005 and 41% (68) are new members from our geographical area who have joined the National Audubon Society in 2004. These members are given membership in PAS until November 30, 2005.

Of the 98 paid members, 29 members (26%) have donated an additional \$555 to PAS. The donations were given for use in supporting Audubon Adventures (\$125), in supporting Conservation projects (\$145), and to support Other uses (\$285).

The PAS Board of Directors and Officers thank all of you for supporting your local Audubon Society, PAS.

Total combined PAS and NAS membership for our geographical area is 332.

James Storms
Membership Chairman

In Memory: PHYLLIS M. WICKS, Palouse Audubon Society Treasurer from July 1992 through June 2002, died Wednesday morning, February 23, 2005 at Aspen Park Healthcare Center. Born on July 31, 1923 in Buffalo, New York she was a graduate of Florida Atlantic University and worked as a tax auditor for the state of Florida. Phyllis moved to Moscow in 1987 following the death of her husband. She became actively involved in community affairs, the Audubon Society, the Washington-Idaho Symphony and the food bank. The chapter expresses our sympathy to her family, Carl, Owen and their families. Phyllis' will always be remembered for her infectious smile and cheerful dedication to the chapter. The family suggests memorials be made to the food bank.

BIRD FESTIVALS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Sandhill Crane Festival

March 18 – 20. Othello, Washington. The festival has many tours for crane viewing along with specialty tours, including Columbia National Wildlife Refuge/Potholes area wildlife tour, Missoula Floods and the Channeled Scablands geology tour, Sage Grouse Lek tour, Lower Grand Coulee birding tour and Wahluke Slope/Shrub Steppe birding tour. Pre-registration is suggested to reserve your seat as some fill up quickly.

www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org

PALOUSE AUDUBON Board of Directors

Co-President: Charles Swift, (208)883-0553,

<mailto:charless@uidaho.edu>

Co-President: Terry Gray, (208)285-1639,

<mailto:clgtlg@genesee-id.com>

Membership: James G. Storms, (509)635-1272,

<mailto:nbutte@pullman.com>

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<mailto:willmes@adelphia.net>

Education: Cathy Willmes, (208) 882-3782,

<mailto:willmes@adelphia.net>

Newsletter Editor: Grant Norton, (509)334-1219,

<mailto:norton@mme.wsu.edu>

Programs: Thomas L. Weber, (509) 334-3817,

<mailto:tweber@wsu.edu>

Publicity: Diane Weber, (509) 334-3817,

<mailto:catbirdz@adelphia.net>

Webmaster: Thomas L. Weber, (509) 334-3817,

<mailto:tweber@wsu.edu>

Secretary: Deborah Stenkamp, (208) 883-0553

Special Projects: Doyle McClure, <mailto:dmcclure@colfax.com>

www.palouseaudubon.com

Spring Audubon Council of Washington

April 8 – 10. Ellensburg, Washington. Hosted by Kittitas Audubon Society. The theme, Kittitas Valley: Cascades to the Columbia will feature programs and field trips that will take you from the mountains to the river. Mark your calendars and plan to join us in Central Washington.

wa.audubon.org/new/audubon

Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest

May 6 – 8. Leavenworth, Washington. Centered around bird watching but also including art shows, concerts, wildflower walks and more.

www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com

Puget Sound Bird Festival

May 14. Edmonds, Washington. Celebrate birds and their habitats on International Migratory Bird Day. The following activities (and more!) will be offered throughout the day at various locations:

Guided bird walks with experienced birdwatchers

Bird-viewing stations at Edmonds Marsh and waterfront parks

Children's activities

Presentations and workshops on various topics such as native plant gardening and landscaping near critical areas, bird identification, and caring for injured wildlife

Book signings by authors of bird and nature-related books

•Exhibits by local and regional organizations

•Birding-related promotions and receptions in downtown businesses

www.ci.edmonds.wa.us or call 425-771-022

MEMBERSHIP

Palouse Audubon Society, PO Box 3606 University Station, Moscow ID 83843, is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. The mission of Audubon 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.

General membership meetings are held at the 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams St, Moscow ID, at 7:30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month, September through May. The board of directors meet at member homes at 7:30 p.m. in the first week of each month.

The Prairie Owl is published every other month, September through May. Material for the *Owl* should be sent to the editor, Grant Norton, 1225 NW Clifford St, Pullman WA 99163, or email norton@mme.wsu.edu by the 20th of the month. Subscription problems should be addressed to the membership chair, James Storms, PO Box 235, Garfield WA 99130, or email nbutte@pullman.com. Visit the Palouse Audubon Society website at <http://www.palouseaudubon.org/>

Palouse Audubon Society
PO Box 3606
University Station
Moscow, ID 83844

PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY – ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Financially supports the programs and activities of the Palouse Audubon Society and includes an annual subscription to *THE PRAIRIE OWL* newsletter. Send your \$15.00 check payable to **Palouse Audubon Society** to: Palouse Audubon Society, PO Box 3606, University Station, Moscow, ID 83844. Please include this coupon. For more information call: (509) 635-1272

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PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY – NEW MEMBERSHIP ONLY

Includes *National Audubon Society* and *Palouse Audubon Society* membership and 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 83844.

Please include this coupon. For more information call: (509) 635-1272

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Membership Category (Mark ONE):

- Introductory Membership (1 yr) \$20.00
 Student & senior Citizen (62+) \$15.00



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