



# Audubon Society of Corvallis the **CHAT**

February 2010

VOL. 39

#6

## General Meeting

Thursday, February 18, 7:00 – 8:30 pm  
First Presbyterian Church

### The Willamette Valley Birding Trail

A presentation by Joel Geier



ASC member Joel Geier will present Oregon's newest birding trail, focusing on our own Willamette Valley, at our monthly general meeting on February 18. The Willamette Valley Birding Trail is the fifth in a planned series of nine birding trails that highlight the remarkable diversity of Oregon's ecoregions. This trail is nestled between the Oregon Coast and Oregon Cascades Birding Trails. The trail highlights twelve local loop routes, each of which can guide you to a full weekend's worth of discoveries in any season. Three loops wind through the Corvallis-Albany area!

This is the country's first regional birding trail to highlight bicycle birding and public transit. Bicycle-friendly directions are included for most of the 138 sites. A special section highlights birding sites along the new Willamette Valley Scenic Bikeway, as well as smaller bicycle trails around the region. Public-transit directions are given wherever practical options exist.

This birding trail is the product of a very broad collaboration that includes ASC's Bill Proebsting and volunteers from Portland, Salem, and Lane County Audubon, along with tourism specialists and wildlife professionals from state and federal agencies. More than 75 birders shared their local knowledge by nominating sites and checking directions and descriptions. Even if you've lived in the Willamette Valley for many years, chances are this guide will open your eyes to new places to enjoy the beauty and diversity of this place we call home.

Doors open at 6:30 pm for refreshments and visiting. The chapter meeting commences at 7:00 pm, followed by the guest lecture at 7:30 pm. Questions about the series can be directed to Dave Mellinger at [David.Mellinger@oregonstate.edu](mailto:David.Mellinger@oregonstate.edu) or 757-7953.

### Directions

The chapter meeting is in the meeting hall of the First Presbyterian Church (upstairs), 114 SW Eighth Street.

*Dave Mellinger*

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## Wildlife Watch Program

### ASC and local law enforcement officials meet on Wildlife Watch program

On January 7, ASC convened a meeting of local area law enforcement experts especially familiar with animal abuse. The meeting, held at the Benton County Commissioner's office, included a list of game wardens, Sheriff Diana Simpson and staff, Albany police department personnel, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Chintimini Wildlife Center, The Freshwater Trust, Heartland Humane Society and the ASC Conservation Committee. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the mission of the ASC Wildlife Watch program and how it could best fit in with current policies and procedures. A fast moving, cordial discussion took place in which a great deal of experience was shared. First, everyone agreed that a reward is mandatory if someone is to come forward to report seeing a crime or animal abused. Second, since a great deal of local interest has been expressed, including media coverage, many felt ASC has gained a good deal of favorable exposure for the Wildlife Watch program. Even if the guilty party who painted the Mallard duck is not found, others will think twice before harming wildlife. Jeff Picton, Chintimini Wildlife Center Director, reported that the duck is still hanging in there, but it will take many months until he is ready to return to the wild. Chintimini now handles calls related to this incident for ASC. Chintimini takes calls 24 hours a day. The ASC Conservation Committee is working on plans to increase the reward funds for future occurrences. It is hoped that grants may become available for future rewards.

*John Gaylord*

## Field Trip Schedule

### Monthly Year-Round Saturday Field Trips

Feb 13: Meet at the Benton Center at 7:30 am  
Mar 13: Meet at the Benton Center at 7:30 am

Our Saturday morning local field trip meets the second Saturday of every month at the Benton Center parking area, 757 Polk Ave, Corvallis at 7:30 am. This field trip is especially interesting for beginner birders and birders new to Oregon's mid-valley area. We spend a lot of time identifying local birds by sight and song. We visit the valley national wildlife refuges—Finley, Baskett Slough, and Ankeny, as well as other birding areas throughout the year. Contact Rich Armstrong at [richarmstrong@comcast.net](mailto:richarmstrong@comcast.net) or 541-753-1978 with questions.

### Spring 2010 Weekend Field Trips

Mar 19 – 21: Bandon/South Coast  
Apr 16 – 18: Klamath Basin  
Apr 30 – May 2: Rogue Valley  
May 20 – 23: Malheur NWR  
June 18 – 20: Summer Lake/Ft Rock/Fremont NFS

Fred Ramsey leads all the spring weekend trips. Fred has been leading these field trips for ASC for over 35 years. He is an amazing field trip guide, sharing his knowledge about finding birds in their habitat and pointing out wildflowers, butterflies, mammals, and reptiles. The field trips fill up early in the fall. Signup sheets are available at the general meeting or email Fred Ramsey with your requests at [flramsey5@comcast.net](mailto:flramsey5@comcast.net).

### Please note:

The Rogue Valley and Malheur trips require deposits by February 28, 2010.

The Rogue Valley trip includes a play at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. The play this year will be *Hamlet*. A deposit of \$40 is required for the play.

The Malheur deposit is \$50. Each deposit must be made payable to Fred Ramsey at 3550 NW Glen Ridge Pl., Corvallis OR 97330.

*Rich Armstrong*

## Hesthavn Treasure-hunting

### A geocache has been hidden at Hesthavn Nature Center. Can you find it?

But what's a geocache, and why should I find it? Geocaching is a worldwide treasure hunting game where you use a GPS (global positioning system) device to help you locate hidden containers, called geocaches. Sign the logbook, then share your experiences online at [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com). This cache was placed at Hesthavn to introduce those near and far to our wonderful nature center. Visit the site [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). On the front page type in the Hesthavn GC code: GC2394R, then enter the coordinates on your GPS and go. The coordinates are N 44° 35.998 W 123° 20.058. This cache contains many little toys and trinkets for trading.

A handheld GPS can be a handy device for birders. You can mark a waypoint on the start of your hike and this device will help you find your way back. If you find a rare bird, mark the coordinates where you sighted it to help with relocation. You can even plot your elevation, your speed and the distance you've traveled.

Thank you to Cheryl Welchel for the photos—I am still trying to get them onto the website.

*Nanette Armstrong*



*Golden-crowned Kinglet photo by Matt Lee*

## What Christmas Bird Count?

### Apologies for any confusion

Sorry for any confusion caused last issue when the Christmas Bird Count table was inadvertently left out of the issue. Better late than never!

### CBC Area Key

- 1A: Oak Creek; NW Corvallis (west of Kings Blvd)
- 1B: NE Corvallis (east of Kings Blvd)
- 2: Orleans (Tangent Dr. to Riverside Dr.)
- 3: Oakville
- 4: Peoria
- 4R: Willamette River and Snagboat Bend by Kayak
- 5: SW Corvallis, Neabeck Hill
- 6E: S. Corvallis east of 99W to Kiger Is.
- 6W: S. Corvallis west of 99W to Herbert Ave.
- 7: Airport
- 8: Greenberry
- 9: Finley, Eureka Rd.
- 10: N. Philomath, West Hills
- 11: S. Philomath, Evergreen
- 12: Beaver Cr.

*Marcia F. Cutler, Corvallis CBC Compiler*

## Hesthavn Notes

### Feb 27: Work party, 9am-1pm

Our next work party is scheduled for February 27, from 9 am to 1 pm, at the Hesthavn Nature Center, 8590 NW Oak Creek Drive.

We will be working along the stream riparian area, removing scattered blackberry brambles and false brome. Wear your grubby clothes, boots, work clothes, and you may want to bring your water bottle. It will most likely be muddy.

The nature center will be open for visitors on February 27 from 10 am to 1 pm.

Spring has started to show its signs, with budding Indian-Plum and other natives poking through. It is a good time to look for animal tracks, like those of deer, squirrels, raccoon, and birds.

Two nature educational programs are being scheduled for the month of March.

Leslie Green will teach an Art and Nature class. Animal Tracks Literacy Project Lessons 1 and 2 will be taught by Steve Engel. The classes will be for 6 to 11 year olds, and the class schedules will be posted to the Audubon website soon.

Map directions are available at [www.audubon.corvallis.or.us](http://www.audubon.corvallis.or.us). The nature trail is open daily to the public to explore the wildlife and native plants.

The Nature Center would like to have additional volunteers who are interested in working with our educational team to share nature experiences as instructors and helpers. Please contact us.

We offer nature classes to schools and other community groups upon request. Contact me at 541-752-0470 or [vanderp@peak.org](mailto:vanderp@peak.org).

*Paula Vanderheul*

## Ready for Finley Planting?

### Yes, the ASC is!

Feb 20 Planting at Finley, 10 am to noon

Plans are set for the Audubon/ Finley planting project coming up on February 20. The project is in its third year with Finley and will feature forbs such as lupine and checkermallow. These nectar plants will help the endangered Fender's Blue butterfly. We are asking for as many members as possible to help out in the two hour project, which will start at 10:00 am at the Finley headquarters. A hot chili lunch will be offered to all volunteers. Come meet some of your Audubon members and the great staff at Finley National Wildlife Refuge. For more information, call 541-908-2898.

*John Gaylord*

## In Addition to the Glory...

### New fabulous rewards for the next Chat editor

As faithful readers will remember, the Audubon Society of Corvallis is looking for a new editor of the newsletter you hold in your hand. The job itself is pretty fun and you shouldn't hesitate to call for more information if you think you might be interested. There is a commitment of time and energy, but depending on how quickly you type, it shouldn't take more than half a day, once a month – and remember, there's only one issue in the summer. What other job gives you the summer nearly off?

The Chat editor collects submissions (usually emailed) and enters them into a Microsoft Word template. It isn't necessary to know how to format the newsletter for publication, or how to print or distribute the issue – other volunteers perform those tasks. The Chat editor enjoys the near-deific power of selecting the stories that will appear in each issue (generally everything that is submitted) and then editing to make them fit. Again, if any of this sounds even slightly interesting, you are probably perfect for the job and should call us immediately before somebody else takes it!

And here's another reason to call right now: for a limited time we are able to offer the following fabulous prize for any and all successful applicants for the post of Chat editor: one large plate of chocolate chip cookies! These are terrific cookies, trust us, and the baker does not stint on the chocolate chips. And they're all yours when you sign up as a Chat editor! Think how badly you'll feel if you decide to 'think it over' for a day or two, then find the position filled when you finally call? Call now for more information. More importantly, call now for those cookies! 541-754-3120.

*Neil and Joan*



*A Canada Goose (larger goose) swimming with some Cackling Geese. Photo by Sue Powell*

## Atop the Nestbox

### Mar 6: Bluebird Trail Spring Workshop



*Western Bluebird (female). Photo by Lisa Millbank*

We will hold our annual Bluebird Trail Spring Workshop at the Corvallis Public Library on Saturday, March 6, 2010 from 3 – 4:30 pm. There will be hands-on demonstrations on nest box designs, construction tips, and mounting techniques. We will discuss bluebird behavior, nesting cycles, and how to monitor nest boxes. Various methods and philosophies will be represented. Free informational handouts will be available. We will cover topics of interest to everyone, from first-time attendees to experienced bluebirders, so mark your calendars!

To raise funds for the trail, we will request a \$5 donation per person or \$3 per person for groups of three or more people. Nest boxes will be available for suggested donations of \$15. Spring is coming -- let's get together and get ready for our blue feathered friends!

*Raylene Gordin*

## And Don't Forget

### February and March Events

Feb 12-13 Winter Wings Festival in Klamath Falls\*

Apr 9-11 Olympic BirdFest\*\*

\*For more info, see the January 2010 Chat

\*\*For more info, see the December 2009 Chat

## Field Notes

### 29 December 2009 – 28 January 2010

Mild weather characterized most of this period with a few stretches of rain that brought us closer to a normal amount, but still a bit drier than long-term averages. Waterfowl numbers declined as migrants moved on south leaving behind our local wintering birds. Songbird numbers appeared to be depressed compared with previous winters, perhaps because of mortality during the December cold spell. Marys Peak was intermittently covered with snow, but much of it melted between snow-falls. The year started off with few rarities, although the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker snuck around EE Wilson through most of January.

Abbreviations and Locations: m.ob. = many observers. Observer names are noted in parentheses after their reports. Observations without a name (or with WDR) are the editor's. ASC indicates observations made by Audubon Society of Corvallis field trips. EEW = E. E. Wilson Wildlife Area north of Corvallis. ANWR = Ankeny National Wildlife

Refuge in Marion County. FNWR = Finley National Wildlife Refuge, and includes Cabell, Cheadle, and McFadden marshes. STP = sewage treatment ponds; Philomath STP are off of Bellfountain Drive south of Philomath. Knoll Terrace STP are off of Elliot Circle in Corvallis. Stewart Lake is at Hewlett-Packard in Corvallis. Toketie Marsh is the remedial wetland for Coffin Butte landfill north of Corvallis, just off of Highway 99W. The Bellfountain Wetland along Bellfountain Drive south of Philomath is also sometimes called the Evergreen Mitigation Bank. The Diamond Hill Road wetland is in Linn County.

A **Greater White-fronted Goose** was seen at FNWR, 6 & 8 Jan (WDR) and 23 Jan (R. Armstrong). The species is typically difficult to find this time of year, but seems even more uncommon than normal this year.

A single **Snow Goose** was at FNWR, 2 Jan. An immature **Ross' Goose** was at Cabell Marsh, 5 Jan. An adult visited McFadden Marsh, 9 Jan..

Two **Trumpeter Swans** flew over EEW during the 9 Jan ASC field trip, to delight of all. The high count of **Tundra Swans** was 400 at Cabell Marsh, 5 Jan.

Thirteen **Gadwall** near Corvallis airport, 24 Jan, was a good mid-winter concentration. **Eurasian Wigeon** have been present in low numbers this winter, but 11 at FNWR, 23 Jan, were with a group of 2,690 **American Wigeon**. An exodus of dabbling ducks occurred just after the first of the year, but most species were still present in respectable numbers. **Mallards** peaked at 1,393 at McFadden Marsh, 12 Jan. 171 **Northern Shovelers** were at Philomath STP, 11 Jan. On 15 Jan, Cabell Marsh hosted 3,500 **Northern Pintails** and 4,500 **Green-winged Teal**.

Two **Canvasbacks** were at Cabell Marsh, 5 Jan, and one was at McFadden Marsh the next day; the species is rare at both sites. An adult male **Redhead**, rare during winter, was near Corvallis airport, 24 Jan. **Ring-necked Ducks** concentrated along the north edge of the southern section of McFadden Marsh throughout the period. The high count was 1,260 on 2 Jan. A female **Greater Scaup** was at the Adair Village STP, 2 Jan, and 3 birds were present, 18 Jan (J. Geier). The high count of **Lesser Scaup** was 79 at Philomath STP, 10 Jan.

**Buffleheads** peaked at 34 at Philomath STP, 13 Jan. Near Corvallis airport, 24 Jan, a female **Common Goldeneye** foraged in a newly excavated, flooded gravel pit. Numbers of **Hooded Mergansers** seemed to be lower than normal; typical high counts at FNWR were of 6-8 birds. Numbers of **Ruddy Ducks** rebounded after the deep freeze of December, peaking at 181 at Philomath STP, 23 Jan.

Twenty **Great Egrets** frequented McFarland Road fields through the first 2 weeks of January. Wintering numbers continue to each increase year lately.

Hanging around EEW for many birders who chased the **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** to see, a **Red-shouldered Hawk** was reliably present throughout the period (m.ob). The species has increased enough in recent years that they are routinely discovered (though not always seen well) on most local outings to lowland areas now. Finley prairie hosted quite the array of raptors. Up to 3 dark-phase **Rough-legged Hawks**, which are much less numerous than light-phased birds, were present along with many **Red-tailed Hawks** and 3 **White-tailed Kites**. A trip there at dusk, 13 Jan, turned up 30 Northern Harriers going to roost (R. Armstrong).

A **Prairie Falcon** was seen from Ryals Road, 2 Jan (J. Geier).

American Coots have wintered by the hundreds in recent years,



*This Barn Swallow, of the blurry subspecies, showed characteristics of North American races and no evidence of molt. Birds born in South America should probably show signs of molt this time of year. This one was at Cabell Marsh, 6 Jan (photo by W. D. Robinson).*

but are in comparatively short supply this winter. The high count was 83 at Philomath STP, 15 Jan.

Shorebirds, for the most part, were quite uncommon. **Killdeer** flocks dwindled after the first week of January. A few singletons of **Least Sandpipers** and **Long-billed Dowitchers** were found in and around FNWR. A flock of 750 **Dunlin** at Cabell Marsh, 15 Jan, was the largest of the month.

Gulls were in very short supply. A **Glaucous-winged**, a 4th-year Thayer's, and two **Herring Gulls** were at Toketie Marsh, 21 Jan (J. Geier).

Owls were busy mid-month. Lisa Millbank and Don Boucher heard **Northern Saw-whet Owl**, **Western Screech-Owl**, and a **Barn Owl** at Willamette Park, 10 Jan. A **Short-eared Owl** was along Llewellyn Rd, 8 & 16 Jan, where they are regular during winter (T. Seager, G. Andrews).

A concentration of 165 **Mourning Doves** near Corvallis airport was noteworthy for our area.

The famous **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** snuck around EEW, periodically cooperating when the sun came out, at least through 24 Jan (m.ob.). The FNWR **Lewis' Woodpecker** was seen throughout the period (m.ob.) and was chasing a second bird on 8 Jan.

No reports of **Black Phoebe** were received. Perhaps the cold spell killed most of them, or pushed the survivors to isolated locations along the Willamette River.

Continuing at Finley prairie, a **Northern Shrike** was detected several times in early Jan (m.ob.). One or two others frequented EEW as well (m.ob.).

**Barn Swallows** appeared at McFadden Marsh, 6 Jan, when 2 were there. Both were present 9 Jan, and at least one stayed through 17 Jan (WDR, K. Hilton). Unlike the one at Cabell in December, these had field marks consistent with North American races, with very narrow and broken blue breast bands and buffy underparts. They also showed no signs of molt, indicating they are most likely to be members of North American subspecies (see photo). An adult male **Tree Swallow** was also present at McFadden Marsh, 9 Jan.

A female **Townsend's Warbler** at EEW, 3 Jan, was rare for that site. Numbers wintering in town seem lower than long-term averages, but there have been few reports recently.

A **Chipping Sparrow** foraged in a weedy patch near EEW Headquarters, 30 Dec. It was also seen 17 Jan when a **Clay-colored Sparrow** was reported as well (R. Namitz). The latter could not be re-located.

A couple reports of **Slate-colored Juncos** came in. One was in North Albany, 3-4 Jan (T. Gholson). Another joined the sparrow flock near EEW Headquarters, 30 Dec. The Armstrongs had one visit their NW Corvallis feeder, 26 Jan.

EEW had 3 and maybe 4 **Swamp Sparrows** detected periodically throughout the period, a bit above normal (J. Geier, WDR).

A few **White-throated Sparrows** were scattered around EEW throughout the period (m.ob.). Numbers seemed about normal for this time of year.

**Red Crossbills** have been around, but not in large numbers. Three flew over Sisters Place, Corvallis, 20 Jan (P. Adamus).

**Pine Siskins** have visited feeders in low to moderate numbers so far this winter. Twenty were at Becky Schwiebert's Corvallis feeder, 2 Jan.

#### **Next issue**

**Please send your reports for the next issue by 24 February to:**

**Rich Armstrong**

[richarmstrong@comcast.net](mailto:richarmstrong@comcast.net)

He'll be handling the field notes for the remainder of 2010.

W. Douglas Robinson

## **Benton County 2009**

This was a good year for birding in Benton County, in my opinion. Without actually trying until the very end I made it to 200 birds for the year in Benton! The main reason for this was the higher than normal number of rarities. There is probably no greater thrill in birding than finding one's own rare bird, and then having many others see your bird.

I actually found five rare birds on my own this year. The first was a Glaucous Gull I found at the dump while leading the monthly Corvallis Audubon half-day field trip in February. Quite a few others saw it during the next couple of days. The second rare sighting was two Whimbrels that Nanette, Paula Vanderhuel, and I found at Finley because we were out there seeing the two Red Knots that Doug Robinson had found. The Whimbrels were seen by Doug and at least a couple others. The third rarity was a female Barrow's Goldeneye (first Benton County record) that Paula, Gail Andrews, and I found at Philomath sewage ponds in November. I know, birders always go to such wonderful nature places like dumps and sewage plants. We were very proud of this sighting because it was such a difficult identification to separate female Barrow's from female Common Goldeneye. It stayed two weeks, and was even there when Nanette got back from Texas (she saw it less than 20 minutes after arriving home). The fourth rarity was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (first Benton County record) that Nanette, Tristen Hynes, and I found at E.E. Wilson on the Airlie CBC. We did not see it well enough to identify it from Red-naped Sapsucker, but it was seen by many. With the help of Joel Geier, Doug Robinson, Cheryl Whelchel's camera, and others it was confirmed to be Yellow-bellied. Many birders from Portland and other parts of Oregon came to see this bird, and it is still being seen as of this writing. The fifth rarity was a Townsend's Solitaire that Nanette and I found while scouting for the Corvallis CBC near Hesthavn. It was seen by Tristen on the CBC the next day. We might even say we had a sixth rarity. Joel Geier reported Black Swifts north of Corvallis that gave us the idea to go look for them on the Willamette. We found some and that inspired a few others to look and find them as well.

A birder with my limited skills cannot make it to 200 without the help of others finding rare birds and reporting them fast. Doug Robinson leads Benton every year and his finds were a big part of my 200. I saw his Red Knot at Finley, his Cassin's Finch and Rock Wren on Mary's Peak, Heermann's Gulls and Red Phalarope at Philomath, and Golden Eagle at Finley. If only I had been able to see all the birds Doug found that I tried to see, it would have been even more amazing. I missed his Pine Grosbeak, Loggerhead Shrike, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Short-billed Dowitcher, Northern Goshawk, Red-breasted Merganser, Chestnut-collared Longspur (we also tried for two Joel Geier found), and Leach's Storm-petrel, all of which I tried for the same day he found them. Rich Hoyer found a Bank Swallow that we found, but we missed his Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Joel Geier found an Indigo Bunting that we saw and helped confirm. Tom Snetsinger pointed us to Marbled Murrelets after we had tried two other places. I don't

*See "Benton County 2009" on next page*

## Benton County 2009 *continued from previous page*

remember who first reported the Black-crowned Night-heron at Finley that we saw.

Now I was not trying for 200 until I realized that I was at 197 after the CBCs. If I had known it was going to be a good year for rarities I would have worked for Common Nighthawk, Hammond's Flycatcher, and Northern Saw-whet Owl, all of which I did not get but could have. We also looked many times for Mountain Quail and Ruffed Grouse with no success. And it was frustrating to have a Prairie Falcon spend December about 0.8 miles into Polk County and never see it in Benton.

My list stood at 199 on New Year's Eve. Could I hit the goal of 200? My final bird of the year was on December 31 in the pouring rain out on Robison Road, almost to the Polk County line. I was trying for Prairie Falcon and Trumpeter Swan. Just after dawn I saw a flock of eight to ten swans, so I jumped out of the car and looked. I could not hear anything with all the rain, and my binoculars got immediately covered in water droplets, but my quick look made me think these were Tundra Swans anyway. I was thinking I was a complete idiot - trying to identify swans with rain covering sound and sight, and me with my medium birding skills. So I drove into Polk to see if Prairie Falcon was at his normal site - it was not. The farm pond had only a few wigeon. So I drove back into Benton County, to the Wiles and Rifle Range and Robison, hoping for Prairie Falcon - nothing. Then right near the Polk line I saw more swans flying from Benton. I jumped out again and there were five (three white and two brown) and these looked bigger and longer necked than all I had seen in the previous few days. I tried to hear trumpeting, but couldn't hear anything in the rain. I decided that I was not sure enough to count them as Trumpeters. So I jumped in the car and drove after them. I lost them as they went down, I thought in the vicinity of that farm pond. Sure enough, when I got to the farm pond there were five Trumpeter Swans (three white and two brown) plenty close enough for good identification, scoping from under the back of my van, out of the rain. I considered that confirmation that I had seen them in Benton as number 200! Despite the rain this was fun and somewhat satisfying.

The record for birds found in Benton County for a year is 240, by Doug Robinson, and I am sure he is well over 200 again this year, as he has been every year. Only one other person has ever reported 200 in a year in Benton and that was Trent Bray who had 202 in 2000, before he moved away.

The good news is that Benton County is easy to bird because it is small, but of course that means it is limited - no coast to Cascades like Lane County. If you live in Corvallis you can only go about 12 miles north to E. E. Wilson and the dump. You can go about 12 miles south to Finley, and the maximum is 20 miles south to Monroe Sewage Ponds. You can't go east at all, just to the Willamette River! Even going west you can only go about 26 miles to the top of Marys Peak or to Alsea and areas southwest of Alsea.

There are many good places to bird in Benton County at various times of the year. Just to name a few: the many parts of Finley, four sewage ponds (Philomath, Monroe, Corvallis, and Knoll Terrace), E. E. Wilson, Marys Peak, Willamette Park, McDonald Forest, Alsea Falls area, anywhere along

the Willamette River or Alsea River, Bald Hill, Fitton Green, Beazell Memorial Forest, Fort Hoskins, and more. If only there were some shorebird habitat and places for gulls besides the dump where they can be very hard to see. Plus we need more deep water, as I have not seen a loon in Benton County.

Looking at the list of birds seen in Benton indicates that if you bird regularly and go to the right places at the right times you should see about 160 birds without any rarities.

So if you love to bird, but don't want to do the long trips, you might consider a Benton County list. Or if you already have a Benton list, but want a new challenge, then you might try a Benton County big year. With some excellent local birders, including ornithologists from OSU who bird a lot, and with our local listserv ([list@midvalleybirding.org](mailto:list@midvalleybirding.org)) that alerts everyone quickly to what is being seen, it is easier to find those rarer species that don't stay very long. You could be the next to find something spectacular like the Crested Caracara Benton had a couple years ago. We enjoy the challenges of Benton County and hope others will as well.

*Rich Armstrong*

## Who's Being Seen

### Late winter birds

The light is slowly returning from the dark of winter and we're waiting for the less distant return of pleasant weather. In the meantime, there are still some exciting birding opportunities in and around our neighborhoods.



*Northern Flicker photo by Matt Lee*

### Woodpeckers

Many woodpeckers head for the mountains for the breeding season. But throughout February and March, woodpeckers continue to be very common. In residential areas, we can expect significant numbers of Northern Flickers and Downy Woodpeckers. Less common Red-breasted Sapsuckers and Hairy Woodpeckers are seen too. In some city parks with tall trees, you might spot a Pileated Woodpecker might be spotted. Although Lewis's Woodpeckers are typically absent from the Willamette Valley, at some point each winter, somewhere, a few are spotted. And some rarities could show up, like a Red-naped Sapsucker. One exception to this trend is the Acorn Woodpecker. Their colonies in stands of Oregon White Oak are a steady presence throughout the year.

## Sparrows

In winter, our year-round White-crowned Sparrows occur in busy flocks in brushy areas. The Golden-crowned Sparrow, a winter migrant, joins the flocks of white-crowns. Keep an eye on these flocks in order to spot the occasional White-throated Sparrow. We also have some regular solitary winter sparrows. Fox Sparrows accompany Song Sparrows and Bewick's Wrens in the thorny and brushy habitats. Lincoln's Sparrows aren't common, but are regulars in low brush near wetlands and prairies.



*Varied Thrush photo by Matt Lee*

## Migrants and Harbingers of Spring

The first few Turkey Vultures return in early February. However, you may not see one, since the majority of Turkey Vultures arrive in March or April. Similarly, a few returning Tree Swallows are spotted in late February but most arrive throughout March. One bird you *will* likely see or hear is the Varied Thrush. They spend the winter in the valley and breed in the mountains. In February and early March they become active and more frequent in residential neighborhoods. For some folks who never venture to the mountains, this is the only time to hear the Varied Thrush's song. It sounds unlike any other bird in the neighborhood. It's an extended note that lasts a second or two and repeated on a different pitch every 10 to 30 seconds. It is variable and can be described as ethereal, buzzy or sometimes metallic. The less common Hermit Thrush follows a similar pattern, becoming more active, vocal and mobile before it leaves for the mountains. If you live in bluebird habitat, early February is the time to set up and clean nest boxes. They won't start nesting in February, but they may scout out nesting sites.

*Don Boucher*

## GreenTip OF THE MONTH

According to a two-year study by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), many indoor plants absorb air pollutants through their leaves and roots and convert them into breathable air. Within 24 hours, some plants can remove up to 87 percent of toxic indoor air. Depending on the species, one plant can provide effective cleaning for every 100 square

feet of space. For example, between 15 and 20 golden pothos and spider plants can refresh the air in an average 1800 square foot home (from EarthShare newsletter).

*John Gaylord*

## Great Backyard Bird Count February 12-15

Bird watchers coast to coast are invited to take part in the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers counting birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges.

Each checklist submitted by these "citizen scientists" helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novice bird watchers to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). One 2009 participant said, "Thank you for the opportunity to participate in citizen science. I have had my eyes opened to a whole new interest and I love it!"

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

On the [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Participants may also enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images taken during the count. Many images will be featured in the GBBC website's photo gallery. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products.

For more information about the GBBC, visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).

*Cornell Lab of Ornithology*

## Contributors to the Chat

Dave Mellinger, John Gaylord, Rich Armstrong, Nanette Armstrong, W. Douglas Robinson, Marcia Cutler, Don Boucher, sPaula Vanderheul, Raylene Gordin.

**Audubon Society of Corvallis**  
www.audubon.corvallis.or.us

**President: Will Wright**, willwright26@q.com, 753-4395  
**Vice-president: Dave Mellinger**,  
David.Mellinger@oregonstate.edu, 757-7953  
**Secretary: Karan Fairchild**, alderspr@peak.org, 929-4049  
**Treasurer: Fred Ramsey**, flramsey5@comcast.net, 753-3677

**Board Members**

**Raylene Gordin**, gordin@centurytel.net, 258-6825  
**Gail Nickerson**, gailhops@aol.com, 754-0406  
**Jerry Paul**, jlpaul2006@msn.com, 745-3934  
**Carroll DeKock**, candgdecock@centurytel.net, 491-3934  
**Becky Schwiebert**, Schwiebert@linkline.com, 310-729-5039  
**Gail Andrews**, gailandrews@peak.org, 745-5323  
**Alternative: Glen Akins**, gnlakins@comcast.net, 745-5447

**Committees and Coordinators**

**Conservation Chair: John Gaylord**, gaylordjohn@aol.com,  
745-5088  
**Education Chair: Marcia F. Cutler**, marciacutler@comcast.net,  
752-4313  
**Bluebird Trail Chair: Raylene Gordin**, gordin@centurytel.net,  
541-258-6625  
**Christmas Bird Count Compiler: Marcia Cutler**,  
marciacutler@comcast.net, 752-4313  
**Hesthavn Chair: Paula Vanderheul**, vanderp@peak.org,  
752-0470  
**Publicity Chair: Don Boucher**, bouchdon@peak.org, 753-7689  
**Webmaster: Tom Haig**, tomhaig@hotmail.com, 231-6583  
**Birdathon Coordinator: Mary van Brocklin**,  
maryvanbrocklin@yahoo.com, 745-7170  
**Membership Chair: Karl Hartzell**, karlerun@yahoo.com,  
758-2275  
**Field Trip Chair: Rich Armstrong**, richarmstrong@comcast.net,  
753-1978  
**Sales Table team: Sally Shaw**, shaws@peak.org, 757-2749  
**Bev Clark**, oreflygirl12@earthlink.net,  
753-4456  
**Refreshment Chair: Gail Nickerson**, gailhops@aol.com,  
754-0406  
**Field Notes Compiler: Douglas Robinson**,  
douglas.robinson@oregonstate.edu, 737-9501  
**Newsletter Editors: Joan Newhouse and Neil Lidstrom**,  
chateditors@gmail.com, 754-3120

Audubon Society of Corvallis  
P.O. Box 148  
Corvallis, OR 97339

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*the* **CHAT**

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**Calendar**

Feb 11 Board meeting  
Feb 12-13 Winter Wings Festival in Klamath Falls\*  
Feb 12-15 Great Backyard Bird Count  
Feb 13 Second Saturday field trip, 7:30 am  
Feb 18 General meeting  
Feb 20 Planting at Finley NWR, 10 am  
Feb 24 Field notes submission deadline for Feb Chat  
Feb 25 Article submission deadline for Feb Chat  
Feb 27 Hesthavn work party/open house  
Mar 6 Bluebird Trail Spring Workshop  
Mar 13 Second Saturday field trip, 7:30 am  
Mar 19-21 Bandon/South Coast field trip

\*see December 2009 Chat



*Photo of Northern Shovelers by Sue Powell*

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