

The Curlew

The newsletter of the Lower Columbia
Basin Audubon Society

Upcoming Events:

For more information see
www.lcbas.org

January 24: Monthly Membership Meeting

February 4: First Saturday Bird Walk at Bateman Island, at 8 am

February 7: Board meeting via Zoom

February 28: Monthly Membership Meeting

Other Events:

For upcoming meetings and walks with the Columbia Basin Chapter of the WA Native Plant Society:

<https://www.cbwnps.org/>

Mongolian Adventure

January 26: Join Scott and Pamela Woodward at 6 pm, in the Doris Roberts Gallery, Richland Library. Experience the culture, landscapes, and history of Mongolia through music and photos from a recent trip to Mongolia, finishing at the world-renowned Eagle Festival.

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 17-20: For more information: www.birdcount.org/

Othello Sandhill Crane Festival

March 24-26: For more information and to register: <https://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org>

Franklin County Shoreline Master Program (SMP) periodic review:

January 24: Q & A Open House from 6-8 pm at the Port of Pasco Boardroom, 1110 Osprey Pointe Ave, Pasco WA. Additional details will be posted on the County's website, as well as the Project Website at <https://tinyurl.com/FranklinSMP2023>

Heritage Gardens ~ Creating Sustainable and Wildlife Friendly Landscapes

Tuesday, Jan 24, 2023 at 7:00 pm via Zoom (link below)

Benton Conservation District in partnership with the Columbia Basin Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society has developed a program designed to honor the cultural and natural heritage of the Columbia River Basin while utilizing sustainable gardening practices. Heritage Gardens promote low-water-use landscaping with native plants to create beautiful wildlife friendly landscapes. Join us to learn how this program was developed, how it has grown and to take a virtual tour of established gardens.

Heather Wendt is a conservationist and the co-creator of the Heritage Garden (HG) Program. She is also the co-author of the Plant Selection Guide, Heritage Gardens of the Columbia River Basin. Heather has worked for conservation districts since 1997. She currently serves as the Assistant Manager for both the Benton and Franklin Conservation Districts, and she is responsible for coordinating the Heritage Garden Program in Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, and Yakima Counties.



A Certified Heritage Garden with native and water-wise plants.
Photo from the Heritage Garden Program

Go to LCBAS.org for a clickable link, or use this to join Zoom Meeting:

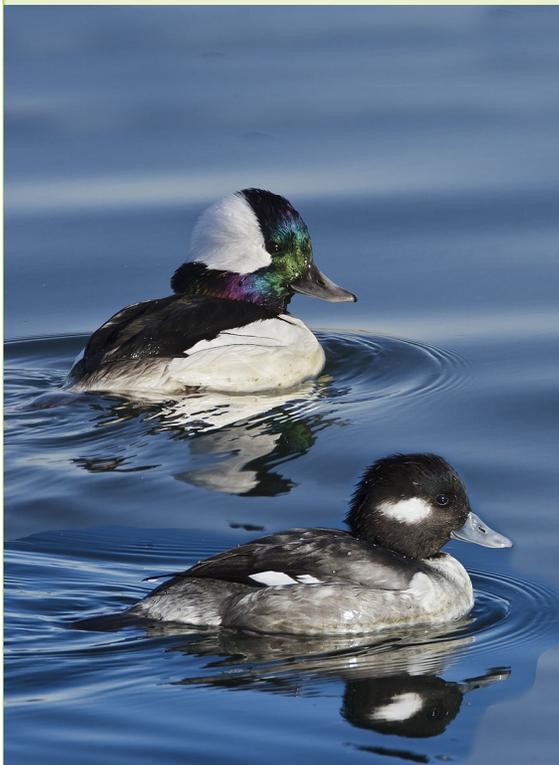
[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82182085993?](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82182085993?pwd=bEJ0VC81b2JsVjN4YU9qc1lWZlNuUT09)
[pwd=bEJ0VC81b2JsVjN4YU9qc1lWZlNuUT09](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82182085993?pwd=bEJ0VC81b2JsVjN4YU9qc1lWZlNuUT09)
Meeting ID: 821 8208 5993 Passcode: 665056

Find your local number: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/kqx8v9xRB>

Bateman Island Bird Walk January 7, 2022

By Lisa Hill

'Tis the season for ducks and drizzle, both of which were in abundance for the bird walk. Small songbirds were scarce, but a variety of waterfowl helped bring the total species count up to 47. So, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, is it a duck? Not always. Let's get our ducks in a row and take a quack at separating out the odd ducks. The task isn't a hard nut to quack. Just quack open the Sibley Guide to Birds and you'll see that learning about waterfowl is just duck soup.



Bufflehead pair
Photo by Larry Umthun

The lucky duck family, *Anatidae*, includes many of the typical winter waterfowl in our region. TUNDRA SWAN (of Ugly Duckling fame), an abundance of AMERICAN WIGEON, and a good number of GADWALL, BUFFLEHEAD, CANVASBACK, NORTHERN PINTAIL, COMMON GOLDENEYE, HOODED MERGANSER, COMMON MERGANSER, and a handful of RUDDY DUCK, RING-NECKED DUCK, WOOD DUCK and LESSER SCAUP to name a few. Nearly all were in the water and very few were sitting ducks. There might have been a couple of species that fell between the quacks and we missed them, like Northern Shoveler and Green-winged Teal. (Just quacking a joke or two.)

So, which lame ducks reside in different families and aren't all they're quacked up to be? COMMON LOON, DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT, HORNED and PIED-BILLED GREBE, AMERICAN COOT, AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN, and HERRING and GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULLS, despite their webbed feet and propensity to float on the water. I won't duck my responsibility to name a few other notable birds like NORTHERN SHRIKE, PACIFIC WREN, MARSH WREN and HERMIT THRUSH.

I'll duck out now and see you at the next Bateman Island bird walk on Saturday, February 4 beginning promptly at 8am. If you're a beginning birder, who knows? You might take to birding like a duck takes to water. Meet in the parking lot of Wye Park above the causeway to the island, immerse yourself in the amazing world of birds, and let your troubles roll like water off a duck's back.

California's Condor: the Dinosaur Bird Podcast "The Wild" by Chris Morgan

<https://kuow.org/stories/rise-of-the-condor>

Podcast review / discussion by Robin Priddy

This was an interesting and very moving podcast about people and California Condors, and how their lives intersected and transformed. Condors were one of the first 78 species listed on the original Endangered Species act in 1967, have been on the edge of extinction for decades, and have not yet been delisted.

They have a 9-foot wingspan and an orange pumpkin-like head. They are North America's biggest bird and they are built to soar. They can fly up to 15,000 feet high, they can soar for hours looking for food, and have well-honed eyesight.

Lead is poisoning condors; this story is about some of the people who are working hard to help them.

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Christmas Bird Count Results December 31, 2022

By Dana C. Ward, Christmas Bird Count Coordinator

The annual Christmas Bird Count was a great success with reasonably good results reported from all three cities. We had 54 participants which included a nice group of feeder watchers. We had 112 species sighted during the count day with a total of 35,841 birds reported. My sincere thank you to all the participants that came out on New Year's Eve to participate. As a Tri-Cities team we again did an impressive job.

We were blessed by near perfect weather for a winter day. It would not have been so nice if we did the count earlier in December. Temperatures ranged from the low 30's to mid to upper 40's with nearly calm conditions. The only minor drawback was much of the still water that would have supported water birds was frozen. Flowing water such as the Columbia, Yakima and Snake Rivers were open for water birds to thrive on. Some ice flows were noted coming down the Yakima and along the south shore of the Columbia River.

Under these great weather conditions the participants were able to do their respective areas in relative winter comfort. To conduct a proper count, much walking and slow driving with stops is best. Walking surveys covered 244 miles, and 384 miles were driven.

Due to high infection rates of Covid, RSV, and influenza, LCBAS did not have a potluck again this year. Instead a Zoom meeting was held for those that were interested in getting the day's results early in the evening of the count day. We are hoping that we can have a potluck later this spring and possibly have one next year at the end of the count day.

Some high counts included American Wigeon - 6692, Canada Goose - 6307, Mallard - 4522, American Coot - 4198, European Starling -1465, Red-winged Blackbird - 915, American Crow - 854, American Robin - 674, Cedar Waxwing - 459, White-crowned Sparrow - 955, Dark-eyed Junco - 617 and House Finch - 578.

Some species to highlight were Purple Finch - 8, Western Bluebird - 7, Lesser Black-backed Gull - 1 and Lesser Goldfinch -18. Unusually high were a few species such as Western Screech-Owl - 6 and California Scrub-jay - 8. Low counts were recorded for Green-winged Teal, - 15, which could be due to frozen backwaters, and Rough-legged Hawk - 1.

Some interesting species counts were Evening Grosbeak - 1, Lincoln's Sparrow - 1, White-throated Sparrow - 2, American Tree Sparrow - 1, Fox Sparrow - 2, Orange-crowned Warbler - 2, Long-eared Owl -1 and Peregrine Falcon - 1. More low count species could be listed but these are just some of the ones highlighted.

I want to thank Team Leads Lisa Hill and Richard Barchet for their continued support. Without them the count would not come off as smoothly as it does. I also want to recognize Bill LaFramboise for agreeing to take over the helm as the new Christmas Bird Count Coordinator. I have had a lot of fun conducting the count and look forward to being the Team Lead for Pasco next year. A tentative date for next year's count would be a Saturday before Christmas Day such as the 16th or the 23rd.

Dr. Rod Coler



One of our long-time LCBAS members, Dr. Rod Coler, passed away January 6, 2023, at the age of 98. He was in the hospital with family nearby. Rod was a champion for the Audubon Nature Trail in Columbia Park, participated in many Christmas Bird Counts, was a keen butterfly enthusiast, traveled on many far-away field trips, and he loved so many aspects of our natural world: birds, insects, geology, astronomy, and more. He was a friend to many, and will be greatly missed.



Western Screech-Owl
Photo by Larry Umthun

California's Condor: the Dinosaur Bird Podcast "The Wild" by Chris Morgan

Podcast review / discussion by Robin Priddy

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As the podcast opens, Chris is in Bitter Creek Wildlife Refuge (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/bitter-creek>) with Laura McMann, a Condor Biologist. They are out looking at a condor nest on a cliff below them. Condors eat dead things and play an important role in the ecosystem. They eat carcasses, which then don't transmit diseases to other animals. Their stomach has very low pH and can destroy bacteria that they eat.

Once there were thousands of condors across western North American. As the west was settled, and large predators were killed, there were fewer predator kills to clean up, which hurt the condors. In the 1960's their population declined even more and it was finally understood that the lead from ammunition was killing them. The lead from ammunition remained in the material left behind after a hunter killed an animal, and the very low pH in condor stomachs dissolve lead quickly allowing it to enter the bloodstream and detrimentally affect multiple systems.

The lead paralyzes their crop which stops working, and they end up starving to death because they can't process food. Listening to Ariana Punzalan, who manages the California Condor Recovery Program, talk about what happened to condors when they can't eat was enough to make me cry. She has rescued many and been able nurse them back to health, though many also died.

In 1987 the population of condors had plummeted to only 22 remaining in the wild, and the decision was made to capture these condors and put them in a captive breeding program in an attempt to save the species. In 1992, releasing them back to the wild was begun, and it has been a slow but steady success. The California program continues to monitor and check the birds to maintain their health and continue to build the species.

Condors continue to be threatened by lead ammunition. Anthony Prieto, a hunter, is working hard to spread the use of non-lead ammunition in order to get it out of the ecosystem. He has a very spiritual approach to hunting, which he learned from his grandfather. He remembered being introduced to condors by his grandfather and was just fascinated by them and one in particular named Topa Topa. Anthony got involved with condor conservation through going to see Topa Topa at the Los Angeles Zoo. After that he went to the natural history museum in Santa Barbara, and he was invited to learn more and was hooked on volunteering with condors.

After realizing that lead ammunition was killing condors, he became committed to working to solve this. He advocated for burying gut piles, so the lead could not be eaten; he also advocates for the use of copper ammunition instead of lead. He continues this advocacy to this day and works to influence hunting. As a hunter he can reach people in a way that others may not.

Listening to Anthony describe the release of a condor was another tear producing story, for him and for me. He offers life advice; when things are hard, rise above them, like the condor. Soar.

It was wonderful to listen to how involvement with condors has changed the lives of these people, and how they have helped the species survive. Today, their future still lies at the mercy of a hidden threat...lead. And it continues to poison them. But these birds have brought together a curious team of people who love them, and are doing everything they can to make sure they are around for not just another 54 years, but well beyond all of us.

There is much more information available on California Condors online. Start with the USFWS website here for more information: www.fws.gov/species/california-condor-gymnogyps-californianus

Ariana Punzalan's Story: <https://www.audubon.org/news/for-arianna-punzalan-protecting-california-condors-close-heart>

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Treasurer	Dan Hansen	treasurer@lcbas.org
Secretary	Debbie Berkowitz	secretary@lcbas.org
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Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society

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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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