



# The Curlew

The newsletter of the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

## Upcoming Events:

For more information see  
[www.lcbas.org](http://www.lcbas.org)

**March 26:** LCBAS Monthly Chapter Meeting at 7:00 PM -- all are welcome!

**April 2:** Board meeting at 6:30 PM. Contact any board member for more information.

**April 6:** First Saturday / Bateman Island Bird Walk. Meet at Wye Park at 8:00 AM. See page two for more information.

**April 23:** LCBAS Monthly Chapter Meeting at 7:00 PM -- all are welcome!

**May: LCBAS Elections--see page 2 for more information**

## Save the Date

**March 22-23-24:** Othello Sandhill Crane Festival  
[www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org](http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org)

**April 20:** Tri-Cities Earth Day at The Reach 12:00 - 4:00 PM  
[visitthereach.us/events/](http://visitthereach.us/events/)

**April 25-28:** Washington Ornithological Society Annual Conference <https://wos.org/annual-conference/current-year/>

**Columbia Basin Chapter of the WA Native Plant Society**

Wildflower season is ongoing! For more information:  
[www.cbwnps.org/](http://www.cbwnps.org/)

## Appreciating Backyard Flora and Fauna Through Photography

**LCBAS Chapter Meeting: Tuesday, March 26, 2024, at 7:00 PM**  
**First Lutheran Church, 418 N. Yelm, Kennewick, WA**

**Dale Halgren and Alan Olander, Photography Hobbyists**

Even though the Tri-Cities has grown tremendously in the 35 years that Dale and Alan have known each other, there are still opportunities to



enjoy interesting flora and fauna in your own backyard, or the greater backyard of the Tri-Cities. Photography is a great way to heighten your awareness of the things around you and a good excuse to sit quietly looking out your window or on a river bank. This presentation is geared to give you an idea of what

you can see in the area, and help you appreciate the beauty and interest that come from glimpses of nature and good light. Local birds, animals, and scenery are the focus of this presentation but you may see something in a new light and enjoy discussing your favorite backyard locations and subjects.

In 1989 Alan and Dale were assigned to share an office, and discovered they shared many similar interests, including sports and outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, biking, and particularly backpacking. They have been on over 30 backpacking trips together since an initial 1992 adventure. Alan had been interested in photography early on, and after years encouraging Dale to take up the hobby, he finally caught the bug. While the initial focus was more on backpacking landscape photography, they work on astrophotography, and wildlife photography when at home.



## First Saturday / Bateman Island Bird Walk March 2, 2024

By Lisa Hill

LCBAS recently purchased five pair of Vortex Crossfire binoculars to loan out, and they are being put to good use, as planned! Lots of people who are new to birding have attended the Bateman Island bird walk this year and borrowed the new binos. Introducing people to the marvelous world of birds with the use of good binoculars is a great way to keep them interested in learning more. Bringing the details of a small bird into sharp focus is as fascinating as seeing butterfly wings under a microscope.

Many of the typical winter waterfowl were present on the Yakima Delta including a huge raft of about 500 LESSER SCAUP. We saw two WESTERN GREBES which seem to be a bit hard to find recently. COMMON LOON, COMMON MERGANSER, HOODED MERGANSER and great looks at WOOD DUCKS were a few of the less common species seen.

Adult BALD EAGLES were present and can often be observed from the east side of Hwy 240 perched in or near the enormous nest in one of the dead

cottonwood trees. For many years, nesting Bald Eagles were a rare sight, but with the eagles' resurgence in population, nests are not uncommon in the Tri-Cities region.



One of the best finds of the day was a flock of 10-12 PURPLE FINCH seen near the beach area on the west side of the island. These birds have a great appetite for seeds from true ash trees (*Fraxinus*) which are not

Purple Finch (above) and House Finch (to right)  
Photos by Larry Umthun

native to this area. A small grove of ash trees are present near the beach and true to form, the Purple Finches were busy nibbling on the seeds. This is another bird that was once a rare find in this region, but now are not hard to locate in winter wherever ash trees are found, possibly due to the proliferation of those trees. W.E. Johnson Park in Richland is also a good site to visit to see Purple Finch.



**The next Bateman Island bird walk is Saturday, April 6. Meet in the parking lot of Wye Park above the causeway to the island. We begin promptly at 8:00 AM.**

**Please join us! Both the public and LCBAS members are always welcome. Binoculars are available, first come, first served.**

## LCBAS 2024-2025 Board of Directors Elections

LCBAS will hold elections for the Board of Directors at our May 2024 membership meeting. All current dues-paying members of LCBAS may vote.

Any LCBAS member who is interested in a position may volunteer or be nominated from the floor at the meeting. If you are interested in an open position, contact Debbie Berkowitz at [secretary@lcbas.org](mailto:secretary@lcbas.org) before the May meeting, or volunteer at the meeting.

We have several open chairs, AND would love help in other areas as well. Please consider nominating yourself or a friend, and/or volunteering to help out in other capacities.

Vacant positions include: Vice President, Education, Membership, Programs, and Publicity.

Further, we'd love your great ideas and assistance if you'd like to volunteer to assist with the Curlew, field trips, education, outreach, hospitality, or any other areas you have an interest in.

## Thank you!

We'd like to send a big thank-you to all of the supporters of LCBAS Flapjack Fundraiser at Applebee's. It was a fun event for all and a success in raising funds to help us continue caring for and protecting birds. It was great to have so many good friends attend!



## “One Man’s Owl” by Bernd Heinrich

### Book Review by Dana Ward

I recently read Bernd Heinrich’s book titled, “One Man’s Owl” and would like to present some interesting information from his book on Great Horned Owls. I will also include additional information from the *The Birder’s Handbook*, some personal communication with biologists, and personal experiences over the years.

The Great Horned Owl is found throughout North America, and winters over its entire range. It is our largest owl by weight, greater than the Great Gray Owl, but slightly less than the Golden Eagle and Bald Eagle. It is the apex predator bowing to no other bird, while eagles can take Great Horned Owls during the day, eagle parts are found in the Great Horned Owl nest, showing that at night the owls rule.

Great Horned Owls take a wide variety of prey from larger mammals such as skunks, to prey as small as insects. Heinrich in his book documented that shellfish are harvested at times. The owl’s digestive system can liquify a mouse in less than five minutes, and undigested parts are collected and expelled as a pellet about once a day.

Great Horned Owls do not build nests. They take over nests built by hawks, ravens or crows. They will also nest in cavities, natural or artificial. You can find Great Horned Owls nesting in cavities found in steep cut banks along streams or rocky cliffs. These owls can also nest on the ground. I found a pair of Great Horned Owls nesting under some juniper trees in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota. Needless to say, the owls were upset when I inadvertently walked into their vicinity. Nesting time is when they are most likely to attack a human and in some situations people have been killed or severely injured.

Heinrich writes:

The behavior of Great Horned Owls in the vicinity of their nests varies greatly with different individuals, though it is generally hostile especially when there are young in the nest....Once I was savagely attacked, while I was climbing to a nest in which the eggs were hatching. I had hardly climbed four feet on the big pine tree, when the great brown bird glided past me and alighted in a pine beyond. There she sat, glaring at me, swaying from side to side, her wings partly spread, her plumage ruffled out, looking as big as a bushel basket, her ears erect, and snapping her bill furiously, a perfect picture of savage rage. As I continued to upward her mate soon joined her....Once, when I was not looking, I felt the swoop of wings, and a terrific blow on my shoulder, almost knocking me out of the tree, and I could feel the sharp claws strike through my clothes....As I neared the nest; I felt a stunning blow behind my ear, which nearly dazed me...her sharp talons had struck into my scalp, making two ugly wounds, from which the blood flowed freely. This was the limit; I did not care to be scalped, or knocked senseless to the ground, so down I came, leaving the owls the masters of the situation.

Clutch size can vary depending on the availability of prey. The usual number of eggs laid is one to five. As an interesting side note, Snowy Owls can lay up to 24 eggs depending on the lemming population. Like other owls, Great Horned Owls will eat their smaller siblings given the right circumstances. It seems cruel and hard to accept, but it is just a survival action. Heinrich related that fellow biologist, James Alder, watched this happen and the larger owlet, after several attempts, partially swallowed its younger sibling, then walked around the nest with two feet sticking out of its beak.

One final bit of information. Why do Great Horned Owls, like many nocturnal owls, have ear tufts? The author speculates that the tufts help the owl to blend into its background, especially if the owl sits on top of a broken off tree. The tufts make the head more ragged in appearance, thus simulating a broken off tree trunk.

I enjoyed reading Heinrich’s book where he raised a Great Horned Owl. He learned a lot about owl behavior and I have only related a small fraction of what he witnessed over the years. He eventually released the owl into the forest.



**Great Horned Owl**  
Photo by Charlene Burge

## Owls – The Science of Birds Podcast by Ivan Phillipson

### Podcast Review by Robin Priddy

From: <https://www.scienceofbirds.com/podcast/owls-tytonidae-strigidae>

Owls are such a fascinating group of birds and command much interest and attention. They have captured human attention for a long time – there's an owl drawn on a cave in France that is 36,000 years old! The owls in Harry Potter, Winnie the Pooh and Woodsy Owl – “Give a hoot, don't pollute!” -- are more examples of owls in our world view. There's a separate category of birding for owls – “owling” – which has an old meaning of smuggling wool or sheep out of England!

Owls have some very distinguishing characteristics among birds:

- ◆ Large broad wings compared to body weight allows them to fly slowly; also their feather design allows them to be quiet in flight.
- ◆ Large eyes are tube shaped, not spherical like ours. Their eyes can't rotate because of their size and shape, instead, their head rotation is very flexible. Their range of motion is 270 degrees! Owls also use a phenomenon called parallax, which is bobbing or dancing movements with their head to locate objects in the distance.
- ◆ Forward-facing eyes are different from almost all other birds, giving owls binocular vision. These big eyes allow more light to reach the retinas, which are packed with rod cells – that function in low light with limited colors.
- ◆ Feather “horns” called “plumicorns” – they are not horns, nor are they ears, but rather just tufts of feathers. They can express emotions and attitudes, and may provide camouflage which breaks up their rounded head silhouette.
- ◆ Owls feet have two toes forward and two back – zygodactyl – like woodpeckers and osprey. Owls, however, can move one talon forward so they have three forward and one back. These talons are used to hunt and capture prey.

Owls come in many sizes: the Elf Owl found in the deserts of the southwest and Mexico are smaller than a House Sparrow. The largest owl, Blakiston's Fish Owl, lives in Northern China and Japan, and in Eastern Russia. It is 28” long with a six-foot wingspan. Females can weigh over ten pounds. Some of our other very large owls include the Snowy Owl, the Great Horned Owl, and the Eurasian Eagle Owl.

Owls have a history of being considered wise in western society and stories. In India, however, they are considered lazy! They may be considered wise, or more like humans, because of their forward facing eyes. The word owl comes from an ancient Indo-European word Uwal. Over time it evolved into the word Ule in Old English. These words are based on the sounds owls make. Bird names based on calls are called phononyms. Other phononymic bird names are chickadee, bobwhite and phoebe.

The podcast next goes on to examine many owl calls. Owl sounds are hard wired, not learned, and can be very individualistic. The podcasts includes many unique owl calls from many parts of the world.

Owls belong to the families Tytonidae and Strigidae. Tytonidae includes Barn Owls and their relatives. Strigidae are known as the “typical” owls. There are between 190 and 230 species in the Strigidae family. Together these two owl families form the taxonomic order Strigiformes. The root is the word Strix, from Greek, which means “a screecher”, likely named for the Tawny Owl. In Greek mythology Strix was a bird-like demon that ate humans. Quite a word origin!

Owls have more plumage per square inch than most birds. Owl faces pick up sound – formed by dense layers of feathers arranged in facial disks which bounce sound to their ears. The owl can move these feathers to change the focal distance of its hearing. Owls that hunt in the dark have asymmetrical ear hole alignment, which gives them the ability to pinpoint sound vertically, allowing them to hunt in total darkness.

There are so many other fascinating facts about owls in this podcast. The notes at the end, and other resources, are equally interesting. Enjoy!

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### LCBAS OFFICERS AND STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Email</u>
President	Dana Ward	<a href="mailto:president@lcbas.org">president@lcbas.org</a>
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Treasurer	Dan Hansen	<a href="mailto:treasurer@lcbas.org">treasurer@lcbas.org</a>
Secretary	Debbie Berkowitz	<a href="mailto:secretary@lcbas.org">secretary@lcbas.org</a>
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Communications Chair	Charlene Burge	—
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Education Chair	OPEN	—
Finance Chair	Dan Hansen	<a href="mailto:treasurer@lcbas.org">treasurer@lcbas.org</a>
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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 The Curlew and priority registration for space-limited field trips. LCBAS is a 501c(3) organization and dues are tax deductible.

\_\_\_\_\_ Regular membership (\$20)

\_\_\_\_\_ Full-time student membership (\$10)

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to make an additional donation of \_\_\_\_\_.

Total: \_\_\_\_\_ (Make check payable to **LCBAS**)

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

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To join the National Audubon Society, please go to [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)