

Whidbey Audubon Society is dedicated to the understanding, appreciation and protection of birds and other wildlife species and their habitat on Whidbey Island and surrounding waters.

Whidbey Audubon Society in the Time of Coronavirus

Society (was) has canceled all of our public activities through March and April. Our speakers, education classes, Birds of Whidbey class and most of our fieldtrips are all canceled. The board has decided to cancel the May meeting, but look for information about the Pigeon Guillemot Research Group on the website or a possible teleconferencing session.

ow I miss you! As you know by now, Whidbey Audubon The scholarship committee is reviewing applicants and exploring ways to interview the top candidates through teleconferencing.

> The Pigeon Guillemot Research Group is busy planning for summer burrow observations. They are planning to develop videos for training and guidelines if the social distancing continues this summer.

The specimen library committee is continuing to catalog and

Those cancellations, however, do not mean our volunteer committees have not been hard at work.

During Coronavirus, see page 3

Phenology, the Study of the Seasons

ur April general meeting program has been canceled due to temperatures warm and the COVID-19 virus. The speaker was to have been Erin Posthumus, from the National Phenology Network (NPN). But she has agreed to present for Whidbey Audubon Society next year in May (2021). However, Erin did give us some information that we can share with you so you can learn about the important work that the NPN is doing.

First a little about Erin Posthumus: She is the outreach coordinator and liaison to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the USA National Phenology Network, a science initiative that aims to collect, store and share information on plant and animal seasonal activity. Trained as a wildlife biologist, Erin received a BA in environmental biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder and an MS in wildlife conservation and management from the University of Arizona. She has worked on a variety of bird ecology projects throughout her career including banding 'I'iwis on the Big Island of Hawai'i, counting wading bird nestlings in the Florida Everglades and surveying bird diversity on top of a 10,000 foot mountain in Southern Arizona. Raised in Seattle, she currently lives in Tucson, Arizona where she enjoys hiking the Sky Islands, rescuing cacti and watching her desert tortoise eat.

Now, from Erin, a bit about phenology: it may be an unfamiliar term, but it's something that you see every day in nature. Phenology is the study of the seasons - when plants leaf out and bloom, birds migrate and insects emerge. These life cycles are a critical part of nearly every ecological relationship. As

precipitation patterns change, phenology of many species is advancing and not always at the same rate. Migratory birds in particular face mismatches in timing between breeding periods and food resources, with cascading impacts on their ecosystems. Her presentation next year will look at what



we know about the challenges birds are facing, how they are coping, and what you can do to help document the changes in phenology happening around us.

If you would like to learn more now, this YouTube video explains the work of the National Phenology Network: *www*. youtube.com/watch?v=i_l3miEF7Dk

There is also a video from its partnership with Audubon Chapter: www.youtube.com/ another watch?v=VqyCUlXxFQo&feature=you.tu.be

Erin also supplied us with a link to their Botany Primer which is at: www.usanpn.org/files/npn/reports/USA-NPN_Botany-Primer-2018.pdf.

Birdathon 2020 Canceled

ue to the unusual circumstances and uncertainty of these times and the need to protect ourselves from social gatherings, the Whidbey Audubon Society board has decided to cancel Birdathon this year.

This doesn't prevent anyone from individually counting how many bird species they spot in their yard or out their window during early May, peak spring bird migration. Perhaps we can share sightings at our next Audubon gathering.

– Kathy Obersinner, Chair

ATTENTION! Important Notice **About Nominations**

If you would like to nominate someone for the office of President or Vice President of the Whidbey Audubon Society, please contact Kim Shepard (click on red type) of the nominating committee. We will elect these offices in May.

Please watch the May Shorelines for information on the candidates and an explanation of the election process. It will be different this year, given our situation, so please stay tuned and be prepared to vote. Thanks!

Conservation Column: Legislative Wrap Up

 $oldsymbol{\Lambda}$ below. Since we are mostly all sitting at home, use some of your time to tell our local, state and federal legislators what is important to you. And get outside and bird - there are no bad birding places on Whidbey Island and it is great for mental health.

2020 Legislative Session Wrap Up

Last week marked the end of the 2020 legislative session. Each of our partners and volunteers worked tirelessly throughout the session to make sure we made progress towards climate justice. Below are updates on each of the Climate Alliance's legislative priorities this session:

Climate Pollution Limits

We are excited that Climate Pollution Limits passed this session and will update the state's greenhouse gas limits to reflect current science and investing in nature-based solutions! Setting strong climate pollution limits is essential to ensure we are setting accurate benchmarks for future bold climate policy.

Transportation for All

Our Transportation for All bill which would have required new transportation investments and any transportation funding cuts to meet health, equity and environment metrics and goals did not pass in full this session. However, we did get a budget proviso for the bill which directs Washington State Department of Transportation to pick two transportation projects to evaluate based on current transportation policy goals and the themes of health, accessibility, environmental justice, equity and climate change. This is a huge success and shows how our coalition in a short period of time, helped change the conversation around how we need to equitably and sustainability invest in transportation in Washington state.

Buy Clean, Buy Fair

The Buy Clean, Buy Fair bill would have directed state agencies to consider suppliers' greenhouse gas emissions and labor standards when purchasing structural materials for publiclyfunded infrastructure projects. While the Buy Clean, Buy Fair

A udubon Washington provided the legislative information did not pass this session, we made great progress in growing the understanding of the need to account carbon emissions and labor standards when purchasing structural materials for publicly-funded infrastructure and we are leading the conversation around public procurement nationally.

Healthy Forests and Wildfire Preparedness

The Healthy Forests & Wildfire Preparedness bill would have raised roughly \$125 million in new revenue per biennium to implement Washington's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan, restoring the health and resilience of 1.25 million acres of forest ensuring cleaner air, safer firefighters and communities, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and increased ability of forests to sequester carbon. While the Healthy Forests & Wildfire Preparedness bill did not pass this session, supporters of the bill are considering whether to run a state-wide ballot measure this fall.

Despite winning strong climate pollution limits this session, the state legislature failed to pass essential bills to mitigate the climate crisis. The update of the state's greenhouse gas limits will only work if we have the right climate policy tools to be able to achieve them.

Please thank your legislators for helping pass strong climate pollution limits this session and urge them to take bold and equitable climate action in 2021.

- Kim Shepard, Conservation Chair

Getting Deliveries?

While keeping a social distance from others and limiting shopping trips, check to see if your Amazon purchase can be through AmazonSmile, its charitable donation program. Choose Whidbey Audubon Society as the beneficiary. [click logo]



Field Trip Report: Fort Casey on March 14

The day started out cold but sunny at Fort Casey State Park. Eleven souls braved the weather and the beginning of the Covid crisis. Right off, the eagles gave us quite a show with their aerobatics and eventually we saw 12 **Bald Eagles**; two were juveniles.

As we started our hike around the Lighthouse it was quiet for the song birds. We saw **American Crow, American Robin** and **Dark-eyed Junco**. The new Central Whidbey State Park Interpreter, Jen Gray met up with us and gave us the update on the restoration of the Lighthouse (the Lighthouse is covered with scaffolding and plastic). As we continued our walk, the bird scene was slow so we jumped into identifying the native plants.

As we hiked back into the forest, a few birds came out: Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Bewick's Wren, Goldencrowned Kinglet, Spotted Towhee. When we popped out into the sunshine the birds were out and actively hunting for food, and Townsend Chipmunk was sunning itself on a low branch so everyone got a good look. As we continued our walk we saw: Varied Thrush, Pacific Wren, Song Sparrow, Goldencrowned Sparrow, Red Breasted Nuthatch, Common Raven, White-crowned Sparrow, Brown Creeper, European Starling, House Finch, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern Flicker, Hairy Woodpecker and Bushtit.

Fort Casey Trip, see page 6

Welcome New and Renewing Members

New:

Peter Bunin Donna Muir Judy Herrin

Renewing:

Cathi Bower Verleen Boyer Ellen Nelson Christi Shaffer Val & Joe Hillers Janet Stein, Spotted Towhee Pete & Liz Berg John Schuster Kathryn Hirt, Scholarship Jean & Tom Ascher Lee Chavez, Scholarship Cathy Queeno-Wall Don & Jan Allen Rob Craig Judy & Lyall Bishop, Scholarship Carol (Finn) Gatewood, Pigeon Guillemot Jenny Brown, Pigeon Guillemot Arlene Stebbins Spotted Towhee Steve & Martha Ellis, Red Tailed Hawk Patricia Duarte & Tom Pocock Sharon & Anthony Zoars, General Fund

Cancellations and Changes

- No April or May General Meetings
- Nominations and Voting Changes
- No collection of specimens for the Specimen Library
- 2020 Birdathon canceled
- The Bird in the Hand postponed until September 2021
- Field Trips canceled until further notice.

During Coronavirus, from page 1

protect our specimens. They will not be collecting specimens for a while and ask that you not collect any dead birds. The plastic storage bags may retain the virus even during freezing.

The Bird in the Hand committee has decided to postpone the festival until September 2021.

Our Birding in the Neighborhoods leaders are working with their core members to make decisions about future trips. Birding in Neighborhoods South tried birding by texting while venturing out solo.

The website committee continues to design our new website.

The nominations committee is continuing to accept nominations for the upcoming was president and vice-president election in May. If you would like to nominate someone, or yourself, for a two-year term as president or vice president of Whidbey Audubon Society please contact Kim Shepard at *kwshepard@ gmail.com*. Just be sure he or she has agreed to accept the nomination!

Shorelines committee is continuing to produce this newsletter, as you can see.

We have so very many volunteers at work that it is hard to keep track of them, so if I missed you in this listing of committees, please forgive me.

What to do in this time of social distancing? Those of us who love birding have the perfect hobby. This is a wonderful chance to do some solo birding in the neighborhood and note which birds we see. (Just stay six feet from the other birders out there and please don't share scopes and binoculars for now — I know, not sharing is really hard for our generous birders and natural teachers.) It is a good time to learn a new bird or three, observe our own feeders and closely observe each avian visitor — can we tell individual birds apart? Which species visit when? Which species is dominant? Perhaps this would be a good time to finally learn how to use eBird or other birding software. Maybe you would just like to watch some nest cams on the internet. There is always a way to learn more about birds. While our public Audubon activities are canceled, we will miss each other but none of us should miss the birds!

SHORELINES April 2020 Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings

hill Cranes flying north. Is it really early spring? Location: Freeland.

- Dave Parent

February 28: First House Wren of the 2020 season at our home. Location: Pheasant farm acres Road south of Coupeville and near Pacific Rim institute. — Joe Sheldon

March 9: Prairie Falcon. This new-to-me Falcon was just posing on a post. Location: Crockett Lake.

— Jann Ledbetter

Editor's Note: Please read related article in this issue.

March 12: Slate-colored Junco. This variant is unusual in this vicinity. Agressively defending the under-feeder territory. — Dave Parent

March 14: Although this isn't a rare bird sighting necessarily, we felt it to be a special observation. For four years now we have had successful nests and young raised in a homemade nest box for Chestnut-backed Chickadees. This morning as we watched them construct their nest yet again, I decided to take one of the prior year's nests that we have kept and place it in a low fir limb. Literally in less than two minutes one of the birds went to the prior nest and began to pull material and take it to straight to the box!! This has continued now and I suspect they will salvage all the old material possible. I feel we are giving them a significant advantage in their nest construction as they will have to expend remarkably less energy looking for material. These very special and localized birds are on

loss, so anything we can do to give them a leg up is vital.

— Robert & Traci York



Photo by Jay Adams

Snow Bunting

March 17: Snow Bunting. Location: On the spit road that runs parallel to Route 20, south of Crockett Lake.

– Jay Adams



Horned Lark

March 17: Horned Lark. Location: Seen on the spit road that runs parallel to Highway 20, south of Crockett Lake, east of the Audubon viewing platform. — Jay Adams

March 18: Two Western Bluebirds male and female. Location: Ebey's Bluff trail.

— Dave Parent



Photo by Michael Sheldo

Pelagic Cormorants in breeding plumage.

March 18: Pelagic Cormorants are now in breeding plumage and easily visible along the ferry route between

February 24: Four Sand- the decline due to forest cover Keystone and Port Townsend. March Dozens of the birds can be seen close-up on the pilings at the Port Townsend ferry terminal. — Michael Sheldon

> March 19: Five swans, either **Tundra** or **Trumpeter.** Likely Tundra, rounded upper border of beak. Difficult to identify due to distance and some haze and fog. Location: North side of Deer Lagoon near the pilings; can be seen from the south end of Deer Lagoon Road and from Double Bluff Road. — Libby Hayward

> March 20: Willet. Reported yesterday by Dave Krause. Seen by me today, March 20. Location: North end of Grasser's Lagoon, head of Penn Cove, Coupeville.

> Confirmation: There is no eBird Island County record for this species, January through May. A Willet spent several weeks in Grasser's lagoon last fall. — Jay Adams

28/29: Forty-one Black Ovstercatchers at water's edge. Largest gathering we've seen. At least two days in row. Location: Monroe Landing beach, just east of boat launch area.

— Chris Hurley and Marlys Erickson

March 30: Three Western Bluebirds in the open prairie about a hundred yards east of the row of old pheasant coops. Location: Pacific Rim Institute. — Joe Sheldon

March 30: Mountain Bluebird. Location: Pacific Rim Institute, to the south side of the path between the old coops. The bird popped up and perched on a bramble cane. Before we could grab a phone for a possible photo, the bird was replaced on the perch by a Western Bluebird. When I wonder was the last time that happened?

– Jay Adams

PLEASE POST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS to the Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) website.

Sightings should be on Whidbey Island or relate in some way to Whidbey Audubon. Reports should refer to birds or other wildlife that are not commonly seen here. Alternatively, they may refer to migratory birds that arrive outside their normal seasons.

Reports of especially interesting sightings in nearby areas are welcome. Greater selectivity is needed to keep the email volume reasonable so editors will exercise judgment on whether the rarity, proximity and significance of sightings merit inclusion.

These guidelines reflect the interests of local birders. Please respect the essentially scientific nature of the Sightings feature. Thanks for your cooperation.

There are designated spaces to submit your information, such as what you saw, where you saw it and the date and approximate time. Although we are asking those who post to leave a phone number or email address with your sighting, they will not be included on the actual "Sightings" page. Thank you!

Keep up with "Sightings" on the was website, on your mobile device at www.m.whidbeyaudubon.org or on the Whidbey Audubon Society Facebook page.

SHORELINES

April 2020

Prairie Falcon at Crockett Lake: the Rest of the Story

(Nod to Paul Harvey via Jay Adams)

The Prairie Falcon recently causing excitement at Crockett Lake is actually Mark Borden's rescue bird. Mark shares his story:

Thave been a falconer since I was 12 years old and a "Master" falconer for almost 40 years.

This little prairie was one of the 90 percent hatched each year that would not have survived in the wild. He was a rescue, and after months of training still had no aptitude for falconry but was a really friendly bird and physically healthy. As a falconer, I keep raptors for the sport of falconry. Birds of prey are not kept as pets and do not make good pets.

In October I attempted to find him a home, ideally as a demonstration or education bird, but could not.

In falconry we have a method of releasing birds into the wild which we call "hack." I decided to hack him, in the hope that he would learn hunting skills, while I supplemented his food and eventually return to the wild. Most falcons will gain their independence over a period of three to four weeks and disperse from the release site. I removed his bracelets and jesses and released him on October 22. My home is ideal for hacking a falcon, as it is in a very open area, with a great vista including both a natural area (Crockett Lake) and an agricultural area.

Initially he remained around the house, honing his flying skills and learning to deal with the local Bald Eagles and Redtailed Hawks. He started out with a few tense encounters, and once I thought an eagle would catch him, but he then established a relationship of mutual respect with the local birds. His great

View Some Birds of Prey



In partnership with the Port of Coupeville and donor, Mary Jo Stansbury, Whidbey Audubon members Sharon Gauthier, Sharon Dunn, Ann Casey, Kathy Stetz and Mary Jo Stansbury worked with Craig Johnson to develop an educational panel about Raptors at Greenbank Farm.



Photo by Jann Ledbetter

Mark Borden's Prairie Falcon voguing on Crockett Lake.

speed and maneuverability held him in good stead. I released a few European Starlings and English Sparrows for him that had become trapped in our chicken coop and initially he was quite inept. Over the months, though, he became more competent, and eventually caught his first sparrow. I believe he caught his first wild bird in mid-November. He continued to be playful, often carrying pieces of horse manure onto the deck and daily orchestrated "bluff attacks" on the Guinea Fowl.

I saw him on Ebey's Prairie while flying my other falcons, and saw him around the lake, as have others. He would not seem to recognize me away from home and would keep a greater distance. Each morning he would return home to be fed. He would then leave for the day, returning to roost in the same exact spot on our barbecue (on the second-floor deck) at night.

In January, February and again in March I reduced his daily food for a few days, hoping he would demonstrate independence, but each time he became hungrier. It was clear that he would not become independent.

The swallows returned on March 7. We have between 45 and 60 pairs of Violet Green and Tree Swallows that nest on our property each year (in the vinyl fence) and although they did not seem especially concerned with his presence, I was worried that once the young start to fledge, he would be a problem. On March 27, I returned him (we named him Eagle Basher though he never bashed any eagles) to his comfortable mews (cage or building for trained hawks).

He did learn some skills, and I will fly him or find another falconer to do so during the coming season. He was an excellent photographic candidate, though a bit of an imposter!

He is a fascinating and unique bird. Having him out and about for five months has been a learning experience for many people.

BIN South Tries to Stay Connected by Text

February 27: Would you say that Meadowlarks or a Shorteared Owl would be the highlight of the morning?



Sanderling

Super day for a different perspective of the Lagoon from Shore Avenue. Thank you to Gwen, who again generously granted us access to her beach, her driveway and her community, where we identified at least 37 species on the shore, in the fields and on the water.

The beach-side was a breezy reminder that it's still February and made for entertaining **Sanderling** observation, as they dodged the surf and took shelter amongst the **Black-bellied Plovers**!

Across the road, everyone got a good view of the **Short-eared Owl** as it hunted and perched for a time.

Oddly absent - Song Sparrows nowhere in sight. WTH!

Heading out, we stopped along Double Bluff Road and observed some dark buteo-not-a-Red-tailed Hawk(?) and so far, undetermined.

March 12: This morning, bundled-up birders were carefully not breathing on one another. There is nothing like getting outside with a focus on birds to take your mind off current events.

It's gotten to the point out at Deer Lagoon, where seeing the Short-eared Owl may not necessarily be the highlight of the day



Photos from the Birds of Whidbey Checklis on the Whidbey Audubon website

Pine Siskin

sarily be the highlight of the day. Right out of the gate, a pair

Fort Casey Trip, from page 3

Our walk ended back at the Lighthouse where we retrieved our scopes and headed to the bluff to scan the water for seabirds. We observed: Horned Grebe, Red-necked Grebe, Rhinoceros Auklet, Pigeon Guillemot in both winter and summer plumage, Common Loon, Harlequin Duck, Pelagic Cormorant in breeding plumage, Double-crested Cormorant and Redbreasted Merganser. Flying over-head were Olympic Gull (Glaucous-winged/Western hybrid), Northern Harrier and Red-tailed Hawk.

It was a wonderful day of birding and we were all so glad to be outside watching birds, and the field trip happened before everything came to a big stop.

— Janet Hall, Trip Leader

of industrious **Pine Siskins** appeared just in front of us, each gathered a big beak-full of cattail fluff and flew off together. Adorable. We could see them *waaaay* up in the alders, and then they flew together *waaaay* off the other direction.

Also — sadly — we got a good (bad, actually) look at a little female **House Finch**, with a case of icky eye, likely caused by a highly-contagious bacteria. Here is an interesting history of how Finch conjunctivitis first appeared and the resulting studies. You know — since we're stuck at home with nothing else to do... www.allaboutbirds.org/news/house-finch-eye-disease-outbreak-thenunderstanding. ["House Finch Eye Disease: Outbreak, Then Understanding" by Rebecca Heisman, January 11, 2017; All About Birds, The Cornell Lab.]

Washing bird feeders may require a longer verse than Happy Birthday. Try *Blackbird, Rockin' Robin, Fly Like an Eagle, Wind Beneath My Wings, Spread Your Wings, Learn To Fly, Free Bird, Bird is the Word, Yellow Bird....* You're welcome.

We saw and/or heard at least 39 species this morning. Stay well.

March 26: Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) South tried Birding by text with everyone in a different place and car.

Well, that was fun. Kind of like the Christmas Bird Count, without the teams. Or the dashing about.

CBC — Covid Bird Count — not to be confused with Corvid Bird Count. That would only be the 20 North American species in the Corvidae family, and only the three (sometimes four- fiveif you're somehow separating American and Northwest Crows) which may be found on Whidbey.

We should do this more often — from reports so far, we have 58 species, and that's just for the three or four hours at 10 locations this morning. It does include part of Crockett Lake, but not including the **coyotes** romping there, or the **otter** off of Cultus Bay Road.

One of today's surprising species is the young **Trumpeter Swan** that is still hanging around the Cattron Road/Cultus Bay Road/French Road wetlands.

Use best practices, the usual respect for private property, situational awareness, distancing protocol, look both ways and wash your hands.

Now – for more shut-in entertainment, here is a very good explanation and reference for the commonly used four-letter bird codes (FBLC) in banding by Kent Fiala of the Carolina Bird Club, which is not at all standardized: *www.carolinabirdclub. org/bandcodes.html*

— Cathi Bower, Bird early – bird often

BIN South has been meeting every other Thursday. Check with Cathi about future plans: *whidbird@whidbey.com*.

SHORELINES

April 2020

BIN North Scores at Penn Cove

March 12: As there are no sports to watch on TV, a good day At Grasser's, Lesser birding is a great activity for this unusual time, or any time. Yellowlegs were scur-Birding in Neighborhood (BIN) North birder Martha Hollis suggested we check out Penn Cove and planned all our stops. We started at Coupe Park, then went to the Town Park, Mueller's Pond and the pullout across the road, Kennedy and Grasser's Lagoons and Monroe Landing.

Things started slowly at Coupe Park. It was cold and very windy and most of the birds, except the Bald Eagles who were abundant, had hunkered down. Sightings picked up quite a bit after that. One real score was a pair of Wood Ducks in the pond at Mueller's. A little farther down the road, sharp eyes spotted a large mixed flock of Black Turnstones and Surfbirds. Their

camouflage was incredible and if they hadn't been moving and making a few sounds we would have passed them by. We also saw Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, Scaup and lots of Surf Scoters near the mussel rafts.



Black Turnstone

rying among the rocks. BINN birder, Dave, just knew that somewhere there was going to be a Killdeer. Even after looking through his scope, some of us thought it was just a rock. Rocks don't usually walk on the beach, though.

Topping off the day was a Kestrel on a wire by the side of the road near Monroe Landing. A truly excellent day of



American Kestral

birding with a total of 41 species observed.

— Marcia Lazoff

Birding in Neighborhoods North normally meets on the second Wednesday of the month. Contact Marcia at *mlazoff@comcast*. *net* for information about future plans.

Whidbey Audubon Society Membership

Please make your check payable to WHIDBEY AUDUBON SOCIETY (WAS) Mail to: Jann Ledbetter, 1112 Maple Place, Coupeville WA 98239

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\$

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The Whidbey Audubon Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Donations are tax deductible. It is Whidbey Audubon policy to never share our membership and subscription information with other groups.

Whidbey Audubon Society Whidbey Audubon programs are 7 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month except December, July and August

September, October and April, May and June meet in Coupeville Recreation Hall, April & May 2020 CANCELED November, January, February and March meet in Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Freeland, March 2020 CANCELED

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Stay Safe and Enjoy Spring Birding!

Illustration: Golden-crowned Kinglet watercolor by Craig Johnson ©

> Whidbey Audubon Society P.O. Box 1012 Oak Harbor, WA 98277