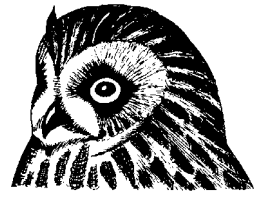


THE PRAIRIE OWL



PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 32, Issue 1, September 2003

MY FAVORITE BIRD(S)

We all have our favorite bird or birds. Even non-birders are drawn to particular characteristics of certain birds. The owl is a good example of a species that stirs the interest and imagination of birders and non-birders alike. I wouldn't be surprised to find interest in owls increasing with the recent series of Harry Potter books/movies in which Hedwig (Harry's owl and mail courier) plays a starring role. The reasons behind our selection of a favorite bird are often as wide and varied as the bird species themselves: a "first" bird, a colorful bird, a comical bird, a backyard bird, a "difficult" bird, a symbolic bird, &c.

In trying to decide on my favorite I couldn't, of course, limit it to a single bird. So here are my four favorite birds and the reasons why.

Carolina Wren. As a child I was always interested in birds and used to try to identify all the species that came into our garden. One of the first books I asked for as a Christmas present was a book of the birds of the world. I didn't start birding seriously until I came to the United States as a postdoc at Cornell University. Cornell is, of course, home to the world-famous Laboratory of Ornithology and my office mate, Stuart, was a keen birder (and also a native of the UK). One morning I was sitting in the office working away and Stuart came running in hot and breathless. "Do you want to see a Carolina Wren?" he said. Happy for a chance to take a break I agreed and we walked (or rather ran) back to the creek that runs alongside Bard Hall and there was the wren still sitting on the branch and singing away. Its distinctive song (given by Peterson as *tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea*) and its difference from the single UK wren species I was familiar with got me hooked on birding.

The Carolina Wren is an eastern species and is distinguished by its overall reddish-brown coloring and bold white "eyebrow".

Red-Breasted Merganser. This would be the most unlikely of the mergansers to turn up in the Palouse but my interest in this bird comes from its description in Roger Tory Peterson's *Western Birds*. Peterson describes the bird as "rakish". Both definitions of rakish would apply equally well to this bird. The sleek and handsome male certainly gives the impression that it is fast and built for speed. I like to think that Peterson was using the term to indicate "jaunty", which is what I think of when I look at the shaggy crest of the female. The crest is almost casual like a muffler that has been carelessly wrapped around the head to keep out the winter chill. One of the wonderful aspects

of Peterson's writing and his field guides was his use of just the right term to describe a bird.

Bohemian Waxwing. This is a favorite bird because of its wonderful name. At Cornell I was used to seeing the familiar Cedar Waxwing and didn't see my first Bohemian Waxwing until I came to Pullman. But the name "Bohemian" conjures up (at least to me) images of the Algonquin Hotel in New York with its smoky lounges, the chinking of glasses of absinthe, and animated conversations between the literati.

There are several definitions of Bohemian of which the waxwing seems to be a unique combination. It is a bird that disregards conventional standards of behavior as it gorges itself on berries swallowing them whole and if the fruit is overripe then the birds may become decidedly tipsy. But they are very social birds and may be seen to pass berries from one to another along a row of birds. In North America, their nomadic wanderings occasionally take them as far east as New England and, more regularly, into the Rocky Mountain states as far south as Colorado.

Female Northern Harrier. There is no more beautiful sight in my experience to date of birding than the female Northern Harrier coursing lazily low over the rolling farmlands of the Palouse with the setting sun perched on the horizon. Surely this is one of the most handsome of all our birds. Her pale steel gray body with clean white underside is so instantly distinctive and recognizable.

Once again we have a very active Fall program and field trip schedule. The weekly trips to Mann Lake will surely turn up some interesting species over the next couple of months. Plus we have the long awaited showing of the movie "Winged Migration" at the end of this month.

The Editor

SEPTEMBER

6 Mann Lake Field Trip

- 13 Mann Lake Field Trip
- 17 PAS Program Meeting -- *ROSE CREEK PRESERVE* - by Bertie Weddell
- 20 Mann Lake Field Trip
- 20 Virgil Phillips Farm Field Trip
- 26 PAS co-sponsored presentation -- *WINGED MIGRATION* - the award-winning movie by Jacques Perrin
- 27 Mann Lake Field Trip

OCTOBER

- 4 Mann Lake Field Trip
- 11 Mann Lake Field Trip
- 11 Kamiak Butte and Rose Creek Field Trip, Leaders: Tom and Diane Weber
- 15 PAS Program Meeting – to be arranged
- 18 Mann Lake Field Trip
- 18 Rock Lake and Sprague Lake Field Trip, Leaders: Tom and Diane Weber
- 25 Mann Lake Field Trip

NOVEMBER

- 19 PAS Program Meeting – Holiday Social and Auction

Program meetings (except for the showing of “Winged Migration”) are held at the 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow. Everyone is welcome. Meetings begin at 7:30pm.

PROGRAMS

Wednesday, September 17 - *MANAGING PALOUSE PRAIRIE AND RIPARIAN HABITATS AT ROSE CREEK PRESERVE* - A program by Bertie Weddell, Pullman - 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow, 7:30 p.m.

The Rose Creek Preserve is recognized as containing one of the best black hawthorn/cow parsnip riparian areas left in the entire Palouse. This is one of the best remaining examples of the rare cow parsnip community, which, even prior to grazing and farming, covered less than five percent of Whitman County. On the preserve, black hawthorn grows to a height of 15 feet or more. The under story of cow parsnip grows to a height of six feet, creating a cool sanctuary for wildlife during hot summer months. In addition, the relationship between the black hawthorn and quaking aspen is particularly complex. As the aspen grows, it shades out the hawthorn, which dies back to rootstocks, only to re-emerge when the short-lived aspen falls victim to heart rot. The preserve is also home to more than 250 species of vascular plants.

Friday, September 26 - *WINGED MIGRATION* - the award-winning movie by Jacques Perrin

For eighty million years, birds have ruled the skies, seas and earth. Each spring, they fly vast distances. Each fall, they fly the same route back. This film is the result of four years following their amazing odysseys, in the northern hemisphere and then the south, species by species, flying over seas and continents. More than 450 people, including 17 pilots and 14 cinematographers, were necessary to follow bird migrations through forty countries and each of the seven continents. The film covers landscapes that range from the Eiffel Tower and Monument Valley to the remote reaches of the Arctic and the Amazon. The result is a film of staggering beauty that opens one's eyes to the ineffable wonders of the natural world.

Palouse Audubon Society is co-sponsoring the presentation with PCEI at the Kenworthy Theatre in Moscow at 7:00 p.m. Advanced tickets are available at Book People of Moscow, Bruised Books of Pullman, PCEI, and Palouse Audubon field trips and meetings.

Wednesday, October 15 – To be arranged. Updated information can be found on our website <http://www.palouseaudubon.org/> or check the local press.

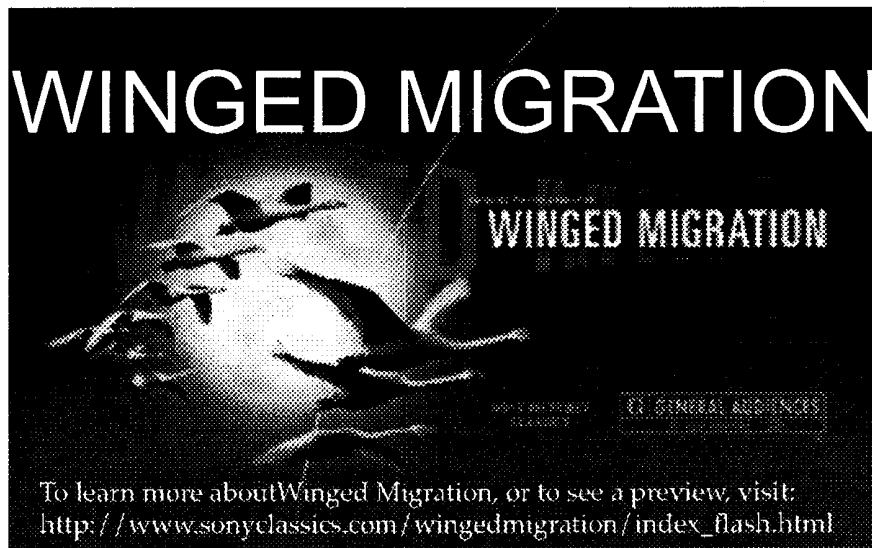
Wednesday, November 19 - *HOLIDAY SOCIAL and AUCTION* - 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow, 7:30 p.m.

Another great program on birds and birding will be featured at our third annual ***Holiday Social and Auction***. Mike and MerryLynn Denny of Walla Walla will present a program on ***BIRDS OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS***. Mike has spent the past ten weeks in the Blues performing small vertebrate surveys on behalf of the USFS. Mike's program will surely be a great attraction to our auction who's purpose is to raise funds in support of the chapter's many Audubon Adventure classrooms. Auction items include a wonderful variety of birding trips, books, artwork and Christmas gifts. Desserts, ice cream, coffee, and punch, will be served. Support of Audubon activities is tax-deductible, so bring your checkbook and help the cause. Everyone is welcome.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, September 6, 13, 20 and 27 - *MANN LAKE FIELD TRIPS* - Co-sponsored by Palouse Audubon, Canyon Birders, and Idaho Fish & Game, these trips will focus on the fall migration of waterfowl and shorebirds as they pass through our region. Field trips led by expert birders from one of the three organizations. **Participants are to meet at the Mann Lake boat ramp at 8:30 a.m.**

The Palouse-Clearwater Environmental Institute and the Palouse Audubon Society proudly present:



Kenworthy Performing Arts Centre, Moscow
Friday, September 26

Social Hour: 7:00pm (no host bar by *The Alehouse*)

Show starts: 8:00pm

\$10.00 At the door, \$8.00 Advance

(Advance tickets at: Book People of Moscow and Brused Books, Pullman)

"I found myself blown away! One of the most amazing films I've seen."

-Marshall Fine, Gannett Newspapers

"One of the most beautiful films to come out this year! Audiences are left with awe!"

-Claudia Purg, USA Today

"Breathtaking! 'Winged Migration' transports you to an exalted realm!"

-Stephen Holden, The New York Times

"A movie miracle! It soars!"

-Peter Travers, Rolling Stone

Thank you to our movie sponsors: *The Alehouse/Coeur d'Alene Brewing Company, John Larkin/Machine Language, RDesign, Palouse Travel, Cutting Edge, D8, Potting Shed Creations, and the Idaho Department of Fish and game*



Palouse-Clearwater
Environmental Institute
www.pcei.org

Ticket proceeds will benefit education programs
of these two organizations



Audubon
Palouse Audubon Society

Saturday, September 20 - VIRGIL PHILLIPS FARM FIELD TRIP - Join Palouse Audubon birders as they participate in the "grand opening" at the farm. Bird walks, bird box inventories, and identification of nesting species during this past summer at among the activities planned for the day. The farm is located along US-95 between Moscow and Viola and is open between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, October 4, 11, 18 and 25 - MANN LAKE FIELD TRIPS - Co-sponsored by Palouse Audubon, Canyon Birders, and Idaho Fish & Game, these trips will focus on the fall migration of waterfowl and shorebirds as they pass through our region. Field trips led by expert birders from one of the three organizations. **Participants are to meet at the Mann Lake boat ramp at 8:30 a.m.**

DIRECTIONS TO MANN LAKE

From the north end of Lewiston, follow US 12 south into town, cross the Clearwater River on Memorial Bridge and immediately take the first left (east) toward East Lewiston. Turn left (east) onto East Main Street and go about a half-mile to the flashing yellow lights. Turn right (south) onto Lapwai (a.k.a. Lindsay Creek) Road. When the road forks stay right on Lindsay Creek Road (Nez Perce County Road 460) and follow it about 5 miles to its terminus at Grelle Avenue. Turn left (east) onto Grelle Avenue and just past the sharp right curve; turn left (east) onto East Powers Avenue (a.k.a. Lapwai Road). Continue straight (east) past the grain towers to the main parking lot. ID DeLorme 54, A-1.

Saturday, October 11 - KAMIAK BUTTE and ROSE CREEK FIELD TRIP - Tom and Diane Weber
Enjoy excellent fall scenery and a nice walk through these 2 Whitman County natural areas. Expect to see a variety of raptors and resident songbirds - including a variety of woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, and sparrows. Excellent views of the Palouse and fall foliage are likely. Expect some moderate walking. Depending on the weather, this may be an all day excursion. **Participants should meet at 8:00 a.m. at Dissmore's IGA at 1205 N Grand in Pullman.** For more information contact Tom Weber at 334-3817.

Saturday, October 18 - ROCK LAKE and SPRAGUE LAKE FIELD TRIP - Tom and Diane Weber
This trip will concentrate on the scabland area of northwest Whitman County. We will visit Winona, Texas Lake, Revere, Sheep Lake, Crooked Knee Lake, Sprague Lake and Rock Lake - to name a few. **Participants should meet at 8.00 am at Dissmore's IGA at 1205 N Grand in Pullman.** Plan for a full day and bring a lunch. For more information contact Tom Weber at 334-3817.

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.

FROM THE PREZ

Wow! Did the summer slip by fast. I know I didn't accomplish much of anything planned for the summer and now with the students return to the universities, the work agenda is pretty much set by their needs. It has been a busy summer and it was only recently that the Board met to discuss programs for the year. We have several great events coming up which you can read about elsewhere in the newsletter. I did wish, however, to emphasize the special showing of *Winged Migration* this September 26. *Winged Migration* was nominated for an Academy Award this past year and lost out to *Bowling for Columbine*. It is a remarkable film - one that you will surely enjoy - AND proceeds from your attendance will benefit the chapter in sponsorship of our Audubon youth programs. So mark your calendars for this event and be certain to get your tickets in advance at either Book People of Moscow or Bruised Books in Pullman.

If you haven't been out looking for birds recently - don't delay any longer. The fall migration is upon us and the few habitats left in the Palouse are teeming with birds. Over Labor Day weekend, Diane and I recorded just two short of 100 species in Whitman County alone. In particular, if you are looking for warblers, head for Central Ferry. Monday, despite the heat, we found 7 species in the park: Orange-crowned, Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Nashville, Townsend, MacGillivray's, and Wilson's. In addition, Yellow Chats were still around at Wawawai Canyon and Steptoe Butte. There are also lots of shore birds at the sewage lagoons and near Sprague as well as at Mann Lake. So treat yourself to some great birding by spending a little time in our riparian habitats.

Happy birding,

Tom Weber

BINOCULARS FOR BEGINNING BIRDERS - by Harold Ward

So, you're beginning to do bird watching? Among your first few and most important decisions is what binoculars are best for you. A pair of binoculars should be comfortable, permit you a quick, high fidelity look at the birds and other wildlife you encounter and fit your budget. The terminology of binoculars can be a little daunting but it's important to understanding what to look for. Binoculars are really just paired telescopes with:

- Two large lenses which gather light from the object you wish to see,
- Some arrangement of intermediate prisms to make the binoculars smaller than a telescope and
- Eyepieces (smaller lenses you look through when using the binoculars).

Binoculars come in many shapes and sizes and for a large number of purposes. They permit you to see in stereo and to magnify what you see making small things large and distant things appear closer. The following is a list of many of the considerations for binoculars you might want to use for birding and other nature watching:

Weight The weight of the binoculars you choose is very important since you may want to be able to continuously use your binoculars for hours. Heavy binoculars will tend to remind you of their weight steadily by the strap pinch on the back of your neck. This can be mitigated a little by a wider, more padded binocular strap or by getting a shoulder strap arrangement. The latter are more of a nuisance than a neck strap and, in either case you're still carrying around some heavy binoculars. Remember, even light binoculars feel heavy by the end of a long day.

Magnification Usually one of the first specifications for binoculars is its power or magnification. For a pair of 7X35 binoculars, the image you see through the binoculars is seven times larger than the image you see directly from the same vantage point. For most people, your eyes can compensate for the shakiness of your hands when looking through up to seven or eight power binoculars. Beyond that power range, the image is shaky enough that even though you might be getting a larger image of the object of interest, you may not be able to use of all of the visual information you get. Also, binoculars less than seven power don't magnify the image enough to be able to easily distinguish many of the features of the smaller, busier birds.

Brightness The brightness of a pair of binoculars is mostly a function of the magnification and the amount of light gathered through the objective lenses in your binoculars. The objective lens diameter, 35 millimeters in the 7X35 example above, divided by the magnification gives a useful ratio (i. e. 5). A ratio of 5 (assuming you have decently clear optics) gives you a reasonably bright image through your binoculars approximating for most people the brightness you see without the binoculars. A larger ratio here is usually better so 7X42 binoculars are for comparable optics brighter than 7X35 and this means that you can use your binoculars earlier in the morning, later in the evening and when the bird you're watching is in deep shade. The quality of a pair of binoculars' lenses and prisms and their coatings also affect brightness.

Color "Birding Chic" notwithstanding, the color of the outside of the binoculars is unimportant but the colors coming through your binoculars should be unchanged. For birding and other nature watching, you don't want any color filters in your binoculars. Colored lenses make it harder to figure out what colors you're seeing in the wildlife you're watching and that

makes identification more difficult. Poorly manufactured optics may also add a rainbow fringe to the image you see or give the image a dim or milky appearance.

Field of View The field of view is often included as a binocular specification. It is usually given as for example 300 feet at 1000 yards or 100 meters at 1000 meters and is actually a measure of the angular width of the cone your binoculars allow you to view. Note that eyeglass wearers may be penalized here if their glasses keep their eyes too far away from their binoculars' eyepieces. That can mean that you may not be able to get a look at a bird you've spotted quickly or be as easily able to follow a flying bird or flock with your binoculars. Binoculars with larger magnification also usually have a smaller field of view or bigger objective lenses and other optics (making them heavier).

Fast Focus Experienced birders may not need a fast focus but if you're just starting out, it comes in very, very handy. Many of the niftiest birds, warblers for example, are small and very active...they don't usually stay in any one place for longer than a second if that. If you manage to get a peek at one even as an experienced birder, you need to count yourself lucky. Once you've got pointing your binoculars down pretty well, fast focus permits you to see one of the greater tiny spectacles in nature.

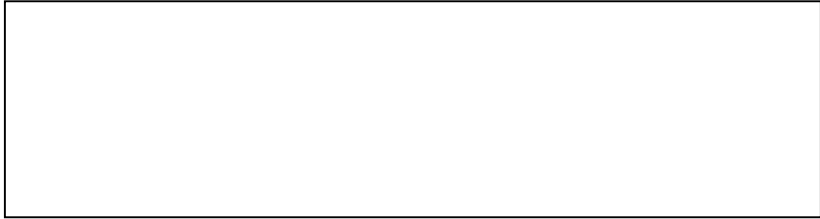
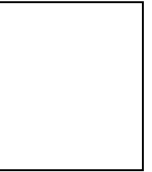
Near Focus Most people think of binoculars as primarily useful for seeing things that are far away. However, some of the smaller birds (warblers, vireos and hummingbirds for example) operate on a time scale that probably gives them the impression that we humans are just fairly fast moving trees. As a result, you can often approach them to within a few yards. Although that is a good thing, your binoculars might not be able to focus that near in. So make sure your binoculars have a decent near focus. Eight or nine feet is excellent for this purpose. A twenty-foot near focus is adequate for most birding.

Center focus and Diopter Adjustment Even minimally adequate binoculars have a single dial, which focuses both eyepieces simultaneously. This is a very important feature for birding. To make this feature effective, such binoculars permit (usually the right eyepiece) to be adjusted so that your left eye and right eye stay in focus as you adjust the central focusing dial. Be sure to get familiar with the procedure to adjust your binoculars to your eyes and eyeglasses if you wear them and remember your diopter setting so you can quickly reset it if/when you let someone else use your binoculars.

Spotting/Viewing Mechanics Try to avoid spotting birds with you glasses on and then trying to view them through binoculars without your glasses. The extra time it takes to do this will cause you to miss a lot. It's much better to pick out your binoculars so they work with your eyeglasses or wear contact lenses. That way the process of going from spotting to viewing with binoculars is quick and consistent and you don't have to worry about dropping your glasses or your binoculars.

TO BE CONTINUED next month when we will discuss price and what to avoid in choosing the PERFECT binoculars.

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MEETINGS

BOARD - 1st Monday (normally)
8/25, 10/6, 11/3, 12/1
MEMBERSHIP - 3rd Wednesday
9/17, 10/15, 11/19, 12/10

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(208) 882-6195

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
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