

# The Prairie Owl



Volume 35 Issue 4

May-June 2007

## EVENT CALENDAR

### MAY

- 1—Board Meeting, 7:30pm, 890 Stefany Ln, Moscow
- 12—Field Trip; *NW Whitman County*
- 16—Program; *Craig Mountain*
- 23—First of 6— *Wednesday Evening Field Trips*

### JUNE

- 2—Field Trip; *Mica Mountain*
- 5—Board Meeting, 7:30pm, 230 SE South, Pullman
- 9—Field Trip; *Craig Mountain*

## PALOUSE AUDUBON

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

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## WESTERN BLUEBIRD

According to Florence Merriam Bailey, respected naturalist-writer of the late nineteenth century, early settlers of our country, upon first viewing the bluebird, thought it resembled the beloved robin redbreast from their native England and so, affectionately, called it the Blue Robin.

The Western Bluebird is a common sight in parklands of the West. Unlike the other species of bluebirds, it does not like large meadows, preferring open forests instead.

Suitable habitat occurs in open conifer forests, farms and ranches, and in streamside groves where there are scattered trees and grassy areas for foraging. Snags where woodpeckers excavate nesting holes, later to be used by bluebirds, are

necessary for good habitat. Western Bluebirds avoid the hot, dry Sonoran and Mojave deserts and largely replace Eastern Bluebirds west of the 101st meridian.

Mountain Bluebirds (*S. currucoides*) also have



similar habitat requirements, but they generally prefer more open habitat and are more tolerant of

disturbance. It has been suggested that in the Northwest, changes to the environment brought by grazing and logging benefited Mountain Bluebirds at the expense of Western Bluebirds. Like other bluebird species, Western Bluebirds have suffered from competition for nest sites because of the introduced European Starlings and House Sparrows.

Western Bluebirds feed primarily from perches, dropping to the ground to feed on grasshoppers, caterpillars, beetles, bugs, and spiders. Insects make up about 80 percent of their diet; the rest is fruit, which is consumed from late summer to early spring.

Two broods are produced each season; the second clutch of eggs is started as soon as the first brood

*(cont on page 3)*

## FROM THE PREZ:

Exciting things are happening soon in our region. This past week I was notified by Christi Norman, Birding Trail Program Director for Washington Audubon and Lisa Remlinger, Audubon Washington, that funding is now available to complete the Washington Birding Trails. I am

not sure just how many loops are to be published for the eastern part of the state. Palouse Audubon will need to work with Spokane Audubon and Blue Mountain Audubon since the loops will pass through areas that we all bird.

If anyone wants to share their favorite birding spots

in eastern Washington, please let me know where these spots are as soon as possible. Lisa and Christi plan to attend our June board meeting to get this project underway.

It would be nice to suggest some areas that we would like included in the loop trails.

*Terry Gray*

## Programs

May 16—**Craig Mountain**; Juanita Lichthardt, University of Idaho, and Janice Hill, Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Janice and Juanita will speak on the vegetation of Craig Mountain: its plant communities; rare plants and outstanding wildflowers; the Canyon Grasslands as an ecological entity; and conservation challenges. They will also introduce us to the rare Spalding's catchfly and discuss the natural communities on Craig Mountain and their relationship to aspect and elevation.

Their talk features beautiful wildflower images and maps of the region. The presentation will be non-technical, although some Latin will be spoken.

This is a joint meeting with the Idaho Native Plant Society - White Pine Chapter. A field trip to the area is also scheduled for Saturday, June 9.

**COMING IN SEPTEMBER—*Bird Watching and Identification Class***, arranged through Moscow Parks and Recreation.

Two, 2-hour Sunday classes—the first, classroom instruction by Donal Wilkinson; the second, a field trip to Phillip's Farm with Terry Gray. \$10 per person or \$25 per family with a 20 person limit. Handouts and an Idaho Birding Guide will be distributed to participants.

More information will be available in the August-September edition of the *Prairie Owl*.



April 22, 2007—**Black-necked Stilts** in flight. Photo by Terry Gray

## To Catch a Thief

A coin-operated car wash in Frederick, Maryland began to lose significant amounts of money in 2003.

The owner suspected someone had a key to the change machine and was removing quarters, so a hidden camera was placed to identify the culprit.

The camera caught the thieves in action - a gang of starlings! The birds were entering the machine through



the change trough, climbing up inside to pick up quarters, and flying off with the coins.

Over \$4,000 in quarters was found on the roof of the car wash and under a nearby tree.

### **Treasurer's Report— 4/23/07**

Savings	\$3,294.47
Checking Balance 2/5/07	\$5,005.67
Local Dues	\$105.00
Donations	\$25.00
Printing and Mailing	(\$193.87)
Ferry Lake Loon Donation	(\$100.00)
PO Box Rental	(\$72.00)
Idaho Birding Guides	(\$125.00)

Checking Balance 4/23/07	\$4,644.80
Total Assets:	\$7,939.27

### **Membership Report—4/20/07**

National & Palouse Audubon	272
Palouse Audubon (paid members)	251
PAS Membership Year—Sep 1 to Aug 31	

## Field Trips

May 12—**NW Whitman County**. This field trip takes us into the heart of Whitman County's channeled scabland. We will visit the shallow lakes near Sprague, where nesting populations of American white pelican, eared grebe, black-necked stilt and American avocet have been observed. The Rock Creek drainage is the home of grasshopper, brewer's, lark, vesper

and savannah sparrows. The Palouse River area contains nesting populations of burrowing owl, long-billed curlew and ferruginous hawk. Participants should meet at 7:00 a.m. at Dissmore's in Pullman. For more information contact Tom Weber at (509) 334-3817. A full day trip.

May 23 and 30; June 6, 13, 20 and 27—**Wednesday Evening Field Trips**. Each field trip will visit a different local area. Among them are: Phillips Farm, Spring Valley Reser-

voir, Wawawai Canyon, Genesee Wetland and Kas Dumroese's property. Participants should meet at 6:30 p.m. at Rosauer's in Moscow. For more information contact Terry Gray at (208) 882-1585.

June 2—**Mica Mountain**. This field trip through low elevation mountain meadows will travel east of Moscow visiting habitat on Spence Road, Lenville Road, Spring Valley Reservoir, Mica Mountain, Vassar Meadows and the East Fork of the

(cont on page 5)

**Western Bluebird** *(from page 1)*

has fledged. After the second brood fledges, both families form a single flock and stay together until migration.

Western Bluebirds winter in open scrubby forests in the foothills and canyons of the Southwest. While there, juniper and mistletoe berries are a major part of their diet. The availability of these foods determines their movements throughout winter.

*"When winter's cold tempests and snows are no more,  
Green meadows and brown furrow'd fields reappearing,  
The fishermen hauling their nets to the shore,  
And cloud-cleaving Geese to the North are all steering...  
o then comes the Blue-bird, the herald of spring!  
And hails, with his warblings, the charms of the season.  
His song and his services freely are ours,  
And all that he asks is, in summer, a shelter."*

BY ALEXANDER WILSON

The Western Bluebird acts as an important dispersal agent for these plants.

Some lesser known facts about the Western Bluebird include:

- Occasionally Western Bluebirds have helpers at the nest. Most of the extra birds attending nests are helping their presumed parents, some after their own nests have failed.
- Genetic studies showed that 45% of nests had young that were not fathered by the defending male, and that 19% of all the young were fathered outside the pair bond.
- Western Bluebirds can be helped by other birds. Violet-green Swallows have been observed feeding and defending nests of Western Bluebirds.

**Rose Creek Field Trip, 3/17/07**

On a beautiful Saturday afternoon, Beth Marshall, Dan Peterson, Sasha Marshall, Erin Marshall, Jim Storms, Laura Bloomfield, Louise LaVoie, Terry Gray, Jerry Cebula and Tom Weber cleaned and repaired nest boxes at the Rose Creek Preserve.

Their activities included: an owl box installation, 3- Kestrel boxes removed, 4- Kestrel boxes cleaned, 3- wren boxes removed and over 40-

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

**April—Redbird Canyon, George Hatley.** Speaking before a turnout of over 50 people, George described the property recently purchased by Idaho Fish and Game and known as Redbird Canyon. The 2,860 acre ranch has access from the Waha Road on the east or by boat from the Snake River on the west. The eastern boundary of the property borders the infamous 21 Ranch where in 1925 a major gun fight occurred. There are two canyons on the property, Short Canyon and Redbird Canyon, both of which have their source in the higher elevations on the east and flow generally westward to the Snake River.

George's father, Ray, purchased the property for winter grazing in 1979 from the Miller family. The Millers had operated the ranch for year round grazing, using the northern slopes as summer range and the southern slopes for winter range. Grazing was controlled by an extensive series of fences. Aside from 20 acres of hay ground and 40 acres of orchard and Black Walnut trees, both located on or near the river bar, the property has been undisturbed - containing only native plants and some evasive weeds (predominately star and scotch thistle).

The drainages and north slopes contain hawthorn, *(cont on page 4)*



bluebird boxes cleaned. Thanks everyone—the birds certainly appreciate your efforts.

There were three nests with Western Bluebird eggs in them on April 22. One of the nests contained 6 eggs—the usual maximum for the first nest of the season.

**GLOBAL WARMING:  
What You Can Do**

Individual choices can have an impact on global climate change. Reducing your family's heat-trapping emissions does not mean forgoing modern conveniences: it means making smart choices and using energy-efficient products. We can all make choices that will greatly reduce our families' global warming impact.

**1 THE CAR YOU DRIVE: THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSONAL CLIMATE DECISION.** When you buy your next car, look for the one with the best fuel economy in its class. Each gallon of gas you use releases 25 pounds of heat-trapping carbon dioxide (CO2) into the atmosphere. Better gas mileage not only reduces global warming but will also save you thousands of dollars at the pump over the life of the vehicle. Compare the fuel economy of the cars you are considering and look for new technologies like hybrid engines.

**2 CHOOSE CLEAN POWER.** More than half the electricity in the United States comes from polluting coal-fired power plants. And power plants are the single largest source of heat-trapping gas. None of us can live without electricity, but in some states, you can switch to electricity companies that provide 50 to 100 percent renewable energy

**3 LOOK FOR ENERGY STAR.** When it comes time to replace appliances, look for the Energy Star label on new appliances. (Refrigerators, freezers, furnaces, air conditioners, and water heaters use the most energy.) These items may cost a bit more initially, but the energy savings will pay back the extra investment within a couple of years. Household energy savings really can make a difference. If each household in the United States replaced its existing appliances with the most efficient models available, we would save \$15 billion in energy costs and eliminate 175 million tons of heat-trapping gases.

*(cont on page 4)*

## 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/>

## Ruth Peck Ownbey

Ruth Peck Ownbey, 93, a resident of Pullman since 1939, passed away on Wednesday, March 14, 2007. She married Francis Marion Ownbey III on December 23, 1937 in Grinnell, Iowa.

Ruth and Marion moved to Pullman in 1939 when he accepted a position at Washington State College in the department of biology. Together they raised four children and participated in many local and national organizations including Audubon, Nature Conservancy and the Washington Native Plant Society.

Although not among the incorporators, the Ownbeys were active in the formation of the Palouse Audubon Society (1971). Marion passed away in 1974.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO (cont)

**4 UNPLUG A FREEZER.** One of the quickest ways to reduce your global warming impact is to unplug the extra refrigerator or freezer you rarely use (except when you need it for holidays and parties). This can reduce the typical family's carbon dioxide emissions by nearly 10 percent.

**5 GET A HOME ENERGY AUDIT.** Take advantage of the free home energy audits offered by many utilities. Simple measures, such as installing a programmable thermostat to replace your old dial unit or sealing and insulating heating and cooling ducts, can each reduce a typical family's carbon dioxide emissions by about 5 percent.

**6 LIGHT BULBS MATTER.** If every household in the United States replaced one regular light bulb with an energy-saving model, we could reduce global warming pollution by more than 90 billion pounds over the life of the bulbs - the same as taking 6.3 million cars off the road. So, replace your incandescent bulbs with more efficient compact fluorescents, which now come in all shapes and sizes. You'll be doing your share to cut back on heat-trapping pollution and you'll save money on your electric bills and light bulbs.

**7 THINK BEFORE YOU DRIVE.** If you own more than one vehicle, use the less fuel-efficient one only when you can fill it with passengers; driving a full minivan may be kinder to the environment than two midsize cars. And whenever possible, join a carpool or take mass transit.

**8 BUY GOOD WOOD.** When buying wood products, check for labels that indicate the source of the timber. Supporting forests that are managed in a sustainable fashion makes sense for biodiversity, and it may make sense for the climate too. Forests that are well-managed are more likely to store carbon effectively because more trees are left standing and carbon-storing soils are less disturbed.

(cont on page 5)

## HIGHLIGHTS *(from page 3)*

with some serviceberry, snowberry, sumac and elderberry. The grasses are predominately bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue. The river bar was the site of a Nez Perce village where erosion has revealed a wealth of mussel shells and crushed bone indicating its use as a village for a considerable length of time. Erosion of the site continues and IDFG would welcome Nez Perce interest in preserving the archeological site. The bar also contains a large and popular beach which has been improved by IDFG with the installation of two outhouses and several picnic tables. The mouth of Short Canyon was the site of a homestead where the female occupant supposedly walked the 6 miles up Red Bird Canyon and the 3 additional miles out to the main road—never to return.

The property is said to contain some petrified wood, although George has never been able to locate it. Pictographs and a Nez Perce burial site are located on the property. White-tailed deer inhabit the

upper elevations; mule deer the lower elevations; Rocky Mountain sheep lamb in the cliff regions; and a herd of 40-50 elk roam the property. Bird species observed on the property include, Prairie Falcon, California Quail, Gray Partridge, Wild Turkey, Chukar, Mountain Quail and Blue, Ruffed and Franklin's Grouse in the higher elevations. Sharp-tailed Grouse had been introduced in the canyon, but because the species prefers level and rolling plains to canyons, they flew across the river to Weissenfels Ridge in Asotin County. It is likely that Mountain Quail will be planted by IDFG.

John Nelson, field technician for Idaho Fish and Game, was present at the program and discussed his work controlling noxious weeds on the property. Aerial applications to control star thistle have been initiated. Other weeds on the property (Dalmatian toadflax, knapweed and white top) are being controlled by ground crews. The department welcomes volunteers. Volunteer opportunities are being coordinated by Jennifer Brunns ([jbruns@idfg.idaho.gov](mailto:jbruns@idfg.idaho.gov)).

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

**March—Chasing Birds “Down Under”, Dr. Mike Webster.** The Superb Lyrebird, a bird that imitates chainsaws, camera shutters and a repertoire of other odd noises was just one of Australia’s unique bird species discussed by Dr. Webster at the March program meeting. Dr. Webster explained that Australia began to separate from the super continent Gondwanaland about 100 mya and this early isolation resulted in the evolution of many unique species. Webster described Australia as a largely dry continent with smaller coastal areas of wet habitat. These unique species also developed interesting behaviors. One important difference is migration. In Australia, birds are either nomadic migrants or they migrate to New Guinea. Webster also noted that North American passerines are now thought to have evolved in Australia and have only recently spread to other parts of the world. Nearly all short distance fliers have yet to cross Wallace’s Line—the divide between the Australian and Asian plates located off the coast of New Guinea.

Webster’s research focuses on the red-backed fairy-wren, a small and secretive bird that has a monogamous partner. Yet, a significant majority of the offspring is from another bird, or an “extra pair male”. Webster studies the “complexities of that monogamy” and is interested in such things as: why more female than male young are



produced; why the extra pair male; what is the role of hormonal mechanisms; and what role does male plumage play in mate selection. Red-backed fairy-wrens, like many Australian species, live in family groups that consist of the male and female pair plus a son that helps raise the young. An interesting experiment performed by researchers removed the male from a pair. This resulted in a ‘widowed’ female. It took, on average, only an hour for the female fairy-wren to acquire a new mate. These family groups or cooperative breeding are the norm in Australia, but somewhat uncommon elsewhere.

After discussing his research, Webster discussed some other Australian species with interesting behaviors. The white-winged cough, for example, consists of a family unit of 4 to 20 birds. Webster explained that these hen-sized birds have difficulties foraging. The process of learning to forage successfully is also very time consuming. Thus, the white-winged cough regularly kidnaps offspring from other families to help in feeding their young. These ‘helpers’ are punished if they eat the food they have foraged for the young. They have subsequently developed a clever way to faint feeding the young—in the final act of passing the food to the young, they look around and if no one is watching, they simply swallow the food.

Another interesting example was the comical orange-footed scrubfowl. Webster explained that the male—

## WHAT YOU CAN DO (cont)

**9 PLANT A TREE.** You can make a difference in your own backyard: Plant a tree. Or get a group in your neighborhood together and contact your local arborist or urban forester about planting trees on private property and public land. In addition to storing carbon, trees planted in and around urban areas provide much-needed shade in the summer, reducing energy bills and fossil fuel use.

## 10 LET POLICY MAKERS KNOW YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING.

Our elected officials and business leaders need to hear from concerned citizens.

Source: *Union of Concerned Scientists, 2006*

except for his perpetual digging to build large mounds of vegetation and earth (6-10 feet high)—is oblivious to the world around him. The female lays her eggs in the mound, which will be heated by the decaying vegetation. The male, obsessed with his digging, sometimes covers the laying female before she is finished. He doesn’t even seem to recognize the emerging young as his own.

Webster also described role reversal which can be seen in such birds as the comb-crested jacana and bower construction and courtship displays of the bower birds.

## Field Trips *(from page 2)*

Potlatch River. Target species include: redstarts, water thrush, goshawk, ruffed and blue grouse, great gray owl, jays and nutcrackers and bobolink. Participants should meet at 7:00 a.m. at Rosauer’s in Moscow. For more information contact Terry Gray at (208) 882-1585. A full day trip.

June 9—**Craig Mountain.** This is a joint field trip with the Idaho Native

Plant Society - White Pine Chapter. Terry Gray and Jerry Cebula will lead the birders and Brenda Guettler will lead the plant people. Participants are to meet in Moscow in the parking lot at the intersection of State Hwy 8 and Sweet Ave at 7:15am OR at the Sports Authority parking lot in Lewiston at 8:00 a.m. This will be a full day trip, so bring a lunch and fluids.

August 4—**Saturday Mornings at Mann Lake.** The first of 13- field

trips sponsored by Palouse Audubon and Canyon Birders, these trips will focus on the fall migration of waterfowl and shorebirds as they pass through our region. Field trip leaders will be there from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. This is a great time of year to catch migrants at the lake. Participants are to meet at the Mann Lake boat ramp at 8:30am (note that Lindsay Creek Road may be closed this summer for construction).

**PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY**

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



*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)**

## GLOBAL WARMING

A November 14, 2006 report from the World Wildlife Fund finds a clear and escalating pattern of climate change impacts on bird species around the world, suggesting a trend towards major bird extinction from global warming.

The report, Bird Species and Climate Change, reviews more than 200 scientific articles on birds in every continent to build up a global picture of climate change impacts.

"Robust scientific evidence shows that climate change is now affecting birds' behavior," said Dr. Karl Mallon, one of the authors of the report. "We are seeing migratory birds failing to migrate, and climate change pushing increasing numbers of birds out of synchrony with key elements of their ecosystems."

The report, prepared by international climate change specialists, identifies groups of birds at high risk from climate change: migratory, mountain, island, wetland, Arctic,

Antarctic, and seabirds. While bird species that can move and adapt easily to different habitat are expected to continue to do well, bird species that thrive only in a narrow environmental range are expected to decline, and to be outnumbered by invasive species.

The report also shows that birds suffer from climate change effects in every part of the globe. Scientists have found declines of up to 90 per cent in some bird populations, as well as total and unprecedented reproductive failure in others.

Scientists also analyzed available projections of future impacts, including bird species extinction. They found that bird extinction rates could be as high as 38 per cent in Europe, and 72 per cent in north-eastern Australia, if global warming exceeds 2°C above pre-industrial levels (currently it is 0.8 °C above). "Birds have long been used as indicators of environmental change, and

with this report we see they are the quintessential 'canaries in the coal mine' when it comes to climate change," said Hans Verolme, Director of WWF's Global Climate Change Programme. "This report finds certain bird groups, such as seabirds and migratory birds, to be early, very sensitive, responders to current levels of climate change. Large-scale bird extinctions may occur sooner than we thought."

If high rates of extinction are to be avoided, rapid and significant greenhouse gas emission cuts must be made. The global conservation organization also believes that the current approach to bird conservation, focused on protecting specific areas with high bird diversity, will fail because climate change will force birds to shift into unprotected zones. A major change in approach to bird conservation is required.