



# THE PRAIRIE OWL

PALOUSE AUDUBON SOCIETY  
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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

**On Saturday, Dec 14** the Palouse Audubon Society will be joining thousands of birders across the country in the Annual Christmas Bird Count organized by the National Audubon Society. Held each year between Dec 14- Jan 5, birders of all levels will count birds, collecting data for ongoing community science.

The 49th consecutive (and 66th overall) **Moscow-Pullman Christmas Bird Count** will be Saturday, 14 December 2019. Birders interested in counting birds at their feeders or spending the day on a field crew are welcome.

Our count circle is divided into two halves. Birders interested in participating on the Idaho side should contact Kas Dumroese at [kas.dumroese@gmail.com](mailto:kas.dumroese@gmail.com).

Moscow participants will be at the Starbucks in the Palouse Mall parking lot at 6:30am.

Birders interested in participating on the Washington side should contact Kelly Cassidy at [highsteppe@icloud.com](mailto:highsteppe@icloud.com) and Marie Dymkoski at [marie-dymkoski@msn.com](mailto:marie-dymkoski@msn.com).



**On Wednesday, January 15, 2020**, join Tom Fischer as he presents "**A Quest To See 38 Warblers - Spring Birding in Northwest Ohio, Tawas Point, Michigan, and Nearby Areas**"

Including Yellow-breasted Chat, there are 38 species of Northeast U.S. warbler, some very common (such as Yellow warbler) and some quite rare (Kirtland's warbler). This talk will describe birding during the past three spring migrations in northwest Ohio and Tawas Point, Michigan. These birding areas are truly unique. Geographically, each area is a "migrant trap," serving as a focal point for many birds to pause during migration. Each area also provides unparalleled opportunities to view migrating songbirds, especially at short distances. Well-established birding festivals are held annually in each location, attracting thousands of birders each year, and providing opportunities for guided day-trips to excellent birding areas. The talk will provide some practical logistic information about the areas visited, and present photos taken during the past three years. The presentation will try to provide a convincing argument that every active birder should try to visit these areas in mid-May.

We will meet in the Arts Workshop at the 1912 Building in Moscow, ID with presentation beginning at 7:00pm.



**Marie Dymkoski**

## FROM THE PREZ

I love winter birding. The obvious reasons for me are the lower number of species of birds, and of course the cover is less dense, fields more open and skies not so bright.

For some, winter is a great time to bird and not feel too overwhelmed. I find that it is easy to take a drive and spot Bald Eagles, Red Tailed Hawks, Canada Geese and other large birds in the grey skies and open waters. I love to share my love of spotting and identifying birds to my friends and this is a great time of year to encourage a day time drive.

The Christmas Bird Count is scheduled for Saturday, December 14 and I will again have my van full of bird watching friends as we count the number of birds we see in an 8 hour period. Good food, belly laughs, and fresh air are all we need for a perfect day (and maybe a barn owl or two!).

As we approach the end of the year, please take a minute now to renew your membership with the Palouse Audubon Society. If you haven't joined, please consider today. Perhaps include a membership for a friend as a gift for the holiday!

And speaking of the holidays, take the time to hug a loved one, share a cup of warm tea with a neighbor, or loan a good book to a friend. Winter is the time for rest and rejuvenation and a time to reflect on the past year. I hope you all have a warm and safe holiday.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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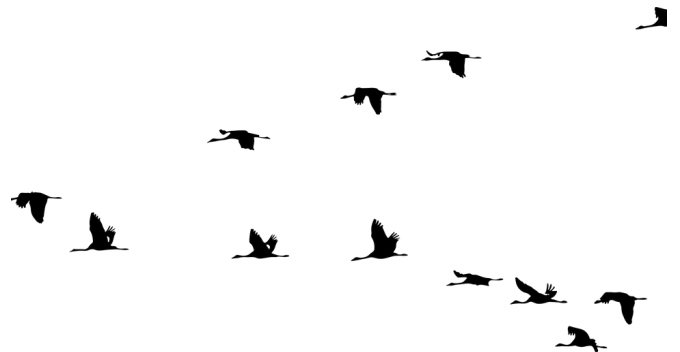
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Programs: board will jointly work on programs



## FIELD TRIPS

**Tom Fischer** of the Palouse Audubon Society will be leading some field trips during the winter months. More information will be found on our Facebook page as well as trip updates on our website.

We currently have several members who are volunteering to facilitate “raptor runs” throughout the Palouse. The **Winter Raptor Survey Project** has been extended throughout our region and trips generally cover an area of 50-60 miles per route. More than 90% of all birds counted on these surveys consist of the following species: Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, and Rough-legged Hawk. If you are comfortable with identifying these 5 species and would like to participate in a raptor run, contact us at [palouseaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:palouseaudubon@gmail.com).

**On Saturday, Jan. 11, 2020** Tom Fischer will be leading a trip to Lewiston/Clarkson (1/2 to 3/4 day). leaving from the Umpqua Bank parking lot in Pullman at 8:00 am. However, trip is conditioned on good weather. Dress appropriate for the weather, with good shoes or boots for walking. Bring plenty of water and snacks as needed. Tom can be reached on his home phone at 509-334-1181 for questions about the trip.



## BIRD OF THE MONTH

I thought that the **Rough-legged Hawk** might be worth consideration this month, as it is a characteristic winter visitor to the Palouse (and much of the rest of North America), and you might happen upon one anytime you are out of doors this winter. They are outnumbered, however, by our common Red-tailed Hawk. These raptors fly very far north to breed and are well out of our area during the summer. They are fairly large birds whose wingspan can reach about 5 feet and which can weigh 2-3 pounds. They are one of the few of our raptor species which has a global range in the northern hemisphere (others include the Golden Eagle, Gyrfalcon and Osprey) and on the Eastern Pacific they range down to Japan's northern island, Hokkaido in the winter. In Britain, buteos are called buzzards, so that in an English language European bird guide, they are called Rough-legged Buzzards. The European birds are considered to be a different subspecies, but they closely resemble our North American subspecies.

The rough-legged, like other buteos, occurs in several color morphs, but the one I have seen most frequently around the Palouse is the light-colored morph (perhaps because the dark morph is mostly a fairly dark brown, and not so easy to recognize). The white morphs have white on the underwings with a prominent black spot in the area of the wrist, which is particularly prominent in juvenile birds. For me this is the best field mark, although the bird has to be flying for it to be visible. The light colored neck region gives way to a large ventral patch of dark brown feathers which transitions to a light colored tail which ends with a brown terminal stripe. When not flying, they often roost on poles or surprisingly thin branches of trees devoid of leaves. The legs are feathered down to the toes, but I find this feature hard to see most of the time and don't rely on it for identification. Cold-adapted birds (and other cold-adapted animals) face potential major loss of habitat

as the climate warms. Warming has been especially rapid in the Arctic where the Rough-legged Hawk breeds. The Audubon website

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/rough-legged-hawk>) includes the results of an extensive study of the bird's arctic range including maps of potential range loss with various levels of warming. The study is interesting in its own right, as I don't recall having seen such a detailed projection of potential range change in any bird. You just click on different projected temperature increases (up to +3 degrees C.) to see what is left of this hawk's breeding territory at that level of increase. At the extreme increase only some 40% of the current area (not necessarily in the current locations) is projected to remain. Yet Audubon regards the conservation status of the Rough-legged Hawk to be of "least concern". This degree of warming may be reached in the 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> century, if not sooner, but since the climate change cascade that has been discussed for years has clearly already begun, and is now thought to be irreversible, the worst-case scenario will inevitably be reached. Sorry to end on such a bleak note.

***Submitted by Paul Schroeder***



## BOOK REVIEW

As an ecologist, I frequently run across the name Humboldt—e.g., the Humboldt Current, Humboldt Life Zone, Humboldt River and Sink (in Nevada), the Humboldt Penguin, etc. Who was this person who made such an impression on 19<sup>th</sup> Century naturalists such as Charles Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace? In *The Invention of Nature* (Knopf: 2015), Andrea Wulf gives us a detailed account of the life and travels of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and an intimate view of his character and accomplishments.

The son of a wealthy Prussian aristocrat, Humboldt had a classic education with tutors and private academies. Upon becoming independently wealthy with the death of their mother in 1796, he and his older brother abandoned their careers as mining engineers and pursued personal interests. Humboldt's strong interests were in natural history and geography and he made careful observations of natural phenomena as well as extensive collections of animals and plants; he also tested hypotheses with careful experiments using the scientific method. He was extremely adventurous and enjoyed being outdoors, and was a tireless walker and climber. What followed then over the next 60 years was a series of remarkable journeys on which Humboldt wrote copious accounts in letters, journals and books. Although Humboldt made several trips to the United States, as well as Russia and Siberia, his travels in South America and subsequent writings proved of most interest to naturalists such as Henry David Thoreau, Darwin, and Wallace. Humboldt's expeditions in South America included ascents of Ecuadorian volcanoes (Chimborazo, Cotopaxi), crossing the Venezuelan Llanos, and descending the Orinoco River to find links to the Amazon. As a result, his observations of plants and animals gave readers an intimate view of nature in the tropics, and almost 400 plants and animals have been named for him.

Two general themes emerge. First, Humboldt lived at a remarkable period in the early to mid-1800's interacting with an amazing

diversity of important personages. His intellectual circle in Prussia included Frederick Schiller and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe. In addition to the previously-noted naturalists, he met Thomas Jefferson, Simón Bolívar, and Charles Lyell (the father of modern geology), and influenced Ernst Haeckel (first user of “oikos” [or ecology]) and John Muir. The second theme is that in his writings, Humboldt anticipated some ecological axioms. In Views of Nature (1808), he described the web of life with organisms having strong inter-dependency. Recognizing the relationship of ambient temperature to altitude, he defined vegetation life zones on mountains and pioneered the isotherm concept. He also foresaw the consequences of human alteration of the natural landscape and ultimately, climate change. In his *magus opus*, Cosmos (5 volumes, 1845-1862), he emphasized organizational aspects of natural, historical, and philosophical themes across a broad intellectual spectrum.

This is a thoroughly engaging book that provides personal perspective and insight into the maturation, character, and activities of this remarkable scientist. Wulf has brought Humboldt to life, and I gained tremendous respect and appreciation for his life and legacy.

***Submitted by Peter Meserve***



## FEEDING BIRDS

As we approach another winter bird feeding season, some of us have wondered does feeding help or hurt birds. Some concerns may include higher density of birds at feeders spreading disease, and feeders that aren't properly cleaned, but we hope that these effects are minimal.

But there are data from citizen science projects that shed light on the impact of bird feeding on bird populations. The data comes from Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Project Feederwatch (<https://feederwatch.org/>) and Audubon Christmas Bird Count (<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>). The study involved looking at 30 years of Project Feederwatch data and selecting 135 species that use feeders regularly. Then the population trends of those species in the Christmas Bird Count data were analyzed. Most of the species that used bird feeders had increasing population over time. Some did show declines in population but they were non-native species, House Sparrows and Starlings, and a notable decline in House Finch that is suffering from eye disease.

Of course, this analysis doesn't address the decline in many species of birds that migrate out of North America, or don't come to feeders, but it is reassuring that data suggests that most bird species that come to feeders are not harmed by feeding.

***Submitted by Charlotte Omoto***

If you have issues with squirrels at your feeder, check out the article in the Feb/March 2019 issue of *Prairie Owl* on Cole's Flaming Squirrel Seed Sauce.

(<https://palouseaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/February-March-2019-1.pdf>)

## NEW FEATURE: Use Merlin Bird ID on AllAboutBirds.org

We've brought our popular Merlin Bird ID tool to the Web! Now you don't have to download the Merlin app to identify 650+ North American bird species.

Just visit [All About Birds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org) and look for the "ID" button in the upper right corner of any page. It works just like our popular app, asking you five simple questions and then giving you a short, smart list of suggestions about what bird you might have seen. It's great if your smartphone is short on memory, and it works from any browser on any device. Try out Merlin now!

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/>



## VISIT KAMIAK BUTTE

Welcome to Kamiak Butte, recognized as a National Natural Landmark, located in Whitman County, Washington.

Any time of year is a great time to visit, but winter serves as a perfect opportunity to bring along those snowshoes you've had collecting dust. The park has over five miles of forested hiking trails and the 3.5 mile Pine Ridge Trail is part of the National Trails System.

Reaching an elevation of 3,641 feet (second highest point in Whitman County), the park offers visitors a panoramic view of the Palouse region. For beginning snowshoers, the lower loop around the campground offers a perfect place to practice.

Keep your eyes open as the park plays host to over 150 bird, mammal and vegetation species. Pack a lunch and spend the day hiking trails or utilizing the day use area!

For directions from Pullman, take State Highway 27 North 11 miles. Turn left on Clear Creek Road for .5 mile. Turn left on Fugate Road (Road No. 5100). Travel .5 mile to Kamiak Butte County Park Road (Rd. No. 6710) to the park entrance on the left.



### Renewal Notice

If the date following "EXP" on your address label ends in 19, THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST ISSUE OF THE **PRAIRIE OWL**! You can renew by using the form in this issue, or use Mastercard or Visa on our Website: <https://palouseaudubon.org/product/1-year-membership/>

Please continue to support the work of the **Palouse Audubon Society**. Thank you!

# 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 Ron Force 208-874-3207 or email [ronforce@gmail.com](mailto:ronforce@gmail.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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