

# the curlew

February 2004

**Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society**  
A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

## Saturday Morning Bird Walk

*with Ann Taylor*

Our next morning bird walk at Bateman Island will be on Saturday, March 6, 2004. We meet at 8 a.m. at Wye Park next to the causeway to Bateman Island. All are welcome; beginning birders are particularly invited to join us.

It was with trepidation I opened my curtains Saturday morning, not sure what to expect. Not too bad, and as the day progressed the sun came out and we six birders enjoyed an almost perfect day. Unfortunately the bird numbers were down. We think it was just a little cold for them that early in the morning. All told we counted 22 species. The gold finches were out en masse, but just one or two white crowned sparrows and a song sparrow showed up. We were quite sure we saw a female black-headed grosbeak, but it was the bald eagles that made our day. Our first sight was of an immature eagle, but further on out on the river perched on a rock were two beautiful adults. What a sight they were! Another great birding day.

## **Second Saturday EVENT at the McNary Environmental Education Center (MEECE) Saturday March 13, 2004 9 am to 12 noon**

McNary Wildlife Refuge will celebrate spring by going native! Slides of successful native plantings at residences in the Tri-Cities will be shown by members of the Local Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society.

Also join a guided tour of McNary Environmental

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February Membership Meeting  
Tuesday February 24, 7 p.m.  
Kennewick First Lutheran  
Church, Corner of 395 and Yelm  
Kennewick

## **“Cranes in the Columbia Basin: more than just a Festival Focus”**

Join us for an up-close look at the graceful Sandhill Crane, the festival that honors them, and their expanding role in management on the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge. Randy Hill, the lead biologist for the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge based in Othello will give this informative presentation. Randy was involved as an organizer from the beginning of the Sandhill Crane Festival back in 1998 and has been intimately involved every year since then. This year will mark the 7th annual festival, March 26-28, 2004. Randy has witnessed the changing relationship between Cranes and people over his career and will share his thoughts on land management and education regarding Cranes and other wildlife in the Columbia Basin.

Randy has been a wildlife biologist since graduating from Humbolt State University in 1977. Randy's experience includes

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AUDUBON MISSION STATEMENT: To conserve and restore ecosystems, focusing on birds and wildlife, for the benefit of humanity and Earth's biological diversity. Audubon educates adults and children about the environment, advocates responsible public policy and legislation for natural resources, and conducts science-based projects using birds as indicators of health of the natural world.

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working for the U.S. Forest Service, The Bureau of Land Management, The Bureau of Reclamation and The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in California, New Mexico, Minnesota, and North Dakota, as well as Washington. Randy has been at Columbia National Wildlife Refuge since 1990.

Come find out more about this local festival and learn about the fascinating characteristics of Sandhill Cranes during their migration.

## Important Bird Area Legislation Update

On Friday February 6 the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee voted 7-6 to move our IBA bill (PSHB 2650 -- Recognizing Important Bird Areas) onto the House Rules committee. Thanks to the chairwoman, Representative Kelli Lynville (D-Bellingham), our bill was not "killed by the clock" because February 6 was the last day to get bills out of the policy committees.

Representative Dave Quall (D- Mt. Vernon) was very eloquent in supporting our bill. "There are even more reasons than economics to support this bill. Watching birds and wildlife is simply enjoyable and a great activity for families"

We owe a big thank you to the House Democrats that voted in favor of our bill: Rep. Kelli Lynville (D-Bellingham), Rep. Phil Rockefeller (D-Kitsap/Vashon Is.), Rep. Bill Eickmeyer (D-Thurston/Mason Co.), Rep. Bill Grant (D-Walla Walla), Rep. Sam Hunt (D-Thurston County), Rep. Joe McDermott (D-West Seattle), Rep. Dave Quall (D-Mt. Vernon)

The next step for our IBA bills is to get both of them out of the House and Senate Rules committees. Both bills need to be sent to the House and Senate floors for a vote.

If you have not already done so, please call your Senator or Representative and ask them to vote YES on PSHB 2650 and PSHB 6342.

Thank you for your time!

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★ **Nominations being Accepted for the Tri-City Conservationist of the Year** ★  
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The Tapteal Greenway Board of Directors is now encouraging nominations for 2004 "Tri City Conservationist of the Year", the annual award given by the Board to an individual, group, or business that has made an outstanding contribution to conservation in the greater Three Rivers area. Anyone can make nominations, and only Greenway Directors are excluded from eligibility. Nominations should be made to Scott Woodward by telephone ( 627-3621 ) or email (woodfish24@charter.com). The nomination period will close at 5:00pm, Monday, March 8th. Help us recognize the special people in our community who make the extra commitment to conservation.  
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Education Center restoration plot. Hike the trail for early wildflowers. View and count migrating birds. "Press on" temporary tattoos of migratory birds for kids!

You are invited to join this activity at McNary Wildlife Refuge's Environmental Education Center, 311 Lake Rd., Burbank, WA. Turn east off US Hwy. #12 a mile past the Snake River Bridge. Call 543-8322 for more information, or visit web site www.nwr.mcnary.wa.us.

The event is open to the public at no charge, Families are welcome!

**LCBAS**  
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**RARE BIRD ALERT - 627-BIRD**

## Bird Sightings - (December 16 to January 15, 2003)

Bill LaFramboise ([wlafra@owt.com](mailto:wlafra@owt.com))

There were 2 Common Loons at Columbia Park on 01/13 (NL, LN, BW). The high count of Horned Grebes was 5 along the Richland Waterfront on 01/13 (BW). Uncommon in the Lower Columbia Basin, 2 Red-necked Grebes were at Clover Island on 12/20 (AD, JDi). Rare but annual during winter, an Eared Grebe was at Columbia Park on 01/13 (NL, LN). Two Western Grebes were at Columbia Park on 01/13 (BW).

There was a Great Egret in Moses Lake on 12/20 and on 01/02 (DS). There were 12 at Ringold on 01/08 (AD, JDi). The latter sighting is the second highest count that I am aware of for the Lower Columbia Basin during winter. Black-crowned Night-Heron numbers continue to be below average. There were 4 at McNary NWR on 12/22 (AMc). Three were at the Yakima Wye Ponds on 12/26 (KC).

A Snow Goose was at McNary NWR on 12/22 (AMc). Rare but annual since 1998, a Ross' Goose was at Howard Amon Park on 12/25 (LN, RF). There were 8 Tundra Swans at McNary NWR on 12/22 (AMc).

There was a Eurasian Wigeon at McNary NWR on 12/22 (AMc). There was a high count of 150 Northern Shovelers at the Kennewick Sewage Ponds on 01/03 (DR). There have been good numbers of diving ducks along the Columbia River. Seven Canvasbacks were at Groves Park on 01/03 (BW). There up to 6 along Columbia Park from 01/10 to 01/13 (BL, NL, LN, BW). Up to 6 Redheads were along Columbia Park from 01/10 to 01/14 (BL, NL). There was an unusually high count of 120 male Ring-necked Ducks at Groves Park on 01/12 (BW). Both Greater and Lesser Scaup were along Columbia Park during January (BL, NL). Barrow's Goldeneye sightings included 1 along the Hanford Reach on 12/28 (KC, JCr), 20 at Groves Park on 01/03 (BW), and 40 there on 01/10 (BL, NL). The latter is the second highest local count that I am aware of for that species. The high Ruddy Duck count was 7 at Groves Park on 01/20 (NL).

There have been good numbers of Bald Eagles

(mob). Cooper's Hawk sightings include 1 along Columbia Drive on 12/15 (KC, JKr), 1 in East Kennewick on 12/18 (DR), and 1 at Canyon Terrace on 01/11 (BL, NL). A Merlin was at McNary NWR on 12/22 (AMc) and 1 was at Canyon Terrace on 01/02 (BL). A Prairie Falcon was at FEALE on 01/19 (HN).

A Greater Yellowlegs was at Clover Island on 12/20 (AD, JDi) and 1 was observed on the Moses Lake CBC also on that date (fide DS). Uncommon during the winter, a Least Sandpiper was at the Finley Evaporation Ponds on 12/28 (DR). Dunlin sightings include 1 along the Hanford Reach on 12/28 (KC, JKr), 4 in East Kennewick on 01/03 (DR), and 22 at Moses Lake on 01/03 (DS).

There were 3 Mew Gulls at the Kennewick Sewage Ponds on 01/03 (DR). A Thayer's Gull was at Moses Lake on 01/03 (DS) and an adult Glaucous Gull was at Groves Park on 01/02 (BW). A Barn Owl flew over Columbia Generating Station on 12/31 (BL). A Western Screech-Owl was in North Richland on 01/09 (BW). In spite of the snow, a Burrowing Owl was at the WSU Campus on 01/10 (BL, NL).

Rare in the Columbia Basin and anywhere in the Northwest during winter, a Williamson's Sapsucker was reported on the Umatilla County Christmas Bird Count on 01/03 (fide CC). Rare during early winter, a Say's Phoebe was in Moses lake on 10/20 (DS) and 1 was near Umatilla on 12/25 (CC, JC).

There were 2 Northern Shrikes along the Hanford Reach on 01/02 (KC, JCr) and 1 was on the Hanford Site along Route 24 on 01/04 (BL, NL). The Blue Jay observed along Sundance Road near Othello since last November was still there during the early part of January (fide RH). A Barn Swallow was in West Richland along the Yakima River on 12/30 (HN). That species is rare during the winter. There are only a handful of local winter records.

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Bushtits were observed during the Moses Lake Christmas Count on 12/20 (fide DS). Perhaps that species is establishing a resident population at the Potholes Reservoir. A Winter Wren was at Two Rivers Park on 12/21 (DR) and 2 were there on 01/01 (BL, NL). Ruby-crowned Kinglets sightings include 1 at Groves Park on 12/20 (BW), 1 in North Richland on 12/21 (BW), and 1 in Two Rivers Park on 12/21 and on 01/03 (DR).

A Hermit Thrush was at Two Rivers Park on 01/01 (BL, NL). Three Varied Thrushes were there on 01/03 (DR) and 3 were in North Richland on 01/12 (BW). The only local report of Bohemian Waxwings was on the Moses Lake Christmas Count on 12/20 (fide DS). Uncommon during winter, there were 2 Orange-crowned Warblers at Two Rivers Park on 12/21 (DR).

An American Tree Sparrow has been observed at a feeder in Richland during the reporting interval (MGr). Four were at Lind Coulee on 01/04 (BL, NL). Uncommon during winter, there were 9 Savannah Sparrows along the Umatilla River on 12/20 (CC, JC). One was in Kennewick on 01/03 (DR), one was at Othello on 01/04 (BL, NL), and 4 were near Moses Lake on 01/04 (BL, NL). A Fox Sparrow was at Two Rivers Park on 12/30 (DR). Rare but annual during late fall and winter, there were 3 Swamp Sparrows at McNary Park in Oregon on 01/04 (CC, JC). A Harris's Sparrow was along the Umatilla River on 12/20 (CC, JC). One has been wintering in North Richland near Groves Park (LF, WHe, BL, NL). Probably the same bird visited the Woodleys' residence on 01/15 (BW). There were 12 Golden-crowned Sparrows along the Umatilla River on 12/20 (CC, JC). Rare in the Lower Columbia Basin, a Lapland Longspur was near Mosses Lake on 01/03 (DS) and 2 were at the Columbia NWR on 01/09 (RH).

There were 2 Tricolored Blackbirds at Para Ponds near Othello on 12/29 (RH). One was there on 01/04 (BL, NL). There were several sightings of Brewer's Blackbirds (mob). The high count was approximately 200 birds in North Richland on 01/11 (BL, NL).

Common Redpolls were reported on the Moses Lake Christmas Count on 12/20 (fide DS). A Pine Siskin was at Canyon Terrace on 01/03 (NL).

## Bird of the Month

The bird of the month is the Red-breasted Sapsucker found in North Richland by Adam Haun on 01/07 for the first Benton County record. Red-breasted Sapsuckers are resident on the west side of Cascade Mountains. They are rare in Eastern Washington, particularly away from the foothills of the Cascades. The sighting was confirmed by a video recording.

### Observers

**CC** Craig Corder, **JC** Judy Corder, **JCr** Jim Criddle, **KC** Kathy Criddle, **AD** Annet Dittmer, **JDit** Jim Dittmer, **RF** Ruth Fischer, **RH** Randy Hill, **BL** Bill LaFramboise, **NL** Nancy LaFramboise, **AMc** Andrew McClelland, **LN** Laurie Ness, **HN** Heidi Newsome, **DR** Dennis Rockwell, **DS** Doug Schonewald, **CSi** Chris Simonen, **BW** Bob Woodley



Great Blue Heron drawing courtesy of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

## Conservation and Action

*With Rick Leaumont*

### Hanford Elk

Everyone has probably seen the recent Tri-City Herald article concerning the Hanford Elk herd. Landowners adjacent to the Fitzner Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve (ALE) portion of the Hanford Reach National Monument have expressed concerns over the number of elk in the herd, crop damages and problems with hunters damaging property, trespassing and hunting in an unsafe manner. The Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) has had to pay out large damage claims over the past five years; the total for these claims may have reached a total of \$500,000, although I have not been able to confirm that number. The herd reached a maximum population of 838 in 1999 and is currently down to somewhere between 400 and 475 animals.

Benton County Commissioner Max Benitz angrily demanded opening the ALE to public hunting at a recent meeting with WDFW and local landowners. Benitz claims the only solution to the "problem" is opening ALE to public elk hunting. He also claims the elk are overgrazing the ALE as well as private property. The private landowners also demanded more Landowner Access Permits, which WDFW issues to landowners suffering damages from wildlife. WDFW can only issue 100 of these permits statewide, fourteen were initially issued to private landowners adjacent to the ALE and we understand ten more were issued following the meeting. The permits only allow taking cow elk and the landowners demanded that these permits allow hunting either sex.

We are taking the position that LCBAS is totally opposed to public hunting on the ALE. The ALE is a very delicate area that has been closed to the public for over sixty years. It is slowly recovering from the horrific fire of 2000. The native plants and wildlife need the solitude and protection from human interference, which the ALE provides and this must not be compromised.

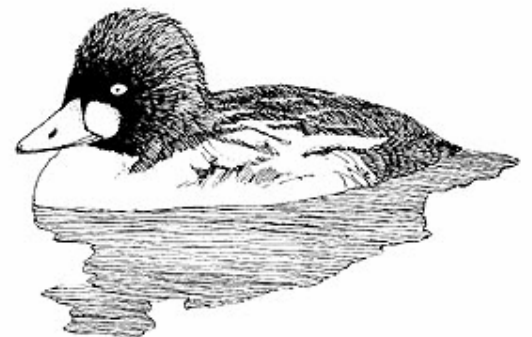
The WDFW claims they want to manage the herd and reduce the population to 350. Unfortunately they are pursuing a flawed policy, which has been marginally successful. Public hunting on private

lands in the 2000 hunting season claimed 95 bulls, 87 cows and 30 calves (sex unknown), 2001 harvested 17 bulls, 49 cows and 9 calves, 2002 recorded 45 bulls, 7 cows and 1 calf and so far the 2003 season accounts for 45 bulls, 16 cows and 3 calves. We do not know what the results are for the 14 to 24 Landowner Access permits. If the goal of WDFW's hunting program is to reduce the size of the herd the season should only allow taking antler less elk (cows / calves) only allowing a small number of permits for bulls. The numbers for 2002 and 2003 clearly indicate the hunter preference for taking bulls. Without going into a birds and the bees discussion, if your really serious about reducing the herd, hunt the cows; taking bulls does little or nothing to reduce the herd's ability to reproduce.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) captured and relocated 177 elk in 2000, and another 32 animals in 2002. Hazing operations by the WDFW have proved to be a very successful method of controlling crop damage in the past, but have been discontinued.

Max Benitz announced at the WDFW meeting that private property owners would close all their lands to elk hunting for the 2004 season. Some of the private property owners are leasing large tracts of federally owned BLM lands on which they control hunting access.

The elk herd is a complex issue and insufficient information is currently available to make scientifically based decisions. We absolutely oppose public hunting on ALE and feel the WDFW should limit the 2004 hunting season to only antler less elk or allow a very limited number of bull permits. Hazing and capture and release programs should be reinstated, and other options considered.



Goldeneye courtesy of Wash. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

## **Come Bird With US**

*By Barbara Clarke, Far Away Field Trip Chairman*

The Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society invites you to join them on a unique birding trips in 2004, the San Juan Islands in the Spring.

On Monday, June 14 to Wednesday, June 16, 2004, we have arranged a 3 day-2 night birding cruise around the San Juan Islands with Viking Cruises out of LaConner, Washington. We will sail on the Viking Star, a classic 58" motor yacht. The ship has large windows for inside viewing and spacious decks for outside viewing. This cruise is especially designed for birders, but opportunities to view other wildlife and the beautiful scenery will be plentiful.

We will visit historic Roche and Friday Harbors. Our two nights lodging is at Rosario Resort in Cascade Bay on Orcas Island. The resort offers their Spa-health club, three swimming pools, massages, and elegant dining.

This cruise includes all meals with the exception of Tuesday evening when we visit Friday Harbor. Monday evening will include a clam chowder supper and a Moran Mansion organ concert and historic slide show.

The price of the cruise is \$483.00 per person with double occupancy. A \$200 deposit is required to reserve your place. Good news! We have about half the cruise filled. Viking Cruises have extended out sign up to April 10<sup>th</sup>. Send your deposit to hold your place with the balance of \$283.00 due by April 10<sup>th</sup>. Don't wait too long to sign up for this great trip. If you would like a detailed itinerary, contact Barbara Clarke, at 509-588-3362 or email at [scregems@bentonrea.com](mailto:scregems@bentonrea.com).

## **BURROWING OWL REPORT FEBRUARY 2004**

It is time to start cleaning up all artificial burrows for the coming breeding season and making them as cozy and attractive as possible. Experience has taught that a 6" opening (tubing) that narrows to 4" tubing is the best combination. The 6" allows babies to dive to safety together instead of going single file, which could prove fatal in case of attack. Research also shows the importance of placing artificial burrows adjacent, or close to natural burrows. Of all the burrows installed over the past 6 years, only 14 produced young. However, quite a few others showed signs of temporary occupancy, or at least inspection by owls.

Dr. Courtney Conway has applied for a large grant to install artificial burrows on golf courses in areas of the United States where burrowing owls live. I fully supported this application by filling out a response form. We hope his efforts will be successful. Clare Sanders, from last year's research team, was in the Tri-Cities for a week in mid-January to check up on over-wintering owls. She found 30 birds in burrows covered with snow. Keeping warm down in a nest wouldn't be hard, but finding food was certainly a challenge.

One female owl, fledged from here, spent last winter in Halsey, Oregon, between Albany and Eugene. She didn't return to the Tri-Cities for the summer season, but showed up again this fall back where she spent last winter. We are not sure where she goes in the spring. I have also re

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ceived a clipping from Medford, Oregon where one lone owl has taken up residence in a storm sewer - "apparently the only one (owl) remaining in the Rogue Valley." Burrowing owls used to be common. There have been attempts to introduce them to the Denman Wildlife Area near Medford and at the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge near Corvallis, but both efforts failed.

Friends, we still have burrowing owls here, but in greatly diminished numbers. They are struggling. If you look around at all the development, it will take region-wide commitment by all to save what is left. Canada is making a major effort to reintroduce burrowing owls to their former range. They have a captive breeding program, and some of our displaced owls were taken to Canada to assist in this effort. **It is so much better to preserve what you have instead of destroying it and then trying to bring it back. Remember, extinction happens one burrow at a time.**



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