



The Curlew

The newsletter of the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

Upcoming Events:

For more information see www.lcbas.org

Mar 24: Monthly Chapter meeting at 7:00 PM

March 28: 4th Saturday Bird Trip to Snively Road: Sandhill Cranes and Ferruginous Hawks - see page 3

April 4: LCBAS First Saturday Bird Walk - see page 2

April 7: LCBAS Board Meeting

April 18: 3rd Saturday Bird Trip Rattlesnake Mountain and Prosser: Sagebrush and Songbirds

April 28: Monthly Chapter meeting at 7:00 PM

Save the Date!

March 20-22: Othello Sandhill Crane Festival - Celebrate their return and learn why nearly 35,000 cranes choose Othello, WA, as a spring migration stopover.

www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/

In this Issue of the Curlew:

- Details on upcoming walks, events, and meetings
- Results from the March walk
- Cheatgrass & Shrub-Steppe
- Burrowing Owls
- How to help: baby birds, injuries, & disease.

AND MORE

Brighten the Corner Where You Are: How You Can Make Your Yard Friendlier to Birds

**LCBAS Chapter Meeting:
Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 7:00 PM
First Lutheran Church, 418 N. Yelm, Kennewick, WA**

With Lori Nelson

Humans have transformed the landscape by removing native habitat, adding non-native species, building structures, and altering ecosystem processes. Addressing the challenges that these changes pose for native plants and wildlife seems overwhelming. A good place to start is your own corner of the world - your home, yard, or local park. In this presentation, I will talk about ways that we can all help our feathered friends, from reducing bird-window collisions to promoting healthy habitats that provide birds with the food and shelter they need.



L. Umthun 2021



**Black-chinned Hummingbird above
Bullock's Oriole below
Photos by Larry Umthun**



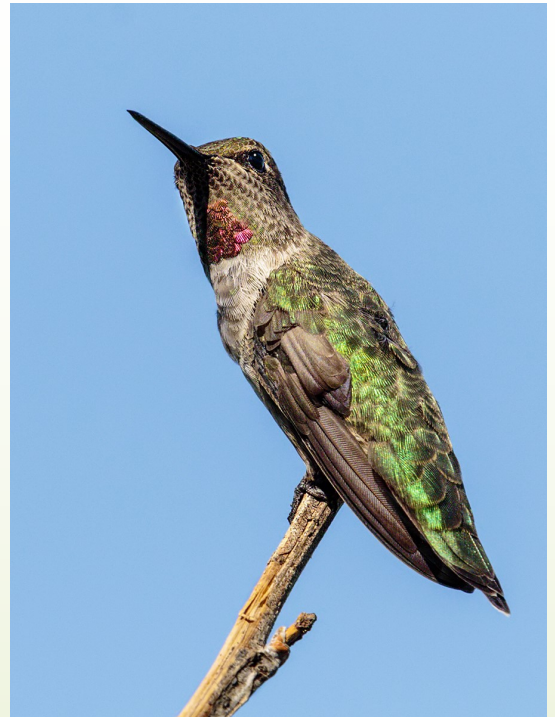
Lori is a life-long learner and associate professor of biology at Washington State University Tri-Cities. Her teaching and research reflect her twin goals of encouraging nature-friendly communities and providing undergraduate students with authentic research opportunities.

First Saturday Bird Walk Trip Report W. E. Johnson Park, Richland - March 7, 2026

By Lisa Hill

W.E. Johnson Park in Richland was the site of the March First Saturday bird walk with a great crowd of 25 birders. It was breezy at street level, but as we headed downhill to the south gate and into the park, we were sheltered by the trees and shrubs. We had a very respectable list of 38 species with waterfowl, songbirds and raptors.

It was wonderful to see our first-of-the-year VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOWS zipping around in the clear blue sky. The park is known for an abundance of SONG SPARROWS, BEWICK'S WRENS and BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES. A few wintering species were still around including WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW, YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER, RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, SPOTTED TOWHEE and PACIFIC WREN. We found a small flock of PURPLE FINCHES and were able to get good looks at beautiful adult males. About 10 years ago, we found the first wintering Purple Finches in Johnson Park on the Christmas Bird Count. They have been in the park every winter since then feasting on ash seeds.



It was a nice treat to see a blazing-yellow male LESSER GOLDFINCH in bright sunlight. That's another bird species that has recently established a breeding population in the Mid-Columbia region. We saw three male ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRDS in different areas of the park. There was a time about a dozen years ago when Anna's were only rare visitors in winter. Now, they also have a breeding population in the Tri-Cities. Many of them routinely live through the winter here, helped along by many people who have heated hummingbird feeders. Even so, to survive below-freezing temperatures overnight doesn't seem to be a problem for them.

Female Anna's Hummingbird - above right
Photo by Larry Umthun
Lesser Goldfinch - left
Photo by Lisa Hill

The next First Saturday Bird Walk is Saturday, April 4, 2026, at Sacajawea State Park in Pasco, at the confluence of the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Meet in the main parking lot We begin promptly at 8:00 AM. Please come a few minutes early to sign in. <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L600472>

State Discover Pass or daily pass required for entry.

Please join us! Both the public and LCBAS members are always welcome. Binoculars are available, first come, first served. No registration is required.

4th Saturday Bird Trip: Sandhill Cranes and Ferruginous Hawks

With LCBAS Birding Events Chair Rowan Young-McMurchie

Join LCBAS for a birding trip to the Barker Ranch area on Snively Rd, W. Richland. If time allows, there will be additional stops at the W. Richland Yakima River Gateway Park and Alabama Blvd (near LIGO). The trip will focus on cranes and waterfowl. Raptors and some early spring migrants should also be viewable. Ferruginous Hawks are a possibility near LIGO.

Meet Saturday, March 28, at 7:45 AM at the SR 240 & SR 224 Park & Ride lot (Terminal Dr, 46.293540, -119.305426). We will carpool from there.

No registration is needed. Questions? Contact Rowan at 509-438-7239 or lcbasbirdingevents@outlook.com.



Sandhill Cranes at Barker Ranch
Photo by Charlene Burge

All are welcome, and binoculars are available on a first come, first served basis. Come prepared to spend a few hours birding near the cars, interspersed with driving. Bring water, snacks, and dress for the weather.



Young American Robin
Photo by Carol VanHook
Shared under Creative Commons License
from Flickr.com

Have You Found a Baby Bird?

Baby bird season is starting! Do you know what to do if you find a baby bird?

It's natural for us to want to help, but it's also natural for baby birds to take a leap out of a nest before they're quite ready to fly. Often these birds have outgrown the nest, and their parents are still caring for them, even if they're on the ground. If it is a fledgling bird, it may not need our help.

Sometimes, though, they're too young, have fallen out of the nest due to the wind or our activities (such as pruning trees or moving hay stacks), or have been found by a predator. If a baby bird is featherless, or has its eyes closed, look for its nest—maybe you can return it safely. If you took it away from your pet or a feral cat, or it has injuries, it will need assistance and veterinary care.

Unfortunately we no longer have a local wildlife rescue (Blue Mountain Wildlife, in OR) which can help. It has been illegal since January 2024 to transport wild birds across the Washington / Oregon state line due to Avian Influenza. Our only current option is to call the Washington State University Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Pullman at 509-335-0711.

Cheatgrass is Cheating Our Future

By Dana Ward, LCBAS President

Washington State has lost approximately 85% of its shrub-steppe environment in the last 100 years. The shrub-steppe environment was once made up of sagebrush, rabbitbush and a wealth of native grasses, forbs, and a variety of native flowering plants. It is now under a relentless attack by non-native, invasive plants led by the dreaded cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*).

Shrub-steppe lands support a healthy avian population of Greater Sage-Grouse, Sagebrush Sparrow and Sage Thrasher, to mention only a few favorite bird species that depend on native sagebrush habitat. Needless to say, reptiles and mammals such as rabbits, elk, and ground squirrels are at home in the arid shrub-steppe environment. All these species have seen their numbers drop in direct relationship to the invasive cheatgrass and loss of habitat.

The United States Geological Survey determined that cheatgrass invaded North America from the old world around the mid-to-late 1800s. Cheatgrass in the late 1900s spread in two major ways.

- 1) The livestock industry intentionally planted cheatgrass because it greened up early in the spring and was harvested as livestock feed, and cheatgrass seeds were dispersed wherever livestock was transported.
- 2) Cheatgrass became widely spread because, believe it or not, it was used as a feed item for sheep on railcars transported across America. All along the railroad tracks, cheatgrass seeds were blown into the native environment.

Cheatgrass outcompetes native plants because it is more drought resistant than nearly all native plants and it germinates before native grasses and forbs. Cheatgrass can literally choke out other plants by competing for sun and water, as well as having a dense root structure that inhibits seed germination from native plants. A double whammy is that cheatgrass is the first to grow in disturbed land, particularly where range fires have occurred. Cheatgrass carries fire through the shrub-steppe, whereas native plants actually suppress or can slow or stop wildlands fires from spreading. With cheatgrass, an unwanted cycle of fires can occur over the years, never allowing native plants to repopulate.

How can we control cheatgrass and reclaim the shrub-steppe environment as we once knew it? At this time, chemical treatments are the only method to stop cheatgrass on a large scale. Herbicides must be repeatedly used to guarantee success. It is best to survey the land to see where the worst infestations occur then hit those areas hard to eliminate the seed source. Follow-up monitoring must be conducted for years to assure that success is achieved. Repeated spraying may be necessary to eliminate the seed source.

Commitment, funding, and a desire to eliminate the plague is a must. If cheatgrass is left unchecked it will create a monoculture that is truly worthless. Research is ongoing to try to discover an effective biological control for cheatgrass, but there is no success at this time.

What can you do? Support land management agencies through letters to elected officials requesting sufficient funding to stop cheatgrass infestation, and keep the public informed of the detrimental impact cheatgrass has to the native environment.

Reference: *Wyoming Wildlife*, March 2026 article, 'Cheating the System'.



Cheatgrass is a highly invasive, winter germinating annual grass which starts turning brown / purple and sets seed as summer begins. It creates a largely contiguous sea of dry, flammable vegetation throughout the shrub-steppe. In this photo, a Burrowing Owl and its burrow are completely surrounded by cheatgrass.
 Photo by Charlene Burge

Burrowing Owl Project at McNary NWR

By Robin Priddy, Director at Large

McNary National Wildlife Refuge is building artificial burrow systems (ABS) for Burrowing Owls (BUOW), thanks in part to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and a Wildlife Diversity Grant awarded by Washington state.

Steve Kahl, the project manager of McNary National Wildlife Refuge in Burbank just south of Pasco, put out a call for volunteers and received over 150 responses! LCBAS member, prior Events Chair, and WDFW Wildlife Biologist Jason Fidorra trained volunteers with previous experience to lead groups constructing artificial burrows.



While most of the new ABS are situated in closed areas to limit human disturbance, some of them are visible from the overlook on the hill on East Humorist Road, east of the slough and near the refuge border.

LCBAS has a long history of volunteer work with BUOW. It was so encouraging to hear that LCBAS and our community continue to be very interested in these owls, and volunteers came from near and far. A total of 64 people showed up for the three events that have taken place so far. I went on February 28th to the first big volunteer event and had a GREAT morning!

Several families came with their children. There were quite a few familiar faces from LCBAS, but most of the volunteers were not members. It was just wonderful to see such wide interest in this project, with some people coming from as far as the Seattle area, Yakima, and Walla Walla.

Before we went to the field site to start digging, Steve introduced the project and Burrowing Owls, and provided details on important aspects of burrow construction.



We learned quite a bit about BUOW behavior and migration.

During the two volunteer work dates, 23 burrows were established and are now ready for occupancy. It's believed that there's a 50-50 chance we'll see at least one site occupied by BUOW in the first year.

A person might ask how the owls will find the burrows as there is currently no known BUOW nesting locations in Walla Walla County. Burrowing Owls are accustomed to using the burrows left by fossorial, aka burrowing mammals, like ground squirrels, marmots, and badgers. Unfortunately, these species have experienced a steep decline in population, which effected availability of BUOW nesting locations.

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Photos, top to bottom: 1. A volunteer group constructs a cluster of three burrows. 2. An example of an ABS, showing the nest chamber, corrugated pipe for BUOW access, and "access port". 3. WDFW and USFWS volunteer Joni Martin, with young BUOW from a previous year during a banding day. All BUOW's are banded by a biologist with a valid federal bird banding permit.

Injured or Diseased Birds

Courtesy of Spokane Audubon Society

Birds can become injured and sick for a multitude of reasons. The most common reasons include being attacked by house cats, window collisions, being hit by cars, and bacterial and viral illnesses contracted at bird feeders.

The only time you should even consider intervening in any wild animal's life is if it is clearly sick or injured – or in the case of a baby, if you are certain the parent is dead. If it flies off when you try to approach, it does not need your help.

Signs of adult songbird in need of help include:

On the ground not moving, does not fly away when approached, easily picked up, extremely fluffed up or ruffled feathers, eyes closed, squinted, crusty, weepy, swollen, bleeding, evidence of blood or wounds, panting, shivering, vomiting, obvious injured limb (dangling leg, drooping/hanging wing, wings not symmetrical), tries to fly but can't.

Before you intervene, please remove any and all cats, dogs and other pets from the area to avoid further injury to the bird. Direct small children to stay away to avoid stressing a bird further.

If a bird has hit a window, it may just be temporarily stunned and needs a little time to regain its senses. Leave it alone and it may be able to fly away on its own. If it's still not moving on its own within 15-30 minutes, it may help to put it in a more sheltered place.

If the bird is a small species (not a raptor or bird of prey) that you feel you can safely handle, use gloves to pick it up and carefully put it in a towel-lined cardboard box with a lid or a towel over the top. Keep the box in a cool, quiet, safe place.

In the case of a window-collision stunned bird, with no signs of any other kind of injury, open the box every 15 minutes to give it a chance to fly away.

Whatever the injury, when you periodically check on the bird's condition, don't be surprised if it has died. Birds go into shock very easily when injured, and often die from the shock.

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Volunteer to Help LCBAS

Elections in May!!

Would you like to get involved with running LCBAS and/or contribute to outreach, education, events, publications, Curlew articles, or other areas?

We would love to have you! Please inquire through the LCBAS website contact page:

www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/contact, OR inquire at a chapter meeting, through a board member, or come to a board meeting (always open to the public). You can help us, our local communities, and the birds and their habitats which we love and protect.



Coming Soon!

Upcoming Bird Festivals: There are many birding festivals and events throughout the state. For more information on bird festivals and events in WA state, visit: wa.audubon.org/bird-festivals-0

This is a sampling of upcoming festivals, but visit the above link to learn about others.

March 20-22: Othello Sandhill Crane Festival
Celebrate their return and learn why nearly 35,000 cranes choose Othello as a spring migration stopover.
www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org

April 16-19: Olympic Peninsula BirdFest
olympicbirdfest.org

May 1-3: Gray's Harbor Shorebird Festival
www.shorebirdfestival.com/

May 14-17: Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest
<https://wenatcheeriverinstitute.org/bird-fest/>

Continued from page 6: Injured or Diseased Birds

Do not try to force feed or give water to any bird or animal that you've confined to a box.

Do not attempt to treat or raise a wild animal yourself – it could be harmful to the animal or to you, and it's against state and federal laws. If you are not properly trained, you could make an animal's situation worse or even cause it's death. If kept improperly, animals may lose their natural fear of humans and become more vulnerable to predation or injury.

Any willing veterinarian can legally provide simple, stabilizing care for a wild animal until it can be transported to a wild life rehabilitator. Currently there are no licensed wildlife rehabilitators in the Tri-Cities. The closest rehabilitator that takes all bird species is Washington State University Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Pullman. Call them at 509-335-0711 to make arrangements to bring in an injured bird. If you are in Oregon, you can contact Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton.

It has been illegal since January 2024 to transport birds across the Washington/Oregon border to Blue Mountain Wildlife.

All wildlife rehabilitators are volunteers, relying on donations for their services. If you send an animal to them for care, consider making a donation to them.

Wildlife rehabilitators are limited by their state and federal permits as to how many and what species of animals they may admit to their facility (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service requires a permit to rehabilitate migratory birds, and coordinates with WDFW regarding threatened and endangered species.)

To learn more about injured wildlife and rehabilitation, including all Washington state licensed wildlife rehabilitators listed by county, visit this site: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/injured-wildlife/rehabilitation>

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Continued from page 5: Burrowing Owl Project

Those mammal burrows have a distinctive look, which includes an open, bare dirt space in front of the burrow mouth that we might think of as a "patio". ABS are constructed of man-made materials to mimic natural burrows, and include half of a 55 gallon juice barrel for the underground nest, and plastic corrugated pipe which leads from the patio to the nest.

All of the volunteers were involved in the digging and construction and a couple of the children brought child-sized tools. We were supervised by people who had done this before and they explained a lot about how the owls would use the burrows and what made them useful and attractive. Steve mentioned BUOWs like badger burrows, so one of the younger people started digging a little bit out at the mouth of the burrow like a badger might, so that digging marks could be seen from the air! It was her idea and she did that at all three of our burrows.

Everyone who was there expressed interest in participating in the ongoing monitoring. People had ideas about observing, photography, school, and scout projects. There was so much engagement and interest in the long-term welfare of the owls.

Several people came from Walla Walla, too. Blue Mountain Audubon, along with the Shrub Steppe Committee of Audubon Washington, have been involved in advocacy for BUOW protections.

There will likely be more burrows installed, and lots of opportunities for viewing and participating in monitoring. There is more information on the Facebook page: www.facebook.com/MidColumbiaRefuges

It was such an inspiration to see all the interest and enthusiasm from so many members of our community. I hope the continuation of this project via expansion and monitoring will encourage even more. I'd suggest anyone reading this to consider getting involved. The work itself is fun and interesting, and feeling the support and engagement of the community was just the best!

For more information on Burrowing Owls, check out the Washington State website here: wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/athene-cunicularia

Continued from page 7: Injured or Diseased Birds

Avian influenza, AKA bird flu, is a disease caused by infection with type A flu viruses that occur naturally among wild aquatic birds (ducks, geese, swans, gulls, terns, and shorebirds) worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species. The viruses are very contagious among birds through saliva, nasal secretions, feces and contaminated surfaces. The Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) form is fatal for infected birds. The American Bird Conservancy has recommendations for simple steps that you can take to help birds:

abcbirds.org/news/avian-flu-outbreak-2022/

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has been tracking avian flu outbreaks and provides updated information on cases, recommended precautions to reduce the risk of spreading or contracting the disease, and an on-line suspected case reporting tool at wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/bird-flu. The Washington Department of Agriculture also has a website where you can check for updated cases in our area at: agr.wa.gov/departments/animals-livestock-and-pets/avian-health/avian-influenza/bird-flu

Salmonellosis is a common and usually fatal bird disease caused by the salmonella bacteria. It is transmitted through droppings and saliva when birds flock together in large numbers, such as at bird feeders. House finches, pine siskins, goldfinches and grosbeaks are most commonly afflicted in the Pacific Northwest.

The first indication that a bird has salmonellosis is that it will appear to be tame, is lethargic, fluffs out its feathers, and is easy to approach. At that point, it is usually in the late stages of the illness and there is nothing that can be done to help except to report them to WDFW's online reporting tool for sick, injured or dead wildlife: survey123.arcgis.com/share/a384e90f69744f2e846135a9ce80027f

Asymptomatic individuals pose as much a risk in spread of this pathogen as those obviously sick. Reducing unnatural opportunities for backyard birds to flock together, such as at bird feeders, helps to alleviate these risks in transmission amongst individuals.

It is possible, although uncommon, for salmonella bacteria to transfer from birds to humans through direct contact with infected birds, droppings, or through domestic cats that catch sick birds. When handling birds, bird feeders or bird baths, it is best to wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly afterward.

For more information, see: wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/salmonellosis-wild-birds

Several other diseases can afflict birds and be spread at feeding stations. If evidence of any of these diseases is seen, immediately remove feeders and clean them with a ten percent chlorine bleach solution. Dry completely before re-using and repeat if you see any more sick birds. Here's what to watch for:

Avian pox – This viral disease causes wartlike growths on birds' faces, legs, wings and feet. The virus is spread by direct contact with infected birds, ingestion of food or water contaminated by sick birds, or contact with contaminated surfaces of feeders, birdbaths and perches. Insects, especially mosquitoes, also carry the disease from one bird to another.

Aspergillosis – This disease is caused by a fungal mold that grows on damp feed or soil in or around a feeder. Birds inhale the fungal spores and the disease spreads through their lungs and air sacs, causing bronchitis and pneumonia. Infected birds have trouble breathing, usually seen open-mouthed but not eating.

Trichomoniasis – This disease is caused by small parasites that can affect a wide variety of animals, including humans. The mourning dove and band-tailed pigeon seem to be particularly susceptible. The disease causes sores in their mouths and throats, and results in death from starvation or dehydration.

LCBAS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL: The Curlew digital newsletter subscribers are alerted to the impending expiration of their subscription by email. Please renew your subscription on or before the month your subscription expires to continue to receive the newsletter without interruption. Renewing online is easy, quick and safe:

www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/join-renew-donate or you can use the form included with this newsletter.

ADDRESS CHANGES: Please send address changes (email address) to www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/contact so that your subscription is not interrupted. You can also mail address changes to LCBAS, PO Box 1900, Richland, WA 99352.

NEW NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERS: We hope you will support Lower Columbia Basin Audubon by joining the local chapter, which is locally funded. Please become a paid subscriber and add your voice to our bird protection, conservation, and education efforts. Doing so is fast, easy, and secure at our website:

www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/join-renew-donate

The **LCBAS Privacy Policy** is available at our website. Find out more at www.lcbas.org or www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org

LCBAS OFFICERS AND STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Email</u>
President	Dana Ward	president.lcbas@gmail.com
Vice President	OPEN	---
Treasurer	Dan Hansen	treasurer.lcbas@gmail.com
Secretary	Debbie Berkowitz	secretary.lcbas@gmail.com
Birding Events	Rowan Young-McMurchie	lcbasbirdingevents@outlook.com
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Conservation Co-Chair	Dana Ward and Rick Leumont	---
Education Chair	OPEN	---
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Fundraising Chair	Marcie Daines	
Membership Chair	OPEN	To contact anyone without a dedicated email address, please use the contact form on our website:
Program Chair	Lori Nelson	
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Director at Large	Kelly Doyle	
OTHER CONTACTS:		
Curlew Editor	Charlene Burge	
Membership Database	Rich Barchet	
LCBAS Website	Lisa Hill & Lori Nelson	
Publicity Chair	OPEN	

Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

PO Box 1900

Richland, WA 99352

Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Membership Form

LCBAS membership benefits include a year’s subscription (10 issues) to our digital newsletter “The Curlew” and priority registration for space-limited field trips. LCBAS is a 501c(3) organization and dues are tax deductible.

_____ Regular membership (Individual or family at the same permanent address) (\$20)

_____ Full-time student membership (\$10)

_____ I would like to make an additional donation of _____.

Total: _____ (If paying with a check, please make check payable to **LCBAS**)

Register and pay online via PayPal at www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/join-renew-donate

-OR- Mail your form and dues to: Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society, PO Box 1900, Richland, WA. 99352

____ I do not want to receive e-alerts for last minute activity changes, important issues, and volunteer opportunities (check for opt-out).

Name _____

Email (required to receive newsletter) _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Membership in LCBAS is separate from membership in the National Audubon Society.

To join the National Audubon Society, please go to www.audubon.org