



January 2015
Volume L
Number 5

the curlew

Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Special Interest Articles:

- Christmas Bird Count results
- Taking Better Bird Photographs

DOUBLE PROGRAM: Climate Change and Atlantic Cruise

**Tuesday, January 27th
7 pm
Kennewick First Lutheran Church
Corner of Hwy. 395 and Yelm**

The January membership meeting has a double bill. President Lori Nelson will share a presentation on climate change and birds.

The second part of the program covers the 2014 Far Away Field Trip, a birding cruise from Boston To Halifax Nova Scotia and back. It will be presented by the local participants: Tom and Bar Clarke, John and Sue Decker, Gene and Charlotte Reep and Ivar Husa (with a camera). They will share many stories and pictures.

**AUDUBON FUNDRAISER
PANCAKE BREAKFAST
SATURDAY, JANUARY 31
FROM 8:00-10:00 am**

LCBAS will host a pancake breakfast at **Applebee's** on Rd. 68 in Pasco on Saturday, January 31 between 8:00-10:00 am.

Tickets are \$10.00 each. You get scrambled eggs, link sausages, pancakes and beverage. This is an opportunity to help LCBAS raise fund for our education and conservation programs and for you and your family to enjoy a good breakfast. Tickets will be available at Jan. 27 membership meeting. For ticket information call Charlotte Reep at 547-9087 or 366-0006

Individual Highlights:

Bateman Island report

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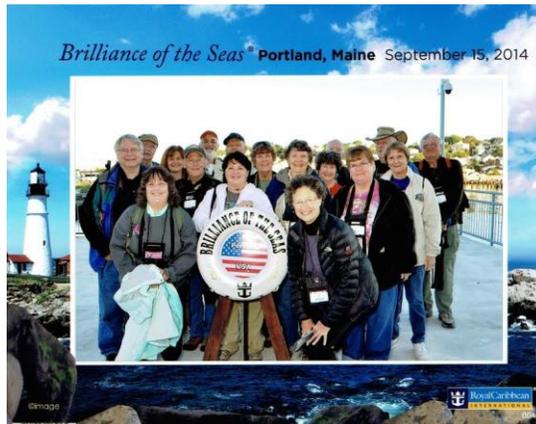
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December Bird

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Parasitic Jaeger
Photo credit: Ivar Husa

Bateman Island Bird Walk: January 10, 2015

We kicked off the first Bateman Island walk of the year with 51 species tallied. The weather was reasonable with plenty of open water and large patches of ice on the delta side of the causeway. The stars of the day were hundreds of gulls on the ice, very close to the boat launch. Identifying features were easily observed with a scope and a total of seven gull species was counted. Two nearly-white immature GLAUCOUS GULLS, huge compared to most of the other gulls, were easy to pick out of the crowd. Along with the usual winter RING-BILLED, CALIFORNIA, HERRING and GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULLS, two much rarer birds were spotted, a LESSER

BLACK-BACKED and a THAYER'S GULL.

This is a great time of year to see COMMON and HOODED MERGANSERS. Small flotillas of RING-NECKED and RUDDY DUCKS bobbed about with plenty of other waterfowl: PIED-BILLED and HORNED GREBES, NORTHERN PINTAIL, AMERICAN WIGEON and BUFFLEHEAD. A BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON was well-camouflaged in the shrubs along the island's shoreline.

The BALD EAGLES seen late last winter building a nest near Hwy 240, appear to have returned and built a second nest. Very few small songbirds

were out, but we were able to find several GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROWS, and a few YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS, BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES, BEWICK'S WRENS and WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS.

The next Bateman Island bird walk is Saturday, February 7 at 8:00am. Meet in the parking lot of Wye Park near the causeway to the island.



*American Wigeon and Mallard
Photo Credit: Ivar Husa*

President's Message with Lori Nelson

Do you make New Year's Resolutions? Mine used to be fairly typical. "Lose weight." "Go to the gym." "Manage my time better."

In 2013, I did something different. My family and I had only recently moved to the Tri-Cities (in August 2012) and I didn't know the area well. I decided that I wanted to get outside more, to explore. But "spend more time in nature" is not a good goal. It's too vague, too iffy. How would I measure my progress?

I decided to set a birding challenge for myself. Not a goal lofty enough to impress top-notch birders, but one that was challenging enough that I would have to work at it – set aside time for birding and nature.

I resolved that in 2013, I would observe 365 species of birds in 365 days.

Sounds crazy, right?

I was going to travel a lot in 2013, so I knew that this goal was feasible – and all good goals should be achievable. I started the year with a trip to Costa Rica that immediately boosted my year list to just over 100 species. Trips to Illinois, Southern California, Alaska, and Florida helped. And I birded a lot with LCBAS to see local species, many of which were new to me. I even drove to Moscow to see the Northern hawk-owl that was hanging around that winter.

Did I meet my goal? Yes and no.

No, I didn't see 365 species. (I came close – 330!) But I saw a lot of wonderful birds, many of which were life birds for me, including Greater sage grouse, Greater prairie chicken, Florida scrub-jay, and the most amazing Painted bunting.

And "yes" in that I spent a lot of time in nature – and I found that even a quick 60 minute walk through Chamna Natural Preserve or along the path in Leslie Grove Park helped calm my mind and lift my spirits. And it didn't really matter if I saw birds or not.

I love many things about birds. Their colors. The beauty of flight. The wonder of their song. The sophistication of their behaviors. But I love even more that birds ground me in nature. I know what's important after a birding trip – and it's not checking species off a list. It's listening to the sounds of life around me. It's looking closely at a living organism, with observant eyes and an open mind. It's smelling the crisp air on a clear day. It's connecting with this wonderful world we live in.

Please join me in resolving to make 2015 a year in which we all renew our connection with the natural world (and hopefully see a lot of birds)!

Best wishes,
Lori

Christmas Bird Count for January 3, 2015 a Birding Success

By Dana Ward, CBC Coordinator

The Tri-Cities annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Saturday, January 3, 2015. Nationally this was the 115th Christmas Bird Count and the 49th organized count for the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society. For the Tri-Cities there were over 80 contributors this year with some first time participants as well as some members that have participated in CBCs since the 1960s.

The count was conducted in the traditional count circle, which is a 7.5 mile radius (15 mile diameter) centered in the Columbia River just off Road 68 in Pasco.

The weather was very good for a winter day with temperatures ranging from a crisp low of 16 degrees to a high of 32 degrees in some locations of the 177 square mile count area. The real blessing was that there was no significant wind for the most part during the day. The sky was partly cloudy with a few minutes of direct sunshine at times. Historical records show that on some CBC days it can be well below zero with winds in excess of 30 MPH.

Preliminary results indicate that a **total of 104** different species of birds were sighted during the 24 hour official count period. This is down somewhat from a total of 108 species last year and 110 species counted in 2012 which was a record high count year. Most years we traditionally count just over 100 species. Unofficial results indicate that Pasco counted 88 species, while Kennewick counted 85 species with Richland capturing the top honors with 89 species. Congratulations to all participants and support personnel for such a fine effort, and as a Tri-Cities' team we did an impressive job!

For this year's bird count we had some old faithful species that went missing. Birds that we usually get but did not see in the count circle the day of the count were Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Prairie Falcon, Burrowing Owl, and Long or Short-eared Owl. Wading birds were hard to find since the river was high during the day and mud flats not exposed. Therefore we did not record Spotted, Western nor Least Sandpipers, as well as any Yellowlegs or Dunlin. The

last few years we have found Anna's Humming Bird but none appear to have stuck around this year possibly due to very cold weather earlier in the winter. Only one city, Richland, was able to come up with a Townsend's solitaire. No Chukars were sighted this year either.

Rare birds seen this year was a Swamp Sparrow sighted by Mike and MerryLynn Denny near the confluence of the Snake with the Columbia. It was a surprise to find a Hairy Woodpecker at Chiawana Park in Pasco. Charlotte Reep spotted this bird a week before the count and she and her team found it again during count day. Other nice surprises were a Northern Goshawk, Barn Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Pine Siskin. A Western Screech Owl was located in Richland. This bird use to be no problem to locate in all count areas but in recent years it has been tough to find or call in.

Preliminary data shows that there was a population explosion of Spotted Towhees in the Tri-Cities with double figures counted in each city. A fun surprise was in store for Kevin Black who with his fiancée sighted 2 flocks of Snow Geese flying over Pasco. Snow Geese were also report from Kennewick. Also sighted in high numbers were Eurasian Collard-Doves which at one time were considered unique in the area but now are sitting side by side with the dreaded Eurasian Starling as a "trash" bird.

Lisa Hill and her crew reported flock of Purple Finches at Johnson Park. Kennewick also sighted this bird. We will have to be careful to sort out Purple Finches from House Finches when birding.

The population data for the 104 species is not available for the January Curlew, but these numbers should be available for the February issue.

I want to thank all the hardy participants that joined in this year's CBC for they made the count a winning success. I particularly want to express gratitude for Tom Clarke, Barb Clarke, Rich Barchet, Jane Abel, Keith Abel and Kevin Black for such good work as team leads for each of the count areas within the count circle. With their help the accuracy and most of all the pleasure of the count was greatly enhanced. I also want to thank Jack and Murrel Dawson, Charlotte Reep and Marilyn Jones for their help at the Pasco Grange.

The CBC potluck was a delicious success with over 60 participants that brought main dishes and desserts. We all enjoyed the food and each other's company while listening to the results of the day's bird count. At the end of the bird species result, we had a suggestion that next year we try to project each bird species onto a screen while doing the three city count. We will see if that is a possibility.

Conservation Report for January 2015

By Marcie Daines

Cascade Checkerboard Project

Checkerboard lands once owned by the Northern Pacific Railroad are being acquired in the Central Cascades along the Kittitas-Yakima Valley to stop the threat of development and its impact on the forest, rivers and wildlife. Almost 48,000 acres of forest land have been purchased by The Nature Conservancy along I90 between Snoqualmie Pass and Ellensburg. These forest lands join several wilderness areas and the Teanaway Community Forest and encompass the headwaters of the Yakima Valley. These forest lands are considered some of the most diverse in North America. Protection will be provided for 390 miles of streams above three large lakes, Keechelus, Kachess and Cle Elum; for animal safe paths with the building of wild life bridges (very successful in British Columbia) which will also improve the spawning habitats; and for the preservation of 200 bird species.

Nature Conservancy Dec 2014/Jan 2015
Sierra Club Cascade CREST WA State Chapter Journal Winter 2014

The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest management plan is being updated with a Draft Environmental Impact Statement to be issued in late 2015. The fate of a million acres of roadless land will be determined. The agency is considering "wilderness" as an option for the first time in two decades. The Sierra Club is asking for the support of partners, citizens, and businesses on the east side to let the *Continued on page 6*

Upcoming events:

January 27th: Membership meeting
January 31st: Applebee's Fundraising Breakfast
February 2nd: Board Meeting
February 7th: Bateman Island Walk

Don't forget to check our website www.lcbas.org for up to date information. And remember we have a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/lcbas> - you do not have to have a Facebook account to read our page, just put in the address above!

Note that prospective members get three complimentary issues of the Curlew. In order to receive more issue, you must become an LCBAS member.

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Bird Sightings for December 2014

By Lannie Smith

North Richland and Richland Columbia River Parks

Jane and Keith Abel keep tabs on the Columbia River and Leslie Groves Park area. They report that the cold weather has brought in a large number of birds. Water fowl included: Eurasian Wigeon (rare, winter), American Wigeon, a Eurasian X American Wigeon hybrid, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback (uncommon, winter), Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common and Barrow's (uncommon, winter) Goldeneye, Hooded (uncommon, winter) and Common Merganser. Also present were Common Loon (uncommon, winter), Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, and Western Grebe (unusual for the park), Double-crested Cormorants- (the Abels reported 60-70 in the middle of the river one morning), and Killdeer. The park yielded up a juvenile Northern Shrike (uncommon, winter), a Belted Kingfisher, Orange-crowned Warbler (rare, winter), Yellow-rumped Warbler, Varied Thrush and Hermit Thrush (both uncommon, winter), Downy Woodpecker, Cedar Waxwing, Spotted Towhee, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. A juvenile Bald Eagle was at the edge of the swimming area, almost daily. Other raptors were Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Cooper's, and Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Merlin (uncommon, winter) and Peregrine Falcon (also uncommon in the winter and new for Leslie Grove Park).

In their nearby yard, visitors included: a Merlin, a regularly appearing Sharp-shinned Hawk who enjoys the birdfeeders, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Varied Thrush, Spotted Towhee, Dark-eyed Junco, American Goldfinch and Pine Siskin. Bob and Pat Woodley took notice of their yard birds on December 23rd: a Spotted Towhee, a Song Sparrow, 8 Dark-eyed Junco, a White-crowned Sparrow, 4 American Goldfinch and 2 House Finch.

Rancho Reata and Amon Creek Natural Preserve

Neil and Sharon Ofsthun reported their Rancho Reata birds: Ring-necked Pheasant, Red-tailed Hawk, Mourning Dove, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Western Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Varied Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Spotted Towhee and

Pine Siskin.

Yakima Delta, Bateman Island, Chamna Preserve and Columbia Park

Laurie Ness reported on the Acme Concrete Ponds near Chamna Preserve in mid-December. Four Ruddy Ducks were present, as were 1 Eurasian Wigeon, 16 Green-winged Teal, 32 Wood Ducks 10 Lesser Scaup, 200 Ring-necked Ducks, 6 Pied-billed Grebes, 4 Eared Grebes, 13 Double-crested Cormorants, 6 Great Blue Herons, and 3 Black-crowned Night Herons.

Susan Painter spotted a leucistic European Starling in the Wye Natural area on the 22nd.

South Richland, Johnson Park and Badger Mountain

Lisa Hill reported an Anna's Hummingbird in their yard for several days at the beginning of the month. On the 18th in W. E. Johnson park she spotted 1 Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted male), 1 Northern Shrike, 8 Hermit Thrush, 3 Varied Thrush, 50 Cedar Waxwing, 9 Spotted Towhee, 3 White-throated Sparrow (uncommon, winter), 1 Golden-crowned Sparrow (also uncommon), and 4 Purple Finch (rare, winter). On Christmas Day the Purple Finch count was down to one.

Kennewick

Susan Painter, on a bit of a roll, photographed a *second* bird with leucism in Columbia Park. This one was identified as a female Brewer's Blackbird with striking white feathers on its wings.

Finley Area

In mid-December Kris Keating spotted an adult and juvenile Bald Eagle circling over the river across from the south end of McNary Island. They were the first eagles she had seen in the area this winter. The Abel's also mentioned that the Bald Eagle numbers seemed low in Leslie Groves.

McNary National Wildlife Refuge and Walla Walla River Delta

Heidi Newsome enticed birders with a report of 600-700 Snow Geese, as well as Mallard, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon "and probably lots more" at the refuge during mid-December. Marilyn Anderson called in soon after. After seeing lots of Snow Geese at a distance out in Burbank, she got up close and personal with about two hundred of them on the lawn right in front of Columbia High School in Burbank.

Pasco and Franklin County

Ivar Husa visited Saddle Mountains and White Bluffs Overlook on the 23rd hoping to see Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, but had to be satisfied with American Kestrels, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawks, and Common Raven.

Clarifications and corrections are always appreciated.

Please contribute *your* sightings to our newsletter! Call them in to 545-4898, post them online at LCBirds2, or email to lanirock@charter.net.

Taking Better Bird Photographs

By Ivar Husa

This is aimed at a wide audience; from those who would consider themselves novices to those with some skills at photography. I'd like to help you take better photographs of birds. I love that that photographs give me time to study plumage and shapes, albeit at the cost of less attention being paid to behavior (the birds, not mine). I'd like to encourage you on your journey to taking better images by offering you some insights and instruction.

Insight #1: There is more than one way to get a better picture! It need not depend on expensive solutions to show marked improvements. There are factors. Here are the main factors I believe contribute to better bird or nature photography.

- General skills with cameras and exposure setting
- Practice. Take lots of images. Test your ideas about what might work best.
- Constructive review of images taken (learn from your mistakes)
- Knowledge of birds, even specific to species
- Getting the camera closer to the birds
- Field craft habits
- Cameras
- Better Lenses
- Tripods and supports
-

Only the last few involve cash investments, so be encouraged that you can become better at this than you are, without spending an arm and a leg.

Continued on next page

Conservation

Continued from page 4

Forest Service know the value they place on these wild lands. The Sierra Club alternative designates 800,000 acres of wild country versus the 120,000 suggested by the Forest Service. A Travel Management Plan is also being drafted to determine which trails are open to dirt bikes and jeeps. Audubon members certainly find protecting wilderness, wild rivers, old-growth forest, and trails free of motors a good habitat for birds!

<http://cara.ecosystemmanagement.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=28730>

*Sierra Club Cascade CREST WA State Chapter
Journal Winter 2014*

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Field Trip 2015

By Kathy Criddle

Join LCBAS on a field trip to the spectacular Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in May 2015. Malheur NWR is located 30 miles south of Burns, Oregon in the high desert. Wetlands, marshes and the Malheur Lake are surrounded by sagebrush and high basalt cliffs making for a vast area of habitat diversity. Bird watching and wildlife viewing is supreme during the spring migration season, providing memorable experiences for all. Accommodations are near the Refuge Headquarters in the large Field Station dorm where you will be assigned to a comfortable bed in either the women's side or the men's side. LCBAS will provide all meals which will be served in the large kitchen/ dining area.

Dates for the field trip are Mother's Day weekend, May 8 (Fri), 9 (Sat), 10 (Sun), & 11 (Mon). Cost is \$105 per person for the 8th thru the 10th (the 11th, for those who choose to stay, costs an additional \$30) which includes a bed in the field station and all meals. Space is limited to 36 people, half men and half women. Reserve your space at the next LCBAS membership meeting on January 27th or place your reservation by email to KCriddlebirds@yahoo.com.

Taking Better Photographs

Continued from previous page

I don't have the space in this piece to go into *all* these factors, but having these ideas in your head can help you break down your own journey toward better images into small enough steps that you can find regular success. You can do this!

Insight #2: You know you want that perfect picture of an eagle flying right over your head, but will you be ready?

Practice your techniques on everyday birds; sparrows, pigeons, ducks and gulls. Get better while taking those pictures on a regular basis, and you will be better prepared when you get that big break on those special birds.

Insight #3: Even the best instruction can't take you to a level where all your pictures are perfect. Well-regarded northwest bird photographer, David Gluckman, advises workshop attendees that training can only help you take *better* pictures in a statistical sense. You will get better pictures more often. That is what I hope for you. The corollary to that idea is that we must accept that many of our attempts will fail to meet our expectations, and we must keep trying if we are to get better at it.

Insight #4: Birds typically present you with a short or very short window of opportunity to get the shot you want. Considerable effort should be spent to reducing the amount of time it takes to snap that shutter with appropriate settings on the camera.

That is probably enough of a pep talk. Here are some specific techniques I use to get better pictures.

Birds nearly always occupy a very small part of your field of view, and the surroundings can be either dark vegetation or bright sky. This has led me to choose the manual mode for setting exposures. As conditions change, or even target species change (light gulls or dark hawks?), I will change my settings. If you don't, automatic metering will make birds shot against a light sky appear as featureless dark blobs.

When I am walking through an area looking for birds, I never know whether a bird will be sitting in a shadow or flying in full sun. I choose camera settings that I think will work for the most likely event I will have to respond quickly to. I take test images and review them to assure that I am getting a reasonable exposure.

I extend my ability to rapidly adapt to changing conditions by giving myself some 'quick options', other than the M (manual) mode that I have dialed in. On my camera, if I twist the Mode dial all the way clockwise, it

ends up at my "C3" (custom settings #3) mode. I set that to a combination of settings appropriate for fast moving birds in a light (sunlit) sky). I pick a fast shutter speed (2000ths of a second), largest aperture (maybe f 4.5), and an ISO value of 1250. You should choose your settings based on what you think works best in full sunlight.

When I rotate the Mode dial all the way counterclockwise, it ends up on the green "PHD" (push here, dummy) mode. I find this usually adequate for shooting into shade, if I need settings in a hurry.



See what I did here? If a shooting opportunity comes up for a bird flying in full sun, a quick twist of the mode dial and I can take the shot. No fiddling. A shot into the shade and a twist to the manual mode gets me a chance at a quick shot, with no fiddling. I'll close by encouraging you to practice on backyard birds or other readily available avian targets. Critique your own work, and you will get better at this, I promise you. See you in the field!

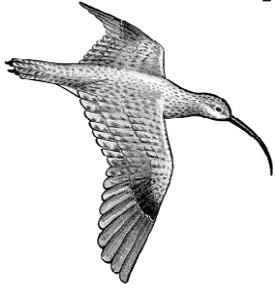


Great Horned Owl
Photo credit: Ivar Husa

The Curlew

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- \$20. for annual membership benefits dues or
- \$10. for full time students.

Please make check payable to **LCBAS**. I can help with an additional donation of \$_____

- Send *The Curlew* to my email address listed below. All my dues will go towards supporting LCBAS in local education and conservation efforts. _____

- LCBAS has an e-alert list (for last minute activity changes, important issues, volunteer opportunities). If you want to opt out, check here. If you opt out, you will not receive e-alert emails (Your e-mail address will not be shared in any case).

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- \$20. for one year new membership in the NAS. This payment includes membership in the local chapter (LCBAS) but does not include a subscription to *The Curlew*

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