

# the curlew

December 2003

## Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

### In the Field

with Ann Taylor

Our next morning bird walk will coincide with the annual Christmas Bird Count. It will be Saturday, January 3, 2004. Check in your Curlew or the Tri-City Herald for information on times and locations. Everyone is welcome and needed. It's a great experience, so y'all come.

Our December bird walk at Bateman was perfect. After the weather's shenanigans during the past week, we expected the worst, but it was superb. Eleven birders joined the group with a total of 52 species seen. A golden crowned kinglet decided to stick around, and let us get a truly wonderful view, apparently an unusual opportunity. A great horned owl also perched for a photo op. A bird I had never seen here in the Tri-Cities was a Northern Shrike. He, too decided it was ok for us to stare. See you at the bird count! .

### Second Saturday EVENT at the McNary Environmental Education Center (MEECE) Saturday January 10, 2004

Cultural Resource experts Jeff Van Pelt and Julie Longnecker, representing the Umatilla Confederated Tribes, will display bones and artifacts confiscated from violators of Indian burial grounds. They will discuss these unlawful violations and also the destruction of envi-

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### Annual Christmas Bird Count on January 3rd

Many ski resorts are reporting their best snow in 10 years. I heard a Red-breasted Nuthatch in the yard this morning. We have already had some pretty cold weather compared to last year. Will this be a good year for alpine species? What will the duck numbers be like? What great yard bird will we find this year? Can we again top the more than 50 volunteers from last year? These are all questions we will answer on January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

This count, which has occurred nationally for over 100 years, and locally for over 30 years, is done in over 1900 locations around America and nearby countries (including South America), and includes over 55,000 volunteers. The data the LCBAS and other counts produce becomes part of the largest wildlife database in the world and is vital for determining the status of expanding and declining bird numbers. Anyone that enjoys looking at birds can help.

This year the focus of the count is on the health of boreal birds. Many of the birds we count are from the boreal forests. At the close of the count, Audubon will analyze the population status and trends of the birds of the boreal forests to see how

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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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these species are faring. Boreal species that appear to be declining that are commonly seen on Christmas Counts nationwide include Belted Kingfisher, Northern Flicker, White-crowned Sparrow, and Pine Siskin.

All Christmas counts are standardized to a 7.5 mile radius circle (about 177 square miles – whoa). The LCBAS count circle is formally called the **Washington Tri-Cities** circle. The Tri-Cities circle centers on the Columbia River shoreline closest to Rd. 68 in Pasco. This is a very large area that includes Selph Landing Road in Pasco, Two Rivers Park in Finley, and Badger Mountain in Richland.

The Tri-Cities count starts in three locations at 7:30 AM January 3rd. The three locations are: Richland – Howard Amon Park; Kennewick – Audubon Nature Trail in Columbia Park; and Pasco – Sacajawea Park. From these locations, we split into smaller teams led by more experienced bird watchers. For the really hardy, we also look for owls at approximately 4:00 am.

Some birding skills are nice but not required. Often a less experienced watcher locates the rarest bird. The Tri-Cities count is also one of the best-supported counts in the state, and regularly has the highest number of species seen inland. All of this is due to strong community support.

Our goal is to count as many birds within the circle during the day. To do this, we need as many teams as possible. If individuals can only participate for the morning, it will still help. There is a fair amount of walking involved, so keep this in mind when making plans. Birds seen at bird feeders within the count circle are just as important to the count, and are a way that less mobile individuals can help.

At the end of count day, the LCBAS has their annual Christmas Potluck. The dinner is held at the First Lutheran Church at the corner of Yelm and Highway 395 in Kennewick. Additional information on the dinner is provided below.

You do not need to be a member of the Audubon society to help, but a \$5.00 fee is requested of each participant to help defray the cost of maintaining the database. This modest fee from each participant adds up to less than half of what is needed for the database; the remainder is from grants.

The information that all counts generate is reviewed and placed in a database that is available to everyone on the Internet and used extensively by ornithologist and government agencies to trend bird populations. The database can be accessed through , then navigating the year, state and count as requested. We are the Tri-Cities count. The database is regularly being updated to make more flexible and useful.

If you are interested in a double-header count, the Walla Walla River count (called Two Rivers) is January 4th. For information on the Tri-Cities or any of the Christmas Counts, please contact Philip Bartley at (509) 783-5265, or e-mail at bfufam2@verizon.net.

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**RARE BIRD ALERT - 627-BIRD**

## **Christmas Bird Count Potluck**

The Christmas Bird Count Potluck will be at 6 PM on Saturday, January 3, 2004 at the First Lutheran Church on 395 and Yelm in Kennewick. Bring a main dish and a salad or dessert to share. Please, bring your own table settings. Come and hear the first official results from the 2003 Christmas Bird Count, and holiday wishes with a friendly bunch of bird enthusiasts!

## Bird Sightings - (October 16 to November 15, 2003)

Bill LaFramboise (wlafra@owt.com)

Uncommon in the interior, a Pacific Loon was below McNary Dam on 11/06 (CC, JC). A Common Loon was at Clover Island on 10/17 and 1 was at the Yakima Delta on 10/22 (AD, JDit).

There were several sightings of Horned Grebes (mob). There have been good numbers of Red-necked Grebes. One was below McNary Dam on 11/06 (CC, JC), 1 was at Vantage on 11/09 (BL), 1 was at Groves Park on 11/11 (BW), and 1 was at the Yakima Delta on 11/14 (AD, JDit). Rare but annual during the winter, there were 2 Eared Grebes at Vantage on 11/12 (SD). There were 4 Western Grebes at Moses Lake on 11/09 (DS).

Great Egrets sightings have included 2 at the Yakima Delta on 10/17 (AD, JDit), 125 at the Potholes Reservoir on 10/21 (RH), 2 at Scootney Reservoir on 10/21 (RH), 1 at Crab Creek on 10/21 (RH), and 1 at the Yakima Delta on 10/22 (BW).

A Greater White-fronted Goose was at the Yakima Delta on 11/03 (BW). There have been 4 Snow Geese in Pasco (CR), 1 was in Groves Park on 10/31 (SDi), 1 was there on 11/03 (BW), and 12 were near Paterson on 11/08 (KC).

Rare in the Lower Columbia Basin but annual since at least 1998, a Trumpeter Swan was at Moses Lake on 11/09 (DS). Tundra Swan sightings have included 8 at the Yakima Delta on 11/06 (BL), 15 at the Saddle Mountain NWR on 11/08 (KC, JCr), 25 at Moses Lake on 11/09 (DS), and 6 at Saddle Mountain NWR on 11/14 (HN, JMe).

A male Eurasian Wigeon was at the Columbia Park Duck Pond from 10/25 until the end of the reporting period (AD, JDit, BL). There were 2 Greater Scaup below McNary Dam on 11/06 (CC, JC). A Long-tailed Duck was below McNary Dam on 11/09 (M&MD, JGa). There were 20 Common Goldeneyes at the Yakima Delta on 11/01 (DR) and 12 were at Groves Park on 11/04 (BW). Ten Hooded Mergansers

were at the Yakima Delta on 11/01 (DR). Two were there on 11/04 (BW). There were 12 Common Mergansers at the Yakima Delta on 11/01 (DR) and 5 were there on 11/03 (BW).

An Osprey was at Priest Rapids Dam on 10/21 (RH). They are uncommon after September and become rare after late autumn. Bald Eagle sightings have included 1 at Two Rivers Park on 11/04 (DR), 1 in West Richland on 11/09 (HN), and 1 at Bateman Island on 11/15 (BL). A Rough-legged Hawk was at FEALE on 11/06 (HN). There were 2 Merlins at Saddle Mountain NWR on 11/08 (KC, JCr) and 1 was in North Richland on 11/15 (BL). A Peregrine Falcon was at the Yakima Delta on 10/22 (BW) and 1 was at McNary Dam on 11/06 (CC, JC).

Northern Bobwhites continued to be observed near Two Rivers Park until at least 10/17 (DR). That species is occasionally released for sporting purposes. There were 23 Sandhill Cranes over Two Rivers Park on 10/21 (DR).

As expected, shorebird numbers have greatly diminished from those observed earlier in the season. The high count of Killdeer was 100 at the Yakima Delta on 10/17 (AD, JDit). Sightings of Greater Yellowlegs have included 4 on 10/22 (BW), 12 on 11/01 (DR, CSi), and 1 on 11/03 (BW) all at the Yakima Delta.

There were 12 Western Sandpipers at the Yakima Delta on 11/01 (DR). There were 8 Least Sandpipers at the Yakima Delta on 10/22 (BW) and 1 was there on 11/01 (DR, CSi). A Pectoral Sandpiper was at the Yakima Delta on 10/22 (BW). Two Dunlin were at the Yakima Delta on 10/22 (BW). There up to 21 there on 11/01 to 11/03 (DR, CSi, BW). The high count was 85 at the Walla Walla Delta on 11/08 (M&MD). The high count of Long-billed Dowitchers was 50 at the Yakima Delta on 10/17 (AD, JDit).

A Bonaparte's Gull was at the Yakima Delta on 10/22 (BW) and on 10/26 (AD, JDit). Four were

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at Moses Lake on 11/09 (DS), 19 were at McNary Dam on 11/09 (M&MD, JGa), and 1 was at Wanapum Dam on 11/09 (SD). A Mew Gull was at McNary Dam on 10/18 (DR, PB) and on 11/06 (CC, JC). Rare inland, a Western Gull was at Moses Lake on 11/09 (DS). A second winter Glaucous Gull was at McNary Dam on 11/09 (M&MD, JGa). A Common Tern was there on 10/18 (DR, PB). That species becomes rare after the end of September.

A Western Screech-Owl was along the lower Yakima River in Richland on 11/08 (DJ). Two Northern Saw-whet Owls were heard calling after dark at Hood Park on 11/15 (BL). A “yellow-shafted” Northern Flicker was at Two Rivers Park on 11/11 (DR). They are rare in the Lower Columbia Basin during winter.

A Blue Jay was observed along Sundance Road near Othello where 1 over-wintered last year (fide BF). Two Brown Creepers were at Two Rivers Park on 10/17 and on 10/31 (DR). A Winter Wren was at Two Rivers Park on 10/24 (DR) and 1 was in Rancho Reata on 11/14 (NO).

A Golden-crowned Kinglet was at Two Rivers Park on 10/31 (DR). There were 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglets at Two Rivers Park on 10/31 (DR). Ruby-crowned Kinglets were at Groves Park most of the reporting period. The high count there was 4 on 11/04 (BW). One was in North Richland on 11/15 (BL).

Rare but annual in the Lower Columbia Basin, there were 3 Western Bluebirds at the WSU Tri-Cities Campus on 11/15 (BL). A Townsend's Solitaire was in West Richland on 11/08 (KC). A Hermit Thrush was at Two Rivers Park on 10/31 (DR). There were several sightings of Varied Thrushes (mob). Cedar Waxwing numbers appear to be low. There were 8 at Two Rivers Park on 10/31 (DR). They were also observed at the WSU Tri-Cities Campus on 11/11 (BW).

Orange-crowned Warbler sightings have included 1 at McNary Park on 10/18 (DR, PB), 3 at Bateman Island on 11/01 (DR), and 1 at

Groves Park on 11/03 (BW). The high count of Yellow-rumped Warblers was 60 at Two Rives Park on 10/17 (DR).

The first local American Tree Sparrow of the season was at Vantage on 10/16 (TA). A Fox Sparrow was at McNary Park on 10/18 (DR, PB). A Lincoln's Sparrow was at Vantage on 10/16 (TA). Rare but nearly annual in the Lower Columbia Basin, a Swamp Sparrow was at Vantage on 10/16 (TA). A White-throated Sparrow was at there on 11/12 (SD). A “slate-colored” Dark-eyed Junco was in North Richland from 10/30 until the end of the Reporting Period (BW).

A Pine Siskin was at Two Rivers Park on 10/24 (DR). One was in North Richland on 11/01 and on 11/06 (BW). One was also at Hood Park on 11/15 (BL).

## Birds of the Month

Mike and MerryLynn Denny and John Gatchet found a Black Scoter downstream of McNary Dam on the Oregon side of the Columbia River on 11/09. Black Scoters are very rare inland. To my knowledge, that sighting is only the 4<sup>th</sup> for the Lower Columbia Basin. Rare but annual in the Tri-Cities, Bob Woodley found several Bohemian Waxwings at the WSU Campus on 11/11. I saw 6 in North Richland later that week on 11/15. Rare anywhere in Washington, Mike and MerryLynn Denny and John Gatchet also found a Rusty Blackbird downstream of McNary Dam on 11/09. There have been about a dozen local sightings of that species.

### Observers

**TA** Tom Aversa, **PB** Phil Bartley, **CC** Craig Corder, **JC** Judy Corder, **JCr** Jim Criddle, **KC** Kathy Criddle, **SDi** Scott Dietert, **M&MD** Mike and MerryLynn Denny, **AD** Annet Dittmer, **JDit** Jim Dittmer, **SD** Scott Downes, **JGa** John Gatchet, **RH** Randy Hill, **DJ** Dennis Johnson, **BL** Bill LaFramboise, **JMe** Jennifer Meisel, **HN** Heidi Newsome, **NO** Neal Ofsthun, **CR** Charlotte Reep, **DR** Dennis Rockwell, **DS** Doug Schonewald, **CSi** Chris Simonen, **BW** Bob Woodley

## Presidents Message

*from Tom Clarke*

We still have three Wildlife Refuge Centennial Pendleton Wool Blankets donated to us as a fundraiser by Friends of McNary. They would make a wonderful Christmas present. They are \$165.00. Please, call or email me if you are interested, (509) 588-3364 or scregems@bentonrea.com.

LCBAS will not have a regular meeting this month, instead Saturday, January 3, 2004, will be the annual Christmas Bird Count. We will have a potluck at 6 PM following the Bird Count. The LCBAS Board will meet the third Tuesday of December and January with the regular January meeting on January 27<sup>th</sup>. Have a Happy Holiday Season, and remember all are welcome on the Bird Count and at the potluck.

### **San Juan Island Cruise**

Come and join the LCBAS Far Away Field Trip to the beautiful San Juan Islands. For three days, Monday, June 14, Tuesday, June 15, and Wednesday, June 16, 2004, we will cruise in the 58' Motor Yacht, the Viking Star. The trip leaves from and returns to beautiful La Conner, Washington. Two nights lodging will be at the beautiful Rosario Resort on Orcas Island. All meals but one dinner meal at Friday Harbor are included. This will be a great birding and wildlife experience. The cost of the trip is \$483.00 per person based on double occupancy. A \$200.00 deposit by February 15, 2004, will hold your place on this trip. If you are interested in more details or signing up for the trip, call Barbara Clarke at (509) 588-3362. You do not need to be an Audubon member to join us and we must have 15 participants to fill the trip.

## Conservation Notes

*with Rick Leumont*

Monument Visitor Center:

The Hanford Reach National Monument's Heritage and Visitor Center took a significant step towards reality on December 5<sup>th</sup> at a ceremony dedicating the center's future site, located on south Columbia Point. Senator Patty Murray, the keynote speaker, praised the visitor center and expressed her vision to bring her new grandchild back to the center to experience the joys and mystery of the Reach. Interestingly many of the people on hand to celebrate the site dedication were among those who previously opposed establishing the Monument. We joyously welcome them as it symbolizes that our community is truly united in its support for the Monument.

The site includes 50 of Richland's 115 acres on south Columbia Point. We expect the remaining acreage to be donated to the project in the near future. The Umatilla tribe still has some concerns about the site but we expect those to be resolved shortly.

The center will be around 54,000 square feet and include offices for the US Fish and Wildlife Service as well as an exhibit gallery, classrooms, auditorium, and gift shop. The Friends of the Hanford National Monument, CREHST Museum, and Richland Public Facilities District will be interviewing architectural firms this month and hope to have firm floor plans and an artist concept of the center in the very near future.

We are off to a good start but we must remain on guard to insure that the center serves as a public educational and recreational asset and is not commercialized. We must also continue to press for inclusion of all the lands on south Columbia Point as part of the visitor center grounds.

Elk Hunting on the Monument:

The Hanford Reach National Monument Advisory Committee met again on December 4<sup>th</sup>. The committee heard reports from the various subcommittees on proposed goals and objectives to be included in the draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan, CCP. The subcommittees should complete their work and the full committee plans to provide the USF&WS advice on the goals and objectives at the next meeting on January 15. The committee has not as yet been expanded with the new positions that were proposed by Sec Norton almost a year ago. We expect the new members to join the committee in January. The committee has worked extremely well over the past three years and I am

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hopeful this will continue.

The committee discussed invasive weeds and what the landscape of the Monument should look like. The discussion included debates on what a natural landscape would be composed of. Do we want a pre-Columbian landscape or one in which we learn to live with exotics such as cheat grass. I must concede that defining what a natural landscape is, is a monumental task and one botanist will debate heatedly. Bearing this in mind, I will continue to champion working for a natural landscape and oppose a long-term goal of just accepting invasive weeds as our permanent landscape.

The desire of the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife to open the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve (ALE) portion of the Monument to elk hunting lead to a spirited discussion. The state requested that we consider elk management as part of the CCP and complained of the high cost of elk damages to crops on adjacent lands. Mike Lilga and I voiced our strong objection to public hunting on the ALE. We advised that the elk herd was not an ALE herd but rather a herd that ranges far and wide from the ALE to the Yakima Firing Center and beyond. The elk herd must be managed as a regional asset and not as a liability of the Monument. We also reminded the committee that instead on one hunting season on lands adjacent to the Monument, the state had increased the elk hunt to four seasons this year. The size of the herd has dropped dramatically from a high of 900 to approximately 400. This issue will continue to be debated at future committee meetings.


dence at crime scenes, under provisions of the current laws.

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](http://www.nwr.mcnary.wa.us).

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

#### Preeview of January 2004 Program:

"The Birds Of the Columbia Basin". Mike Denny will present a program on birds of the Columbia Basin. The Photographs were taken by his wife MerryLynn over many seasons in the field. Mike works as a field Biologist for the U.S.Forest Service on the Umatilla National Forest in Oregon and Washington. Mike is also deeply envolved with the Stateline Wind Project . He currently sits on the board of Blue Mountain Audubon, is a past member of the board of directors of the Washington Ornithological Society and is currently co-authoring a book on Wallula Gap with three other writers. Above all Mike enjoys being out in the field birding with his wife and anyone else that might be interested.



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*\*Membership in National Audubon Society includes affiliation with Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, 10 issues of the Curlew, and 4 quarterly issues of the Audubon Magazine.*

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