

# THE PRAIRIE OWL

PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 47, Issue 4, February-March 2019

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*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*

## PROGRAMS

**Feb 7, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.** in the Great Room of the 1912 Building, 412 East Third Street, Moscow: Pam Brunsfeld, retired Systematic Botany instructor, and director and curator of the University of Idaho Stillinger Herbarium, will be speaking on PLANTS AND POLLINATORS. She will provide information on the ornamental and native plant species you can plant in your garden to benefit butterflies, birds and bees. This program is jointly sponsored by the White Pine Chapter and the Palouse Audubon Society.

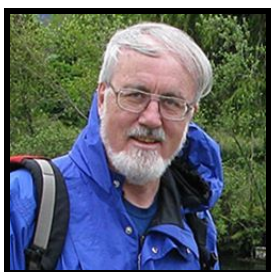
**Wednesday, February 20 at 7:00 p.m.** in the Great Room of the 1912 Center, Moscow, HawkWatch International Senior Scientist Dave Oleyar will give a presentation on current research programs of HWI. Urban areas, or the built environment, are one of the fastest growing habitats on the planet. While a number of researchers have studied the ecology of some wildlife species in cities, there are many questions left to address. Dr. Oleyar discuss some what we already know, and you will also learn about HWI's newly launched Studies of Urban Raptor Ecology (SURE) Program that currently includes surveys of raptor communities in different

urban areas (including the Palouse), and studies of the nesting ecology and survival of American Kestrels. Dave will also discuss future plans for this program. There are opportunities to help contribute to these efforts for those interested! The program is free and open to the public.

**Wednesday, March 20**, David Moen of the Nez Perce Wildlife Division will discuss the Nez Perce Tribe's research and efforts to return condors to the greater Hells Canyon area, with particular attention on habitat evaluation and addressing the issue at the heart of this giant vulture's recovery: lead poisoning in scavenging raptors and how hunting and ranching practices firmly rooted in their conservation heritage can be vital tools for the protection and recovery of birds of prey. The program will be held in the Great Room of the 1912 Center, Moscow, at 7:00pm and is free and open to the public.

Tribes in the Pacific Northwest are proven leaders in modern conservation efforts. They have been instrumental in fighting for salmon recovery in the Columbia basin, protecting bighorn sheep in Idaho, providing refuge for marbled murrelets in the coast range, and returning gray wolves to the region. As a next step in this trajectory of healing western

lands, the Yurok and Nez Perce Tribes are working with others to bring California condors back to Oregon. It is this shared vision of restoring the common ecology to contribute to a more diverse and resilient world that makes partnerships between local tribes, concerned citizens, and regional organizations a natural development. Diverse partnerships working toward a common conservation goal are especially needed now that a growing human population threatens to, quite literally, consume the biological riches of our planet.



**Ron Force**

## FROM THE PREZ

Although I don't put out bird feeders because I travel too much, my general interest in birds causes Google News to suggest articles for me on the topic. In the Winter issue of Living Bird magazine, there was an interview with Australian scientist Darryl Jones, author of the book *Birds at My Table* and Emma Greig, project leader for Project FeederWatch. Both confirmed a surprising fact: despite the popularity of bird feeding, there has been little research of its effects on birds or their populations. FeederWatch then sponsored several studies, leading to some insights on feeding's effects on bird distribution from the data collected by thousands of observers over many years.

For folks in the eastern U.S., Cardinals are more likely to be seen in winter and have been consistently spreading their range northward, but Evening Grosbeaks have declined possibly because of declining habitat in the boreal forest. Cooper's Hawks seem to have benefited from the buffets afforded by feeders and more are overwintering, but fortunately so far their prey species show no

signs of decline. FeederWatch data confirms a trend we've seen locally. Anna's Hummingbirds are sticking around year-round as more people leave their specialized feeders up all year.

Is feeding good for the birds? Research studies are mixed. Studies of Black-capped Chickadees in Wisconsin showed an increased over-winter survival rate. Other studies showed increased breeding success and earlier reproduction in winter residents. On the other hand, two studies on Blue Tits in England found higher mortality and decreased breeding success because of Winter feeding. An explanation might be increased survival rates of less-fit individuals leading to poorer breeding success. However, none of the studies controlled for food quality. Feeding seems to be most critical during hard winters when normal food sources are limited.

Outside of scientific studies, experts speculate on the following possible detrimental effects.

1. Increased predation. Good for the predators, but may lead to a change in the balance of nature as more Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks survive and winter-over.
2. Concentration of birds may increase the spread of disease.
3. It may encourage habituation to humans or cause birds to remain in areas to which they are not adapted.

Be that as it may, feeding birds encourages positive feelings in humans and has become a big business, with \$4 billion spent on seed and \$970 million for feeders each year in the United States. If you do want to feed birds, the National Audubon Society makes the following suggestions.

1. Have more than one feeder and place them at different heights to serve different birds' preferences and spread them out to reduce disease contagion.
2. Purchase high quality seed and research what type of seed is most preferred by the species in your area.
3. Scrub bird feeders twice a year with dish detergent and soak them in a bleach solution. Rake up and discard spilled seeds.
4. Place feeders either within three feet of a

window or at least 30 feet away to prevent bird strikes. Place decals on windows so they're visible.

5. Create cover using native trees, shrubs, or brush piles close to the feeders, but not so close as to provide a hiding place for predators. Don't feed birds on the ground.

**6. KEEP YOUR CATS INDOORS!**

Studies show that 40% of the American public has fed birds at one time or another, and according to Darryl Jones, it at least as popular in Europe and Australia. Done right, it can benefit both birds and people.

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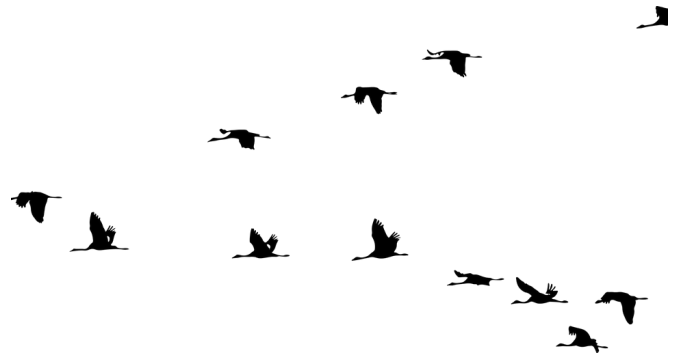
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## FIELD TRIPS

We are looking for a Field Trip Leader! Sometimes getting outside just takes someone to say "hey, let's go!" We would like to find someone who is willing to schedule a few evening or weekend trips that we can promote on *Facebook* and in our newsletter. You do not need to be an ornithologist or 'professional' birder, but someone who is willing to lead a group of birders on local trips. Please contact **Marie Dymkoski** if you're interested in scheduling spring dates!



## BIRD OF THE MONTH

In our area, Bohemian Waxwings are winter birds which you might, with luck, locate in the Palouse. They are similar to Cedar Waxwings though a bit larger, and travel in flocks, which may be quite large. The last flock I saw around here (in Pullman), however, had only 13 birds. Where the birds go depends on where they can find fruit, and the flocks wander around unpredictably on the search for berries.

In an area further north, in B.C. the birds may be present year round but here they are usually only present in the late autumn and winter. I haven't encountered them as often recently as I used to back around the turn of the century.

Our locals yards and gardens often include mountain ash trees which the Bohemians like,

though they will eat many kinds of fruit, even the dried berries still hanging on in winter. The mountain ash is also favored by Cedar Waxwings and, of course, Robins, of which there have been large numbers this winter. They also are wandering around in large flocks and feeding on the same trees. The Robins are more abundant, but it can pay to examine individual birds in a large flock of robins at a mountain ash; either type of waxwing might be present, though the Bohemians will probably show up later in the winter (such as January).

The dried berries consumed during the winter contain sugar which has been concentrated as the berries dry in the dry winter air, which may lead the birds to seek out water (or snow) to dilute the sugars and make them more digestible. Like Robins, if the birds eat too much over-ripe fruit, which may have fermented, they can become intoxicated, even though their livers can handle ethanol better than those of humans.

During the breeding season, they need to feed a higher protein diet to their chicks, so they become flycatchers for a while during the summer (and further north) and, like our Cedar Waxwings, may be seen dashing out from foliage to catch insects (mostly mosquitoes and midges) on the wing.

Unlike the Cedar Waxwing, which is restricted to North America, the Bohemian is widespread in the northern hemisphere. It occurs throughout Eurasia, and is circumpolar, mostly at quite northerly latitudes (to about 70 degrees north latitude in the breeding season). (Thus in Britain they are called simply "Waxwings"). They migrate south in the winter, sometimes for considerable distances. One recorded wintering in the Ukraine was recovered the following summer in Siberia, about 3,700 miles away! (quoted in Wikipedia). Obviously, they don't seek out the same nesting area each summer. They tend to breed in mature conifer forests, but in lowlands, not in the high mountains.

Although these birds have seemed to me to be scarcer recently, over half a million birds were recorded in Germany alone in

2004-2006, and they are not considered threatened at the present time. (But a warming earth could restrict their northerly breeding habitat.)

**Paul Schroeder**

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS 2018

With just a few anticipated reports missing (mostly feederwatch), here are the preliminary results for the 48th consecutive Moscow-Pullman CBC. Observers reported 66 species, 2 species fewer than our rolling 5-year average. Two new species were added: Harris's Sparrow and Say's Phoebe.

It appears we will set new count records for Red-tailed "Harlan's" Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Lesser Goldfinch, and Yellow-rumped "Audubon's" Warbler. We added Yellow-rumped "Myrtle" Warbler (seen in ID and WA). It also appears we will tie record counts for Pileated Woodpecker, Spotted Towhee, and Brown-headed Cowbird; this is the first cowbird report since 1984.

Other rarer species seen included Golden Eagle, Northern Goshawk, and Prairie Falcon (Count Week).

Notable was the absence of Bohemian Waxwings (zero, zilch, nada); it's been 16 years since we recorded no bohemians. Of the other species usually seen on the count, we also missed Green-winged Teal, Wilson's Snipe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch.

Full report can be found on [palouseaudubon.org](http://palouseaudubon.org)

Thanks,

**Kas Dumroese, Kelly Cassidy, and  
Marie Dymkoski**

# GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. Everyone is welcome—from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants tally the number of individual birds of each species they see during their count period and enter these numbers on the GBBC website. As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or from anywhere in the world.

For more information, see [The Great Backyard Bird Count](#).



New to birding? Maybe you've taken an interest but you are not sure how to identify birds and what to look for. We'd like to help! Look for more information on upcoming bird classes in our next newsletter.

This might be a good time to remind you of the ABA Code of Birding Ethics! Visit: <http://listing.aba.org/ethics/>



## NOMINATIONS FOR PALOUSE AUDUBON CHAPTER OFFICERS

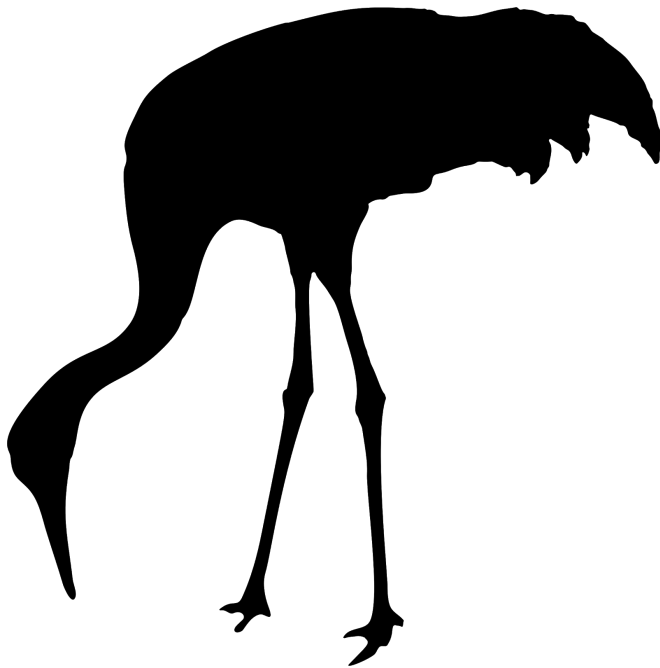
Nominations are being accepted for chapter officers: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Election of officers will take place at the program meeting in February, where nominations will also be accepted from the floor. If you are interested in serving in one of these positions, please contact Marie Dymkoski ([marie-dymkoski@msn.com](mailto: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](http://www.palouseaudubon.org) at the link "About Us, Mission".

The annual meeting of the Palouse Audubon Society will be held at the March program meeting, where installation of officers and other chapter business will be conducted.



## OTHELLO SANDHILL CRANE FESTIVAL

The Othello Sandhill Crane Festival announced the 2019 theme as “Elegant Travelers on a Journey”. The 22nd annual festival will be held March 22, 23, 24, 2019 in Othello Washington. With the celebration of the spring migration of the Sandhill cranes, the festival offers a variety of events for the whole family to enjoy and learn. Online registration opens on February 1, 2019. [www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org](http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org)



For nearly two decades the festival has celebrated the annual return of nearly 35,000 sandhill cranes to Othello, Washington every March as they migrate north to their breeding grounds in Alaska. The Festival offers an incredible opportunity to view the cranes up-close, with tours led by local experts. The Festival also boasts other specialty tours of the flora, fauna and geology of the area, and many lectures, as well as children's activities.

The Festival has grown over the years with returning participants attending from across the country.

## COLE'S FLAMING SQUIRREL SEED SAUCE

I don't know about others who feed birds, but I have had a heck of a time with squirrels! I only feed birds in winter, and participate in the Cornell Project Feederwatch, <https://feederwatch.org/>. It is great fun for me who is averse to waking up early to go birding especially when it is cold. To minimize squirrel activity at my feeders, some of my feeders have a cage around it that prevents squirrels from getting to the food. But we also have chunks of alder that we drilled holes in and fill with peanut butter. This is a favorite of woodpeckers and flickers as well as other birds. There are other types of peanut butter feeders that provide needed fat for birds. But the squirrels decimate those feeders! So I recently discovered that birds can't taste hot spicy flavors but squirrels are repelled by them. I use Cole's Flaming Squirrel Seed Sauce, and it works! I first did an experiment where some of the holes were filled with regular peanut butter and others with peanut butter mixed with the hot sauce. I can see the difference between the pecks of birds from teeth marks of squirrels and squirrels cleaned out the regular peanut butter but not the ones with the hot sauce. I expect that any other hot sauce works equally well.

The fact that birds can eat hot peppers was supposedly first discovered in the 1990's when birders in the Southwest wondered why birds can eat the fruits of a wild plant called “bird pepper”, *Capsicum annuum*, that has a Scoville scale of over 50,000 which is very hot. Rodents cannot handle the heat but birds love it and get vitamins from it. The reason for this difference between mammals and birds may be the difference in number of taste buds. Birds typically have very few, less than 50 whereas mammals have ten thousand or more taste buds. Birds have been known to defend these plants from other birds, who knew!

***Charlotte Omoto, Secretary***

## MEMBERSHIP

Palouse Audubon Society (PAS) is a nonprofit 501(c)3 and 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 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, 3rd and Adams St, Moscow ID, at 7:00 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month, September through May, except in December. The board of directors meets at the 1912 Center at 7:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month, September through May.

*The Prairie Owl* is published every other month, August through April. Material for the "Owl" should be sent to the editor, Marie Dymkoski [marie-dymkoski@msn.com](mailto:marie-dymkoski@msn.com) by the 20th of the month. Any questions about membership should be directed to Diane Weber 509-334-3817 or email [catbirdz@roadrunner.com](mailto:catbirdz@roadrunner.com).

Visit the Palouse Audubon Society website at <http://www.palouseaudubon.org/> or find us on Facebook.

## PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership includes an annual subscription to *The Prairie Owl* newsletter. Please consider a donation in support of the programs and activities of the Palouse Audubon Society. Membership renewals are due in September and current members will receive renewal notices at that time. PAS is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization.

Annual Membership **\$15.00**                      Donation \_\_\_\_\_

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