



The Curlew

The newsletter of the Lower Columbia
Basin Audubon Society

Upcoming Events:

For more information see
www.lcbas.org

March 28: 7:00 PM Monthly Membership Meeting; please note that it is in person; address to the right!

April 1: Bateman Island Birdwalk at 8:00 PM (see page 2)

April 4: Monthly Board Meeting at 6:30 PM via Zoom

April 8, May 13, & June 10: Tapteal Greenway/LCBAS jointly hosted birdwalks (See page 6 for more information)

April 22: LCBAS will have an educational and outreach booth at Earth Day at the Reach
visittthereach.us/

April: Intermountain West Shorebird Survey Community Science Remember--the Shorebird Survey is fast approaching! Please contact the LCBAS Chapter Coordinator, Laurie Ness at pennifurs.mom@gmail.com

Past LCBAS Zoom meetings are available on our website. Please see page 6 for more information.

Other Events:

Othello Sandhill Crane Festival

March 24-26: For more information and to register:

www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org

This year they have announced that a remote option is available for watching some of the talks. See the website for more information and how to sign-up.

Washington Audubon page for WA bird festivals:

<https://wa.audubon.org/bird-festivals-0>

Secret Life of the Desert: Deserts of the Pacific Northwest

**Tuesday, March 28, 2023 at 7:00 PM, in person meeting
First Lutheran Church, 418 N. Yelm, Kennewick, WA**

With Daniel Biggs, Production Manager.

When most people think of the Pacific Northwest, they think of green trees, rivers, lakes, and mountains, but in fact, two-thirds are overlooked and unappreciated deserts. These stunning landscapes have incredible plant, insect, and animal species that few have seen or know about. The "Secret Life of the Desert: Deserts of the Pacific Northwest" is a series dedicated to the discovery and education of the vast and complicated desert regions of Oregon and Washington. Rich with diversity and detail, narrator Mike Denny covers over 400 fascinating desert species that are beautifully filmed by Daniel Biggs. All these living organisms survive because of relationships, dependencies and arrangements while living in



the most arid places here in the spectacular Pacific Northwest.

This educational series helps people better understand the value of these unique places and the life that depends upon them. Discover how and why these desert areas are outstanding treasures and deserve your care and attention.

Mike Denny, the narrator of the series, is currently a teacher and naturalist and has contributed to many conservation organizations such as the Audubon Society. Mike has co-authored seven books, written dozens of articles for publication on natural history, won several conservation related awards, and co-authored a film series. Mike teaches at WWCC for the Adult Continuing Education Department and guest lectures at Whitman College and Walla Walla University on natural history, conservation of natural resources and avian ecology.

Daniel Biggs, Production Manager for Blue Mountain TV, has won two bronze Telly awards, one for "Secret Life of the Forest, The Northern Blue Mountains" which he also worked on with Mike Denny. Daniel has now begun his own production company called, "NW Image Pro" focusing on professional photography and video production.

Bateman Island Bird Walk March 4, 2023

By Lisa Hill

After many days of blustery winds, the first Saturday in March dawned clear and calm. More than 20 people gathered to scout the island and surrounding waters, coming up with 51 bird species. Also noted was an amazing number of mule deer accessing the island over the causeway. At least 25 deer in two herds trotted single-file down the trail, veering off to the right into the dense shrubs after reaching the island. Deer are seen occasionally on the island, but never in such high numbers.

Near the causeway, flocks of more than 30 RUDDY DUCKS and COMMON MERGANSERS bobbed about with a few HOODED MERGANSERS, a HORNED GREBE and PIED-BILLED GREBE. Found near the north end of the island on a mud flat among a large flock of gulls were a LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL and the rare SLATY-BACKED GULL seen regularly in the region over the past five winters. This bird is well-documented and can be positively identified as the same returning individual by its abnormal feet which lack most of the webbing between the toes.

Several BALD EAGLES and RED-TAILED HAWKS were spotted. The only other raptors were COOPER'S Hawk and the ground-nesting NORTHERN HARRIER, *Circus hudsonius*. One of several birds of prey that live in the Mid-Columbia area year around, the NOHA often flies low while hunting over wetlands and farm fields, teetering side to side with wings held at an upward dihedral like a Turkey Vulture. It is the only species in the *Circus* genus in North America. It has a high degree of sexual dimorphism in which adult males and females look so different that they appear to be entirely different species. One characteristic easily seen and used for identification for both sexes is the large white rump patch. Like owls, NOHAs have a noticeable facial disc which helps them focus sound to aid in locating and capturing prey.

The bird is thought to be named for a breed of hunting dog called a Harrier. The military harrier jet is in turn named for the bird, built with a downward dihedral angle to the wings.

The next Bateman Island bird walk is Saturday, April 1. Meet in the parking lot of Wye Park above the causeway to the island where we will begin promptly at 8:00 AM.



Northern Harrier
Photo by Larry Umthun

FIELD TRIP to BIG FLAT HMU February 5, 2023

By Jason Fidorra, Birding Events

On the first Sunday of February, three birders joined Jason Fidorra for a field trip to Big Flat Habitat Management Unit. The rainy morning likely deterred several, but the group enjoyed dry weather most of the time onsite! This is a US Army Corps recreation site that is free to use and lies on the Franklin County side of the Snake River about 25 minutes east of Pasco.

While walking along the shoreline, the first highlight was watching a BALD EAGLE swoop repeatedly at a group of COOTS that regularly dove out of reach but provided close views of the exciting spectacle. A very unusual February pair of BLUE-WINGED TEAL flushed from cattails but provided only brief views. NORTHERN FLICKERS, AMERICAN ROBINS, and CEDAR WAXWINGS were in great abundance, but no Bohemian Waxwings could be located. As the group started to head back to the cars, rain started up and shortened the planned trip but not before a MERLIN cruised past us as a final sendoff adding to a total of 32 species detected.

A full list is available at this ebird link: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S127683516>



American Robin
Photo by Charlene Burge

Travels to Madagascar

Report and Photos by Jason Fidorra, Birding Events

Madagascar is a bucket-list destination for many people and has been for me since childhood. Endemic bird families, lemurs, baobabs, and chameleons juxtaposed against deforestation, poverty and a looming extinction conservation crisis made this island country in the Indian Ocean a place I wanted to see sooner than later. In October 2022, I embraced the distance and logistical challenges with my partner Emma Etheridge and set off for four weeks to explore this exciting land!

We arranged our trip independently and used many local agents to piece together transport, guides, and flights during this customized dream trip. We started with the rarely visited Masoala National Park, the largest remaining tract of rainforest in the country. After an internal flight, truck, wooden canoe, and backpack we arrived at a beachside hut where the forest meets the ocean. This area is home to some of the world's most enigmatic wildlife including the absurdly billed Helmet Vanga, and rare and bizarre nocturnal lemur, the Aye-aye. Seeing these species were highlights of the trip for me!

Next, we were flying back to the capitol to meet our driver and van and headed over a terrible "highway" to the temperate rainforests around Andisabe. Highlights of the three days here, aside from our beautiful accommodations on a private reserve, included the singing Indri lemur, the largest remaining of the lemurs. Unfortunately, deforestation and hunting in the 2000 years since human discovery of the island has led to the recent extinction of the larger lemur species, which grew to weights of 600 pounds!

Once a primarily forested country, Madagascar is sometimes called the "red continent" for the iron rich soil now exposed and eroding into the seas, and retains only 10% forest cover.

Next we drove two days across the highlands to Ranomafana National Park and began our journey south along the famous RN7 highway. Here we saw several more lemurs including the golden bamboo lemur and our first Asities, one of the bird families endemic to the country. Madagascar only has about 200 regular bird species, but over half are endemic, including the endemic families of Asities, Ground-Rollers, Mesites, Cuckoo-Roller, Tetrakas, and most of the Vangas.



Scaly Ground-roller



**Above: Helmet Vanga
Below: Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher**



Continuing over the next two weeks, we enjoyed paragliding from the cliffs of Andringitra National Park, hiking waterfalls in Isalo National Park, and of course finding many more endemic birds and lemurs. We ended our journey in the unworldly arid spiny forests of the southwest, which are full of baobabs, octopus trees and spiky vegetation both unique and imperiled, plus many birds and lemurs. Possibly one of the earth's most unique habitat types, our sunrise walk through these forests made for a memorable send off.

Yakima River Delta Ecosystem Restoration

Comment Submitted to the Army Corps of Engineers from the LCBAS Conservation Committee

Re: Yakima River Delta Ecosystem Restoration, FONSI
To: LTC ShaiLin KingSlack, District Commander

This comment letter is being submitted on behalf of the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society of the Tri-Cities, Washington, in response to the Draft Finding of No Significant Impact for the Yakima River Delta Ecosystem Restoration, Draft Feasibility Report with Integrated Environmental Assessment. Specifically these comments concern the removal of the Bateman Island causeway.

The Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society (LCBAS) supports the removal of the causeway to allow salmonids listed under the Endangered Species Act to pass in cool water to and from spawning gravels in the upper tributaries of the Yakima River. The removal of the causeway will also benefit the ecology of the entire length of the Yakima River as well as to the advantage of resident and migratory birds.

LCBAS was dismayed when the report stated that no bridge would be constructed to replace the causeway! In reading the documents provided, it appears that the funds allocated have restrictions on use and that the costs of a bridge lie outside what is allowable under the Section 1135 funding source.

To dismiss the construction of a bridge in the removal of the causeway is effectively saying that 50 years of bird science, environmental education and low impact tourism can be pushed aside and not considered. We take exception to placing an "X" under the heading "Insignificant Effects" for "Recreation" as noted in Table 1 in Appendix G, Draft Finding of No Significant Impact. There will be a significant impact to recreation, science, and education since ready access to the island is eliminated by removal of the causeway without it being replaced with a bridge.

Since the construction of the causeway in 1940, ready access to the island was gained for farming and other uses. After acquisition by the Corps, regular public access was gained for walking, fishing and bird watching. The island's position at the mouth of the Yakima River delta afforded unique bird watching opportunities for wading birds, water birds, upland birds and raptors which cannot be easily viewed from any other location in reasonable driving distance from the Tri-Cities. The LCBAS recognized this exceptional bird location and designated it an Important Bird Area; a designation that is recognized by the National Audubon Society as well as Audubon Washington.

The Bateman Island Important Bird Area is one stop for the birding communities' Sun and Sage Loop. The Sun and Sage Loop attracts bird watchers from all over the state of Washington and the Pacific Northwest. Bateman Island is also an important counting location in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Bateman Island is located at the center of the count. The Christmas Bird Count tradition is the longest running community science project in the United States with well over 100 years of bird trending data and nearly 50 years of local data for the Tri-Cities. The loss of ready access to the island in winter, December 15 to January 5, which is the count time frame, jeopardizes the Christmas Bird Count continuation of bird trending data. The Sun and Sage Loop for birders, Christmas Bird Count for biological science and monthly Audubon sponsored bird counts for education and science will be impacted by removal of the causeway with no replacement bridge.

The Draft Feasibility Report with Integrated Environmental Assessment is lacking good information on what might happen to the mud flats with the diversion of the Yakima River through the channel formed by the removal of the causeway. The mudflats, shallow waters and shoreline of the delta are a prime feeding area for migratory and resident wading birds. The various laws listed in Section 6, "Compliance with Applicable Laws, Regulations and Executive Orders" states that the overall ecology must be considered when action is taken that could impact the biological community. The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act specifically requires this review. LCBAS disagrees with the conclusions provided under this act by the various agencies. The Corps should do an analysis similar to what was conducted for salmonids in Appendix B, Habitat Evaluation Model.



Bateman Island Causeway is the only walking access to Bateman Island Photo by Charlene Burge

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Yakima River Delta Ecosystem Restoration

Comment Submitted to the Army Corps of Engineers from the LCBAS Conservation Committee

In reviewing the various Alternatives and their impacts, it became evident that one alternative was not considered. That alternative would be the placement of large culverts within the causeway scaled to the size needed for the entire flow of the Yakima River and the potential future influx of Columbia River water around the north end of the island. It is understood that complete removal of the causeway would eliminate most of the backwater where predatory fish reside. LCBAS request the Corps to analyze what the loss would be to salmonids if very little backwater was created by engineered culvert placement with upstream and downstream projections into the current to prevent backwater.

The Draft Feasibility Report with Integrated Environmental Assessment and Appendix F appeared to be a little weak on chemical contaminants in the sediments. Removal of the causeway and the excavation of sediments adjacent to the causeway could release toxic residues from historic agriculture and residential use. Such toxins as DDT, DDE and arsenic could be trapped in the sediments and released during excavation. These toxic chemicals could end up in residential drinking water downstream from the causeway where pumping stations are located. Continual sediment and water testing must be conducted and analyzed in a timely manner before and during excavation.

The Draft Feasibility Report with Integrated Environmental Assessment, Section 5.8 Risk and Uncertainty reviews that fire response would be limited to firefighting by boat. LCBAS feels that this is unacceptable because of loss of habitat to native plants, birds, wildlife. Depth of burn into the soil could also impact cultural resources. Extensive fires would impact health of the communities around the island. LCBAS believes that plans must be outlined for, in the least, a walking bridge. A walking bridge would allow a rapid response firefighting team with appropriate hand-carried gear.

Section 7, Conservation, Coordination, and Public Involvement of the Draft Feasibility Report with Integrated Environmental Assessment does not state the City of Richland. They are the lease holder of the Corp lands and should be a prime member of any study and action.

Removal of the causeway is acceptable to LCBAS to save salmonids, but the associated consequences have a serious impact to recreation, fire response, avian science and education on the island. Plans should be developed by the Corps for a path forward to construct a bridge even if funding isn't available under 1135.

Thank you for considering comments from the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society. We look forward to your responses to the items of concern that we outlined in this letter.

Sincerely,

Dana C. Ward
Point of Contact
Conservation Committee
Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society
PO Box 1900, Richland, Washington 99352

LCBAS is Looking for Help!

We are seeking members who would like to work with Education, Programs, Membership, and/or Publicity.

Please talk to any board member for more information, attend a board meeting, or send us a request for more information by using the Contact tab at the top of our website to access the contact form:

www.lcbas.org

Whoooo Needs You?

**LCBAS
Needs
You!**



Do you have a great idea for future bird walks or outings, or story ideas or Curlew content?

Your ideas and input are always appreciated. If you are interested in leading a walk or outing, or writing for the Curlew, that's even better!

Please contact Jason Fidorra with your great ideas or to volunteer to lead walks or outings, or Charlene Burge with your story and content ideas for the Curlew.

Use the Contact tab at the top of our website to access the contact form:

www.lcbas.org

LCBAS Education Outreach: Franklin County Salmon Celebration

Calling all LCBAS Volunteers!!! Here is your opportunity to lead a Birding Station at the Salmon Celebration Salmon Release. Multiple event dates are available to help teach Franklin County elementary students about birds, and create new advocates for the natural world!

If you would like to assist - Please reach out to coordinator [Kara Kaelber](#) at 509-416-0440 extension 107.

A one-time training opportunity (required) for volunteers will be held at Sacajawea Park on March 22nd at 5:00 PM. The training will provide information on set up and materials.

Volunteers can choose one or more dates, or even pick all to help out with if you choose.

March 28: Edwin Markham & Mesa Elementary

March 30: Columbia River Elementary

April 13: Captain Gray STEM Elementary

April 14: Marie Curie STEM Elementary

April 20: Robinson Elementary

April 21: Longfellow Elementary & Star School

April 25: Maya Angelou Elementary

April 27: James McGee Elementary & Nueva Esperanza School

May 2: Franklin Elementary

May 4: Mark Twain Elementary

May 5: Connell Elementary & St. Pats

May 9: Ruth Livingston Elementary

May 10: Burbank Elementary

May 11: Robert Frost Elementary

May 12: Emerson Elementary

May 23: Rowena Chess Elementary

May 25: McClintock STEM Elementary

May 26: 3 Rivers Elementary

National Audubon Society Subscribers

New members of the National Audubon Society receive a complimentary three-month subscription to the Curlew, the newsletter of the Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society (LCBAS). After the first three months, the complimentary issues end.

We would like to encourage National Audubon members to consider joining LCBAS and get involved in all we have to offer in your local area — ten months per year of meetings, Curlew newsletters, outreach and education, and bird walks and field trips! Don't miss out! Joining LCBAS does so much good, and is fast, easy, and secure at our website:

<https://www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/join-renew-donate>

Birding the Tapteal Greenway with LCBAS and Tapteal Greenway

Join LCBAS and the Tapteal Greenway in a series of joint bird walks in 2023. The walks will be once per month through June, in five of the pearls along the Tapteal Greenway necklace. The first walk in the joint venture was February's LCBAS Bateman Island walk. Second was Amon Basin. But there's still three to go!

The walks occur on the second Saturday of each month. All walks will start at 8:00 AM because birds don't sleep in!

See www.tapteal.org, the LCBAS Calendar at www.lcbas.org, or email mike.iliga@gmail.com for more information about the start locations.

This is a great opportunity to go birdwatching, and also to see some of the interesting habitats and destinations along the Tapteal Greenway. Upcoming locations are:

Chamna Natural Preserve
2nd Sat., April 8:00 AM
main parking lot

W.E. Johnson Park
2nd Sat., May 13, 8:00 AM
S. Entrance on
Tanglewood

Horn Rapids Park
2nd Sat., June 10, 8:00 AM
kiosk parking lot

LCBAS Past Membership Meeting Recordings

The November and February membership meetings were recorded and are available to view through a clickable link to Zoom on the LCBAS website. Those are November: Dragonflies and Damselflies by Dennis Paulson February: Bird Collisions by Lori Nelson.

Click on Events at the top of the page.

www.lcbas.org/chapter-meeting

LCBAS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL: Postal Curlew subscribers can see the year/month their subscription expires by looking on their Curlew label. **eCurlew 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 Curlew without interruption. Renewing online is easy, quick and safe: <https://www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/join-renew-donate> or you can use the form included with this newsletter.

Consider receiving the eCurlew instead of a paper copy! See all the photos in color, receive your Curlew sooner, and save paper and other resources. To switch to the eCurlew: <https://www.lowercolumbiabasinaudubon.org/contact>

ADDRESS CHANGES: Please send address changes (postal address or email address) to <https://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 have been sending you complimentary issues of The Curlew newsletter to keep you up to date on local happenings. After three issues, the complimentary mailings end. To continue to receive The Curlew newsletter without interruption, please become a paid subscriber. Doing so is fast, easy, and secure at our website <https://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 | Sheri Whitfield | president@lcbas.org |
| Vice President | Michael Henao | — |
| Treasurer | Dan Hansen | treasurer@lcbas.org |
| Secretary | Debbie Berkowitz | secretary@lcbas.org |
| Birding Events | Jason Fidorra | — |
| Communications Chair | Charlene Burge | — |
| Conservation Co-Chair | Dana Ward and Rick Leumont | conservation@lcbas.org |
| Education Chair | OPEN | — |
| Finance Chair | Dan Hansen | treasurer@lcbas.org |
| 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 | OPEN | |
| Director at Large | Robin Priddy | |
| | OTHER CONTACTS: | |
| Curlew Editor | Charlene Burge | |
| Membership Database | Rich Barchet | |
| LCBAS Website | Lori Nelson and Lisa Hill | |
| 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

___ I want to save resources and postage and receive my newsletter by email

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

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Membership in LCBAS is separate from membership in the National Audubon Society.
To join the National Audubon Society, please go to www.audubon.org