

In the Field...by Ginger Shoemake

It looks like nesting season for some of our local birds is going to be earlier this year than usual. Lynn Sealey's **wood ducks** are building a nest already in the box on her pond. This is a month earlier than last year. Rodger and I walked Mill Creek on February 27 and the **great blue herons** are already standing on nests in the trees. This nest was right over the paved trail but when we looked a couple weeks later it was gone.



Photo by Rodger Shoemake

Mike and MerryLynn saw 34 **lesser goldfinches** near the VA on February 28. The species seems to be well established now in the County.

The bluebirds are returning! Mike and MerryLynn saw 2 **western bluebirds** on Lewis Peak Road on February 28, and Christopher Lindsey saw 5 on Jasper Mountain Road the same day.

On March 3, eight of us watched **northern harriers** displaying and calling as we walked the trail at the lake. Spiraling high in the air and then diving – first the male and then the female. How pretty to watch. Then we watched a singing **northern shrike** in the treetops. Such a pretty song that we only hear in the spring. One **great horned owl** was on the east side of the lake and another was on the north side of the lake, so it looks like we may have two nesting pairs again this year. **Bewick's wrens** were singing and checking out nesting sites. A clever person (or persons) created some very interesting rock formations at Cayuse Falls where the diversion water flows over the rocks.



Rock sculpture

Linda Hanson walked Bennington Lake on March 4 and found nine **tundra swans**, four **common mergansers** and four **common goldeneyes** on the water.

Mike and MerryLynn found **tree swallows** at Peninsula HMU and **rock wrens** on Byrnes Road on March 8. Christopher Lindsey found a **loggerhead shrike** on Hatch Grade the same day.

Joe and Carolyn Corvino's **Cooper's hawk** began looking for nest sites in their neighborhood on March 12. They noted that it builds a new nest each year rather than using the nest from the previous year.

On March 14 our yard was full of **American goldfinches**. I quit counting at 110! We also had a beautiful male **pheasant** and 28 **California quail** along with all the usual birds.

Our Tuesday walk was rained out on March 17, so we walked the 19th instead. They were beginning to fill the lake, so we went up to Rooks Park and crossed at the diversion dam. There were several **tree swallows** flying around the nest box at the south end of the lake, and two more in the canal; We noticed that the rock sculptures seen on the 3rd were gone, either from the force of the water or human hands.

We watched a **beaver** swimming around the edge of the lake seemingly moving branches toward its house on the east side of the lake. We saw one **northern shrike** and a **Townsend's solitaire** (two of the winter birds that will be leaving very soon). A **ruby crowned kinglet** was singing it's melodic song along the trail, and the **song sparrows** and **Bewick's wrens** were happily singing their songs. We only saw one **great horned owl** and couldn't find the nest with its mate.



Pam Fisher watched four turkey vultures circling over her house late afternoon on March 19. They soon landed in the top of a neighbor's tree and settled in to roost for the night. Here is her photo. They stayed until

about 11 the next morning, then circled around heading northwest over town.

Twenty-two people enjoyed a sunny but windy Field Trip with Mike and MerryLynn Denny on March 21. Before heading north to the Snake River, we stopped along Detour Road to check out the gulls, sparrows and hawks in the fields. There were several singing **Savannah sparrows** and a surprise find – a **Harris's sparrow**. One field was full of raptors including two **Harlan's red-tailed hawks** and a **rough-**

President's Corner by Mike Denny

US Army Corps of Engineers to Shoot Native Protected Birds at all Dams from McNary East to Lower Granite

This past week I had a meeting with a biologist from the US Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District to get their story concerning the proposed killing of thousands of native protected birds at dams along the Snake River upstream to Lower Granite Dam. Here is how the story was related to me by the Biologist.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), which is an arm of the Dept. of Commerce, is under pressure from fishery groups, tribes and coastal communities to bring the salmon back faster! So NMFS transferred the pressure inland to the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE), Walla Walla District to start a program to cut down on birds eating fish at the dams. NMFS demanded that ACE retain the USDA Wildlife Services (the new name for the old Animal Damage Control). This is the shooting, trapping, poisoning arm of the US Dept. of Agriculture.

So the ACE has retained USDA Wildlife Services to shoot native protected birds at the dams. This just does not happen without yet another player and that is the US Fish and Wildlife Services (USF&W) out of Portland, Oregon. Because all native birds are supposedly under protection from the USF&W this agency must issue what are called "take permits" which allows the holder the right to kill everything from Golden and Bald Eagles to any fish eating bird. This ability to give out Take Permits to kill any native wildlife species not under ESA rules has been acted on thousands of times if a wild animal disrupt any person's ability to make money on private, State or Federal holdings. Millions of wild animals are killed each year for doing what they do by Wildlife Services.

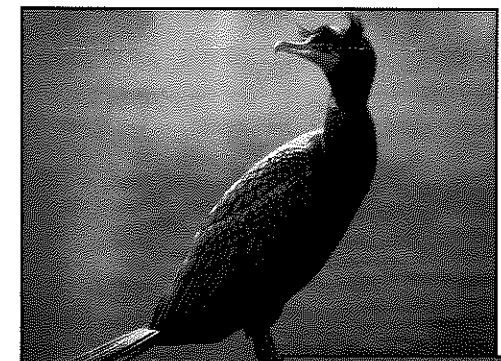
ACE asked for take permits on behalf of USDA Wildlife Services to start shooting 2100 California Gulls, 150 Double Crested Cormorants and 600 or so Ring-billed Gulls. The USF&W handed take permits to USDA Wildlife Services to start shooting birds April 1, 2015. The ACE calls the operation "Nuisance Bird Abatement Program".

Remember that shooting and killing thousands of gulls once started could become just part of the operation at the dams. This first year sets a standard of operations and could become an annual thing. It is a precedent setting action for all of the agencies involved.

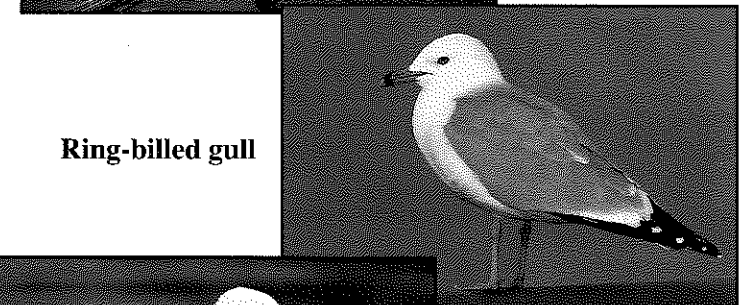
These agencies are funded by us and they must follow BMPs (Best Management Practices) which are biologically based. This action is not based on sound science, and despite hearing from hundreds of biologists, the ACE proceeds with political based practices.

So please be aware and speak up. The shooters at the dams cannot separate one gull species from another and therefore are a threat to all species of gulls—whether common or rare. Phone the ACE and ask them questions about their bird shooting program and if they have explored other options? They will tell you that millions of fish have been eaten by these species of birds. They will say they know this from the millions of pit tags they have located on the breeding islands, so ask them about all the fish that go through the dam turbines and are then picked up and eaten by these birds. What percentage of the pit tags come from dead and injured smolt that get sucked through the dams?

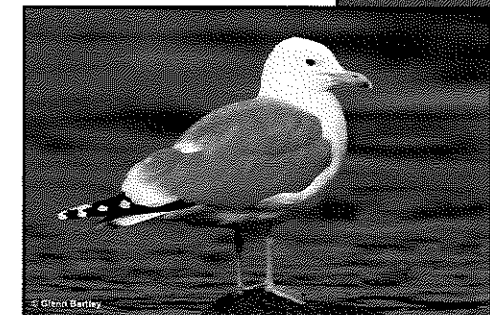
Thank-you for your concern about our natural heritage.



Double-crested cormorant



Ring-billed gull



California gull