

# The Prairie Owl



Volume 35 Issue 1

November-December 2006

## EVENT CALENDAR

### NOVEMBER

11—Field Trip to Lewiston/Clarkston

15—Program; *Raptor Rehabilitation*; Dr Nickol Finch & WSU Raptor Club

### DECEMBER

13—Program; *Birds, Bats and Blades: Wind Turbines and Protected Wildlife*; Mike Denny

16—Pullman/Moscow Christmas Bird Count

30—Lewiston/Clarkston Christmas Bird Count

### PALOUSE AUDUBON

President: Terry Gray, (208) 882-1585, clgtlg@moscow.com

Vice-President: VACANT

Secretary: VACANT

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Board Members: Diana Jones, (208) 882-0898, joneses01@myway.com; Laura Bloomfield, (206) 388-7938, laurabloomfield22@yahoo.com; and Donal Wilkinson, (208) 310-3010, donalwilkinson@yahoo

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Newsletter/Program/Website: Tom Weber, (509) 334-3817, tweber@wsu.edu

Publicity: Diane Weber, (509) 334-3817, catbirdz@adelphia.net

## R.I.P.—R.B.A. THANKS KAS

On August 31, 2006 the plug was finally pulled on the Rare Bird Alert Hotline. The program was started in December 1993— Carol Bradford was president of Palouse Audubon and Dale Goble served as the first voice of the northern Idaho/eastern Washington/northeastern Oregon RBA. The original tape recorder was in Dale's closet. About a year later Kas took over, even though the recorder lurked in Dale's closet until the summer of 2002 when a virtual mailbox was purchased from Verizon. In 2004 the telephone number [208-882-6195] was disconnected in favor of posting sightings on the website.

Palouse Audubon wishes to thank Kas Dumroese

for his many years of service to the Rare Bird Alert Hotline Program. Below follows Kas' last message—dated 8/31/06

Greetings all:

Tonight I'm compiling the last RBA for northern Idaho / eastern Washington / northeastern Oregon. With the Internet, it appears that my compilations have essentially become an archiving mechanism - you can read about rare sightings sooner than I can compile and repost. And to be honest, I'd rather spend more time outside birding!

I started with an analog tape recorder and a dedicated phone line... back when that was still a great way to share infor-



R Kasten Dumroese

mation. Now with Tweet-ers, Inland Birders, and IBLE, the information is shared almost instantaneously.

Over the years I've accumulated directions to some really great birding sites, sites where birds are often reported. I plan to ask Palouse Audubon to upload

(cont on page 2)

## FROM THE PREZ:

Firstly, I wish to apologize for the lack of a September/October newsletter. Not to make excuses, but we've been a bit short handed. The Board has made a commitment to publish a bi-monthly newsletter, starting this month.

There have been some major changes in our Board. Due to professional and personal commitments, Grant Norton has stepped down as Newsletter Editor. Charles Swift and Deb Stenkamp have also resigned. They are adopt-

ing a 9-month-old daughter and are currently in China to bring her back to their newly remodeled home in the United States. Three new members have volunteered to help out on the Board: Diana Jones, Donal Wilkinson and Laura Bloom-

(cont on page 3)

## Programs

November 15— **Raptor Rehabilitation**; Dr. Nickol Finch, Clinical Instructor, Zoological Animal Medicine, Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Washington State University. Featuring many of the live raptors in the care of the WSU Raptor Club, Dr. Finch will discuss rehabilitation. Come join us for a wonderful program featuring some of our most beautiful birds. November 15, 7:30pm, 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow. Everyone is welcome.



Dr. Nickol Finch & friend

December 13— **Birds, Bats and Blades: Wind Turbines and Protected Wildlife**; Mike Denny, expert birder, naturalist, and co-chairman of the Blue Mountain Audubon Society Conservation Committee. Mike will explore what is going on within the wind energy industry; what the impacts are to our native birds and bats; the how's of wildlife surveys on wind farms—who is doing them and who pays for it; and the role of State and Federal Wildlife agencies. Mike will also discuss the composition of the TAC Group, as well as the Federal Tax Credit to the Wind Industry.

Mike is a passionate and dynamic speaker. Come join us and learn

how a wind farm comes into being—how these giants are built and sites selected— and their effects on our bats and birds. December 13, 7:30pm, 1912 Building, 3rd and Adams, Moscow. Everyone is welcome.



## Rare Bird Alert Hotline (from page 1)

those directions to their site so when someone talks about Tyson Ponds, or the Lewiston levee ponds, or Bassett Park, or Philips Farm, or Perch Point, you can track down the locations....

It's been a great time. I figure I've done about 650 reports, but I couldn't have done it without your participation. Thanks everyone.

Good birding, Kas Dumroese

**AND THANK YOU, KAS!**

*"I figure I've done about 650 reports, but I couldn't have done it without your participation.."*

### Treasurer's Report— 10/23/06

Savings	\$3,292.96
Checking Balance 8/1/06	\$3,335.94
Income:	
Local Dues	\$1320.00
Donations	\$350.00
NAS dues share	\$40.00
Expenses:	
Mailing (April newsletter)	(\$95.94)
Birding Field Checklist	(\$24.15)
Postcard Mailing	(\$84.09)
Membership Mailings	(\$265.20)
Website domain renewal	(\$14.95)
Checking Balance 10/23/06	\$4,561.61
Total Assets:	\$7,854.57

## Field Trips

November 11— **Birding Lewiston/Clarkston**; Terry Gray, leader. Meet at 7:30am, N Main Rosauers in Moscow to car pool to Lewiston. We will meet Canyon Birders at Gart's Sports at 8:15am and look for birds at the levee ponds, both rivers, Hellsgate State Park, Mann Lake and possibly Spalding Park. All day trip— so bring a lunch.

**Christmas Bird Counts**—The Christmas Bird Count is a fun day for both the birding enthusiast and the novice alike. Held between December 14 and January 5 each year, the CBC is an opportunity to see wintering birds such as waterfowl and raptors. All count data are incorporated into a national database. This will be the 107th annual

Christmas Bird Count and the Palouse Audubon Chapter's 36th annual year of participation.

Count day for the **Moscow-Pullman Circle** is **Saturday, December 16**. Contact Dave Holick at <daveholick@moscow.com> (208) 882-5556 or Tom Weber at <tweber@wsu.edu> (509) 334-3817.

*(cont on page 3)*

## A Letter from the Board of Directors to our Members

Over the past several years a number of officers and other chapter leaders have stepped down from their positions for various personal reasons. These departures have left the Palouse Audubon Society in a position where it is becoming difficult to meet all the chapter's commitments: assembling and distributing a timely newsletter, holding regular chapter program meetings, and conducting field trips, to name a few.

We are looking for a few chapter members who would be willing to spend a little time helping with chapter activities and to bring new ideas and fresh enthusiasm to the chapter board. Specifically, we are looking for

help in the following areas:

1. Vice-President, to assist the chapter president with planning chapter activities
2. Secretary, to take and distribute minutes from scheduled board meetings
3. Field trip leaders, to lead even one field trip a year to one of their favorite birding spots
4. Program chair, to help locate and invite speakers for the monthly program meetings
5. Publicity chair, to send press releases to local newspapers and to help publicize other chapter activities
6. Feature writers, to prepare feature articles for the bimonthly newsletters (Bird of the Month, local issues column, etc.)

If you would like more information

about these volunteer opportunities, please contact Terry Gray at (208) 882-1585; email: [clgtlg@moscow.com](mailto:clgtlg@moscow.com).

If you have comments or suggestions for the chapter, please send those to Terry as well. Your ideas and comments are most welcome and will be helpful as we plan activities for the remainder of the chapter's year.

## Field Trips (from page 2)

Count day for the **Lewiston-Clarkston Circle** is **Saturday, December 30**. Contact Terry Gray at [<clgtlg@moscow.com>](mailto:clgtlg@moscow.com) (208) 882-1585

For more information, including recent years count results see [www.palouseaudubon.org/CBC.html](http://www.palouseaudubon.org/CBC.html)

## FROM THE PREZ (from page 1)

field. One of our goals this year is to do some projects. We have money to apply toward projects—but we need some ideas and help. Suggestions include: maintaining bird trails, bird identification classes, field trips and more.

The 20th season of Cornell Lab of Ornithology Project FeederWatch begins on November 11th. Data entry is now open and ready for participants to log in and update Count

Site information. For information about data entry (for both new and returning participants) read the instructions found at: [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/InstruxandUpdates/BeginDataEntry.htm](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/InstruxandUpdates/BeginDataEntry.htm)

A Thanksgiving Day Bird Count takes place on Thursday, November 23rd. The counter chooses a ONE-HOUR time that best fits his/her holiday schedule. Details are on our website.

Please consider joining us this year for our Annual Christmas Bird Counts. It is a lot of fun and you do

not need to be an avid birder to participate. You are welcome to participate for the day or part of the day. See page 2 for details.

I wish to thank our current and past Board members as well as everyone who has supported Palouse Audubon by paying dues, participating in our field trips, and attending our monthly program meetings.

If you have any ideas on how to improve what we do— please let me know. Thank you.

*Terry Gray*

## WINTER BIRD FEEDING (from page 6)

including our own Seed Preference Test show that this high energy food is the flock-pleasing favorite of the majority of birds that visit feeders. In fact, it is often wasteful to fill a feeder with a standard mix—a blend of sunflower, milo, millet, oats, wheat, flax, and buckwheat seeds—since your visitors may eat the prized sunflower seeds and leave the rest

The enclosed table is based on stud-

ies conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Keep in mind that birds' feeding habits vary based on weather patterns, geographic region, season, and even individual taste, so you may find exceptions to these guidelines.

In the table, "corn" refers to dried, whole-kernel corn, a favorite food

for jays, pigeons, doves, quail, and pheasants. It is perhaps the least expensive of all birdseeds. Cracked corn, however, is easier to eat for blackbirds, finches, and sparrows. "Millet" comes in red and white varieties, but most birds prefer white proso millet over red. "Nijer," or thistle seed, is a delicacy for small finches such as goldfinches, siskins, and redpolls. Because nijer seeds are small

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**Winter Bird Feeding** *(from page 3)*

and expensive, it's best to serve them in a special nizer feeder, which has tiny ports that prevent the seeds from spilling out. Safflower is another seed that many birds like - most notably, cardinals. As an added bonus, it has limited appeal to starlings and House Sparrows (nonnative species), and squirrels. Peanuts are another readily available food that many backyard birds will eat. While sunflower seeds are favored by most feeder birds, some birds do prefer other seeds. For example, blackbirds like corn, and doves prefer corn, milo, and millet. Our Seed Preference Test found that most ground feeding bird species prefer white millet or red milo to black- oil sunflower seed, but many tree feeding species prefer sunflower seed. Experiment to see what your birds like best!

**Make it Yourself** As an alternative to commercial mixtures, which may have a high percentage of less appealing 'filler seeds' such as red milo, you can create an attractive, low cost mixture yourself. Pour one 2.5- pound bag of black-oil sunflower seed, one 10-pound bag of white proso millet, and one 10-pound bag of cracked corn into a clean trash barrel. Mix it up with a broomstick, and be sure to replace the lid tightly. In fact, always store whatever seed you decide to provide in a tight, waterproof container. Metal containers work best to prevent rodents from gnawing their way into your food supply.

**Leftovers: For the Birds?** You don't have to limit your offerings to commercial birdseed. Some people save the seeds from squash and melons. This is a great way to put the seeds from your Halloween

pumpkins to good use. Some birds relish these seeds even more than black-oil sunflower. Spread them out on trays to air dry before placing them in your feeders or on the ground. If the seeds are sufficiently dry and free of mold, you can save them to use when winter comes. Smaller birds may have a tough time breaking open vegetable seeds, but if you run the seeds through a food processor first, they will be able to eat them with ease.

Some people throw out scraps of stale bread, cake, or doughnuts for their feathered visitors. There's nothing wrong with this, but be sure the food is not moldy or it may harm the birds. Another caveat: table scraps may attract less-welcome visitors such as European Starlings, House Sparrows, rats, or raccoons. Attracting nuisance species can be a real problem in urban

and suburban areas, so be considerate of your neighbors before feeding leftovers.

**High-Energy Foods** You can also attract insect-eating birds such as chickadees, woodpeckers, and nuthatches to your yard by offering peanut butter or suet (beef fat). Birds that live in cold climates especially appreciate these high energy foods. Some people worry

	Chickadees, Nuthatches	Finches	Grosbeaks	Sparrows, Blackbirds	Jays	Woodpeckers	Pigeons, Doves
Sunflower	√	√	√	√	∅	∅	∅
Safflower	∅	∅	∅				
Corn				∅	√		√
Millet		∅		∅			∅
Milo					∅		∅
Nizer		√					
Suet	√				∅	√	
		√ Preferred		∅ Readily Eaten			

that birds will choke on sticky peanut butter. There's no evidence that they do, but you can completely eliminate any risk by mixing peanut butter with corn meal or oatmeal. The plain beef suet available at most supermarket meat departments is an excellent high-energy food. Suet can quickly become rancid in warm weather, but some commercial suet cakes and doughs can be used year round. Offer the suet in a plastic mesh bag (the kind onions come in) or, to guard against

raccoons, in a wire basket. Pre-made suet cakes are also available. These cakes often contain a mix of birdseeds. The cakes are great to have on hand in case your local supermarket is out of suet.

**Fruity Favorites** Birds such as robins, thrushes, bluebirds, and waxwings don't usually show up at feeders because seeds are not a major component of their diet. But you can still tempt them to dinner with an offering of fruit. Soften dried

raisins and currents by soaking them in water, then offer them at your feeding station. You can offer fruit on a platform feeder or simply on a plate on the ground.

**Water, Water Everywhere** Unfrozen water can be as hard for birds to find in winter as food. Birds need water not only to drink, but also to bathe in - clean feathers provide the best insulation. A dependable supply of fresh water will even attract birds that wouldn't ordinarily come

*(cont on page 5)*

## Winter Bird Feeding (from page 4)

to your feeders. A shallow, easy-to-clean birdbath is best - an upside down garbage can lid or large frying pan will work fine. To emulate a natural puddle, simply dig a shallow hole in the ground and line it with plastic before filling it with water. An immersion-style water heater will keep your birdbath unfrozen in the winter. Clean your birdbath often and keep it filled with fresh water.

**Types of Feeders** The ideal bird feeder is sturdy enough to withstand winter weather, tight enough to keep seeds dry, large enough that you don't have to refill it constantly, and easy to assemble and keep clean. For these reasons, plastic or metal feeders work better than wooden ones. In general, seed feeders fall into three categories: tray feeders, hopper feeders, and tube feeders. Tray feeders are typically placed close to the ground and attract ground-feeding birds such as juncos, sparrows, and towhees. Tray feeders also work well when mounted on deck railings, stumps, or posts. Hopper feeders are very common and are often hung from trees, decks, and poles. These feeders are especially good for larger species such as cardinals, jays, and grosbeaks. Tube feeders are typically suspended from trees and posts. They are excellent for finches, titmice, and chickadees.

**Feeder Placement** Place your feeder in an area free of disturbances where it is easy to see and convenient to refill. Your feeder should be close to natural shelters (cover) such as trees or shrubs. Evergreens are ideal, providing maximum cover from winter winds and predators. If trees and shrubs are too close, however, they can also provide good jumping-off places for squirrels that may be eyeing the seeds, and cats that may be eyeing the birds. A distance of about 10 feet seems to be a happy compromise. You can provide resting and escape cover for ground-dwelling birds, such as Song Sparrows, by placing large, loosely stacked brush piles near your feeders.

**Feeder Maintenance** Clean your feeders about once every two weeks,

more often during times of heavy use. Scrub them with soap and water, then dip them into a solution of one part bleach and nine parts water. Rinse them well and allow them to dry thoroughly before refilling. Another important maintenance activity is to periodically rake up birdseed hulls beneath your feeders. Decomposing hulls may harbor bacteria that could spread bird diseases.

**Bird-Feeding Concerns** Poorly maintained feeders may contribute to the spread of infectious diseases among birds. The feeders themselves can sometimes pose hazards too. Here are some helpful hints for successful bird feeding:

- Avoid overcrowding at feeders by placing numerous feeders several feet apart.
- Keep your feeding area and feeders clean.
- Keep food and food-storage containers dry and free of mold and fungus.
- Check your feeders for safety. Sharp edges can scratch birds and make them susceptible to infection.

People wonder whether bird feeding causes birds to change their migratory behavior. The clue that most birds use to migrate is the change in day length rather than the availability of food. Also, peak migration time is late summer and fall, a time when natural foods are readily available. It is unlikely that feeding birds has any effect on their migratory patterns.

Many people also worry about what will happen to their backyard visitors when they go on vacation. Ideally, a neighbor or friend should stop by to restock your feeder. Otherwise, try to taper off gradually before you go. Don't fret, however; it's fine to stop feeding briefly. In winter, natural food sources often disappear overnight when they are covered by snow or consumed by other animals. Birds have adapted accordingly---studies show that even birds with free access to feeders consume three-quarters of their diet elsewhere, and that when feeder birds are deprived of supplemental foods, they quickly revert to

an all-natural diet. If your neighbors have feeders too, you can rest even more assured that your birds will not starve.

### ***If You Build it, Will They Come?***

It may take a while for the word to get out about the new feeder in town. If you are not seeing birds within a few days of setting up your feeder, try sprinkling some seeds on the ground around the feeder to make your feeding site more obvious. If the seed in the feeder is blowing out or getting wet, there is a good chance that your birds are getting the same treatment. Your feeder may simply be too exposed. Moving it to a calmer, more sheltered spot may increase visitation. In newly developed housing areas, birds may not feel sufficiently protected because trees and shrubs may be small or few in number. Remember too that bird populations fluctuate naturally from year to year, so if you notice a scarcity of feeder birds this year; you may be surprised by an abundance of birds the next year.

*BirdNotes*—Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

## MEMBERSHIP

Palouse Audubon Society, PO Box 3606 University Station, Moscow ID 83844, is a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Our mission 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. on the first Tuesday of each month.

The Prairie Owl is published every other month, September through May. Material for the Owl should be sent to the editor, Tom Weber, 230 SE South St, Pullman WA 99163, or email [tweber@wsu.edu](mailto:tweber@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, (509) 635-1272 or email [nbutte@pullman.com](mailto:nbutte@pullman.com). Visit the Palouse Audubon Society website at <http://www.palouseaudubon.org/>

**PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY**

Palouse Audubon Society  
PO Box 3606  
University Station  
Moscow ID 83844



*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.*

**We're on the Web at:  
[palouseaudubon.org](http://palouseaudubon.org)**

**WINTER BIRD FEEDING— If you feed birds, you're in good company. Birding is one of America's favorite pastimes. A 1997 report from the Kaytee Avian Foundation estimates that 43 percent of U.S. households or about 65 million people provide food for wild birds.**

**Wintertime - and the Living's Not Easy** In much of North America, winter is a difficult time for birds. Days are often windy and cold; nights are long and even colder. The lush, berry laden vegetation of summer and fall has withered or been consumed, and most insects have died or become dormant. Setting up a backyard bird feeder makes their lives easier and ours more enjoyable.

To observe birds at your backyard feeder, you don't need to brave the elements - you can simply watch the show from the comfort of your own home. Participants in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch can also help scientists track changes in the abun-



dance and distribution of winter bird populations, by counting birds at their feeders during this winter long survey.

**Types of Bird Food** During the spring and summer months, the diet of most songbirds is composed mainly of insects and spiders. These creatures are highly nutritious, abundant, and, for the most part, easily captured. During fall and winter, however, non-migratory songbirds must shift their diets to fruits and seeds. This is the time of year when winter bird feeding enthusiasts should roll out the welcome mat and set the table. The question is, what to serve for dinner on days with extreme

cold? The shelves of many supermarkets and specialty bird feeding stores are stocked with bags, buckets, and cakes of many food types. You may find the task of selecting the best foods a bit overwhelming. One key to attracting a diversity of bird species is to provide a variety of food types, but that doesn't mean you need to purchase one of everything on the shelf.

**Which Seed Types Should I Provide?** The seeds that attract the greatest number of species are black-oil sunflower. These seeds have a high meat-to-shell ratio, they are nutritious and high in fat, and their small size and thin shells make them easy for small birds to handle and crack. (Striped sunflower seeds are larger and have a thicker seed coat) Several studies,

*(cont on page 3)*