

The Prairie Owl



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February-March 2016

EVENT CALENDAR

February 12-15, 2016: GBBC
(Great Backyard Bird Count)

February 17 Program: Dr. Kerri Vierling presentation on Fire Effects on Avian Populations and Communities

March 16 Program: Kittitas Audubon Society Climate Change Committee Presentation

March 18-20 Sandhill Crane Festival in Othello, WA

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February 17 Program

Dr. Kerri Vierling, professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Services at the University of Idaho, will present a program on Fire Effects on Avian Populations and Communities on Wednesday, February 17, at 7:30pm in the Fiske Room of the 1912 Center in Moscow, Idaho. Fire severity and occurrence has increased over the past decades, and forest fires can have strong influences on the wildlife community. Dr. Vierling will discuss the role of fire in forested systems and how animals, particularly birds, respond to this disturbance. This program is sponsored by Palouse Audubon Society and is free and open to the public.

March 16 Program

On Wednesday, March 16, 2016, the Kittitas Audubon Society Climate Change Committee from Ellensburg, Washington, will present a program on Climate Change, Birds, and Us. Members of Kittitas Audubon Society were so inspired by the September 2015 Audubon Birds and Climate Report that the chapter formed a special Climate Change Committee to focus attention and efforts toward this alarming new challenge. Recently awarded a Chapter Climate Grant, the Kittitas Audubon Climate Change Committee is committed to spreading the word about the impact of climate change on birds in eastern Washington. The climate change committee has delivered presentations to local groups and organizations, including sometimes reluctant audiences. Their presentation showcases how to best communicate the effects of climate change and how people can take action to mitigate the impacts of climate change on birds and people. They will also highlight their ongoing work to compose guidelines illustrating the

benefits of fire-wise, water-conserving, carbon-sequestering native plants, which is the focus of their grant project. The presentation is clear and inspiring, delivering perhaps the most important message of our time – we must take action to curb the effects of climate change in order to sustain a world where both birds and people prosper. The meeting will be held at 7:30pm in the Great Room of the 1912 Center in Moscow, Idaho. This program is sponsored by Palouse Audubon Society and is free and open to the public.

Othello Sandhill Crane Festival

The Othello Sandhill Crane Festival will be held this year on March 18-20. The festival includes tours for crane viewing and specialty tours: burrowing owl, Columbia National Wildlife Refuge, Missoula Floods, and more. Pre-registration is recommended as most tours fill quickly. The festival fee includes admission to lectures at the Othello High School and the educational displays and vendor exhibits in the high school gym on Saturday. The banquet on Saturday evening features invited speakers. Check the website <http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/index.php> for details. If you are interested in attending the festival this year, check the website frequently for updates.

Summary of Moscow-Pullman Christmas Bird Count Results

The 62nd Moscow-Pullman CBC was held December 19, 2015. Thirteen field parties and 11 feeder watchers participated and tallied 72 species on Count Day, pending acceptance of rare species, and 9986 individual birds. Three additional species were seen during Count Week. Low numbers of American Robins, European Starlings, and waxwings contributed to the fewer individuals counted. New or tied high CBC counts included 14 COOPER'S HAWKS, 4 HARLAN'S RED-TAILED HAWKS, 8 MERLINS, 68 AMERICAN CROWS, 183 BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES, 14 WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCHES, 149 WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS, and 2 WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS. New Count Day species included an ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD in Moscow and a CHIPPING SPARROW in Pullman. Of the three Count Week species observed, two are new to the count: SAY'S PHOEBE and PURPLE FINCH, both from Moscow. A Bald Eagle was the other Count Week species. A report and photo were received for Pullman's WHITE-THROATED SPARROW.

A couple of interesting notes: Lesser Goldfinches were seen in both states, but 82% of them were tallied in Idaho, whereas 68% of the American Goldfinches were recorded in Washington. After nine years of ever-increasing, record numbers of Eurasian Collared-Doves, this year the number dipped. Mourning Doves were counted (196) near their 10-year average of 201. Pine Grosbeaks (53) were observed in both states, narrowly missing the 1984 record of 55. Last year ended a 45-year drought for Gray Jays, and two were observed again this year.

For a complete report and tally of species counted, visit the PAS website and click on the news article Moscow-Pullman Christmas Bird Count Results 2015. The organizers thank everyone who participated this year.



Merlin

From the Prez



Ron Force

Sorry to have missed the January meeting, but I'm on a tour of southern India. Although not a birding trip, I've seen a few interesting species and lifers along the way.

This is my third trip to India, the previous two were 30 and 15 years ago. Over that time, I've observed many improvements in cars and transportation, cell phones, and the general health and prosperity of the people.

There has been one disturbing change for the worse. In previous years, packaging was folded newspaper, cardboard, and jute bags. When these were discarded, there was a whole class of scavengers who picked them up for recycling. If not picked up they naturally decayed. This packaging has now been replaced by plastics, which have no recycling component. As a result, plastic bags festoon the trees, plastic bottles float in every pond and river, and Styrofoam litters the beaches.

Like water, all the plastics eventually find their way to the sea, and plastics are nearly forever. I've seen similar litter in developing countries in Asia. Climate change may not be the only environmental disaster on the horizon.

PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership includes an annual subscription to **The Prairie Owl** newsletter. Please consider an additional donation in support of the programs and activities of Palouse Audubon Society.

Annual Membership	\$15.00	Donation
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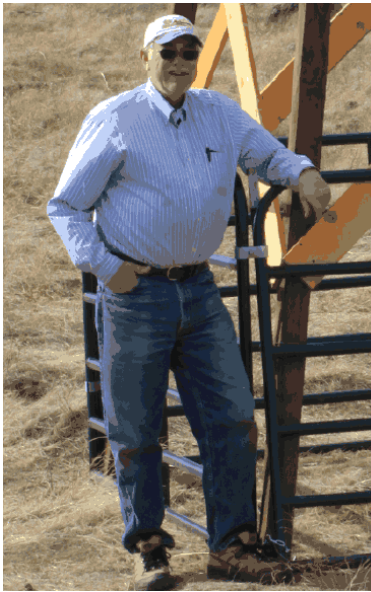
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(notice will be sent by email when a new issue has been posted on the website)
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Thank you to Jim Storms



At the December meeting, the PAS Board reluctantly accepted a letter of resignation from Jim Storms. Jim has been a valuable member of the Board for twelve years--since September 2003--when he became chair of the Membership Committee. He held this position for seven years, learning USPS addressing conventions, correcting members' mailing addresses, and keeping membership rolls in good order. Jim relinquished this position to Ron Force in 2010 and later that year was asked

to serve as a Board Member-at-Large. On the Board, Jim has helped to maintain continuity and provide institutional memory. Jim, with the help of Mike Costa, also completed the construction and installation of the second Ferruginous Hawk nesting platform last year in western Whitman County.

Jim, the PAS Board thanks you for many years of service to the chapter, and we are grateful that you and MaryAnn will continue to attend program meetings and provide MaryAnn's delicious home-baked cookies for all of us to enjoy. Good birding, Jim and MaryAnn!



Update on Kea Birding App

2016 has started off well with the Kea birding app, as the Android version has just been released and is available on Google Play.

Keep up with other developments on the Kea website (<http://kea-learnbirdsthroughplay.com/index.html>) or on Facebook

(<https://www.facebook.com/learnbirdsthroughplay/?fref=photo>)

Palouse Audubon Society will offer the Beginning Birding Class again this spring. Check the next issue of the Prairie Owl for details!

Great Backyard Bird Count

It's almost time to start counting for the 19th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, so mark your calendar for February 12-15, 2016! The GBBC is a great way to learn more about the birds in your community and to connect with nature, and it is good experience for fledgling birders. You count birds anytime or anywhere during the four-day period, tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time, and report the counts on an online checklist at the GBBC website. As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from around the world. The website is loaded with information to help participants and to inform birders in general. Reports, photos, questions, and comments can also be posted on the PAS Facebook page. For complete information visit the website at <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>

A Look Back

This is the second of a series in celebration of the 45th anniversary of the Palouse Audubon Society: an article about the Short-eared Owl from the May 1974 issue of the Prairie Owl.

According to an update from the Audubon Climate Change Report, "This owl of open country occurs widely in North America, South America, Eurasia, and Africa. The species' status varies tremendously from region to region: populations are endangered in some places, flourishing in others. Audubon's climate model shows a loss by nearly three-quarters of climatically suitable space in winter. Some regional populations seem likely to dwindle or disappear altogether. For others to flourish, adapting to human-modified landscapes will be essential. It is encouraging that some Short-eared Owls have exploited new habitats like reclaimed strip mines, but discouraging that so many have withdrawn from increasingly disturbed habitats." In the area served by Palouse Audubon Society, these owls were once common. They were seen regularly during the Christmas Bird Counts, sometimes in groups as large as 17 and 18, and even 32 of them in 1983. Since the late 1990's, they have been observed on only a few counts, mostly singly, and none have been counted since 2012. See next page.

THE SHORT-EARED OWL, NOMAD by Ruth Carson

You can believe it! That blinking, staring bundle of feathers perched upon a road-side sign or fence post in broad dayling is an owl! Returning its curious stare may prove an hilarious, if disconcerting, experience.

Large numbers of foraging Short-eared Owls, conspicuous in the winter landscape, have captured the interest of Northwest residents, Greyhound and school bus passengers, and even truck drives in their isolated cabs. Counts run as high as 20 or more owls within a mile.

A helicopter pilot was prevented from landing near Palouse, Washington, several winters ago, when he encountered nearly a 100 of the gyrating birds. Similar counts have been made near the Pullman-Moscow and other area airports.

Numerous "strikes", with varying degrees of damage to both rodent-hunting birds and planes, have been made at the Vancouver, B. C., International Airport. With a wingspread approaching 42 inches, the Short-eared Owl becomes a formidable aircraft. Hundreds of these birds were trapped and removed from Vancouver's coastal, marshy airport area. Today, vegetation is kept as short as possible to discourage small rodents and their winged predators.

The Short-eared Owl is a "cat with wings", soft-plumaged, sharp-talones, its hearing incredibly acute, its body programmed for the instant pounce. Near Colton, Washington, three of these birds were observed making repeated whirling-dervish attacks upon a bobcat crouched upon the Burlington Northern Railroad tracks.

The ear tufts are small, one inch or less, centrally placed and seldom seen erected. The bird is approximately 16 inches in length, with a body conspicuously light-colored beneath, and the brown stripes of the under-body more narrow than those above. Dark under-wing patches show in flight. The larger female is apt to be more buff colored than her mate.

In the air, this diurnal owl may be mistaken for the Marsh Hawk, a bird which frequents the same areas. Both are harriers. The lack of white on the rump, the shorter tail, and more erratic flight of the Short-eared Owl are distinguishing field marks. Flying in a bobbing, yet graceful, pattern, the bird appears to rise and fall, revealing its identity even at night in the beam of car headlights.

Known as le hibou a oreilles courtes in French Canada, and lechuza de los campos south of our border, the Short-eared Owl is a circumpolar, international species of open, treeless places. Found almost worldwide at one season or another, its numbers are largely dependent upon a fluctuating or cyclic small-rodent population.

Our Northern Short-eared Owl (Asio flammeus flammeus) nests always on the ground, sometimes in small colonies. An elaborate courtship ritual is climaxed by the male bird's spectacular plunge from a height of several hundred feet into the grass in front of his hen, following an aerial display in which long wing tips are rapidly clapped together behind the tail--accompanied by much bill snapping. The seldom-heard call notes are a series of yip-like or sneezy barks, those of the female the higher-pitched.

A nomad, the Short-eared Owl disappears from the fields and dunes it haunts as silently as it appeared, winged ecologist in search of an eco-system demanding its own singular brand of technology! A few birds remain into mid-summer or later; most wander to higher latitudes.

Many Northwest farms and ranches have hosted their own small flurry of Short-eared Owls, often close to the house and other buildings--farm families well aware these restless and intriguing birds are "paying" guests.

Our own Palouse chapter of the National Audubon Society has chosen the Short-eared Owl as its emblem, tribute to the role this bird plays in the environmental scene.

Tons of Robins

During the winter of 2007, near St. Petersburg, Florida, observers counted robins arriving in late afternoon to roost on an island of dense mangrove trees. For two and a half hours, the census-takers watched a steady stream of robins flying overhead. Based on the rate of birds passing by per second, a conservative estimate was made of 720,000 robins, and if the average robin weighs 2.7 ounces, that was nearly 61 tons of robins! (From BirdNote, Program "61 TONS OF ROBINS!")



California Condors

All California Condors living in the wild are caught each year and tested for levels of lead. Birds with elevated lead levels are sent to treatment facilities to lower the lead levels and then are returned to the wild. Lead comes from bullet fragments left in animal carcasses that have been shot.

MEMBERSHIP

Palouse Audubon Society (PAS), PO Box 3606, Moscow ID 83843-1914, is a chapter of the National Audubon Society (NAS) with its own dues. New NAS members in our chapter area receive one year's free membership in PAS, along with the chapter newsletter and other benefits of membership.

PAS dues of \$15 are payable in September. Members may receive the chapter newsletter, The Prairie Owl, either by mail or by email notification of its posting on the chapter's website. Members are encouraged to read the newsletter online to save printing and postage expenses. PAS members who have not renewed and NAS members who have not paid dues after one year of membership are removed from the newsletter distribution list on December 31st.

General membership meetings are held at the 1912 Building, FISKE ROOM, 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 meets at the 1912 Center at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month.

The Prairie Owl is published every other month, August through April. Material for the Owl should be sent to the editor, Tim Hillebrand, 857 Orchard Ave., Moscow ID 83843, 805-518-9612, tshphd@gmail.com by the 20th of the month. Subscription problems should be addressed to the membership chair, Ron Force, PO Box 3606, Moscow ID 83843-1914, 208-874-3207, ronforce@gmail.com. Visit the Palouse Audubon Society website at <http://www.palouseaudubon.org/> or find us on Facebook.

Olympic Birdfest April 15-17, 2016

Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours, live auction and raffle, gala banquet, and more. Our featured speaker, noted artist Tony Angell, "Revealing the Secret Lives of Owls".

Join our festival pre-trip, a three-day, two night birding/sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands, April 12-14. Register separately at

www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon.

Extend your festival with our Neah Bay post-trip on April 17-19—two days exploring northwest coastal Washington. Birdfest registration at

www.olympicbirdfest.org.

314 Species on the Brink

Shrinking and shifting ranges could imperil nearly half of U.S. birds within this century. Find out how scientists have used hundreds of thousands of citizen-science observations and sophisticated climate models to predict how birds in the U.S. and Canada will react to climate change by visiting the Audubon Website at www.audubon.org. There you will be able to read about the patterns and effects of climate change on birds. It's the broadest and most detailed study of its kind, and it's the closest thing we have to a field guide to the future of North American birds. Learn how you can get involved.

Wing Tip

A bird's eye takes up about 50 percent of its head. Our eyes take up about 5 percent of our head. To be comparable to a bird's eyes, our eyes would have to be the size of baseballs.

Wing Tip

The penguin is the only bird that can swim, but not fly. It is also the only bird that can walk upright.

PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Palouse Audubon Society
PO Box 3606
Moscow ID 83843-1914



**Get to know our local owls
Give a Hoot. Go Owling.**

The mission of the Palouse Audubon Society is to promote education, conservation, and the restoration of 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:
www.palouseaudubon.org
and on [Facebook](#)

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Nominations for Palouse Audubon Chapter Officers

Palouse Audubon is now accepting nominations for chapter Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Election of officers will take place at the program meeting in February, where nominations will also be accepted from the floor. If you are interested in serving in one of these positions, please contact Marie Dymkoski (marie-dymkoski@msn.com, or 509-595-1650). More information can be found in the chapter Bylaws posted on the Palouse Audubon Society website, www.palouseaudubon.org, at the link "About Us, Mission".

Listen to the Mockingbird

Growing up in Santa Barbara, I woke up every morning listening to the distinctive song of the Mockingbird, and I miss them in Idaho. However, there may be Mockingbirds coming our way. They are not uncommon in Southern Idaho now. So, be on the lookout for them in Moscow one of these days.

Apparently they are expanding their territory because of the disruption of their environment by urbanization and climate change.

They are called Mockingbirds, by the way, because of their ability to imitate the calls of other birds and sounds such as sirens and car horns.

Did you know that the song, "Listen to the Mockingbird" was a Civil War love song? It was written in 1855 and was popular in both the North and the South. Purportedly, it was Abraham Lincoln's favorite song.

