



Shorelines

Newsletter of the Whidbey Audubon Society

April 2021

Whidbey Audubon Society is dedicated to the understanding, appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife and their habitats on Whidbey Island and in surrounding waters.

Whidbey Audubon Meets Virtually Thursday, April 8 Dragonflies and Damselflies of Western Washington: Identification and Natural History

Dragonflies are often called “birdwatchers’ insects,” as they are large, colorful and active during the day, unlike so many other insects, and they exhibit complex behaviors, some of which are comparable to those of birds. Join Dennis Paulson for a lecture on the more common species of this group in western Washington. Where do they live? When might you see them?



Dennis Paulson at Crab Creek near Moses Lake, sporting an *Odonata* mask.

What is especially interesting about them?

Dennis has been studying dragonflies and damselflies (*Odonata*) since he chose them as a subject for his PH.D. dissertation at the University of Miami in 1966. He has lived in Washington for 53 years and has studied the *Odonata* of the state during that entire time, as well as studying and photographing them all over the world. He wrote the definitive field guide for western *Odonata* as well as a recent illustrated book on the natural history of the group, *Dragonflies & Damselflies: A Natural History*. Princeton University Press, Princeton; 2019.

Our monthly programs are free and open to all. If you are not a Whidbey Audubon Society member and would like to attend, please [click here to go to our website](#). We'll send a Zoom JOIN link to all members and registered nonmembers. If you do not see our Zoom invitation email by mid day the day of the program, please check your spam folder. If you still do not find it, contact



Photo by Dennis Paulson

This Paddle-tailed Darner is a dragonfly.

the [webmaster](#). Registration closes at 10 a.m. on April 8.

And, if you are not a member, please consider joining through the Membership page. Members receive notifications of upcoming events and do not need to register for our monthly programs.

Please join us on **Thursday, April 8**. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. after a brief meeting at 7:15.

Whidbey Audubon's Birdathon Migrating Soon to Our Area

What is the Birdathon?

Another spring has arrived and Whidbey Audubon remains committed to protecting native birds and the natural spaces they need to thrive. Despite COVID, birds continue to migrate and come to our feeders and over the course of this challenging year, many people have found birds to be a source of comfort and beauty. While following the recommendations from the

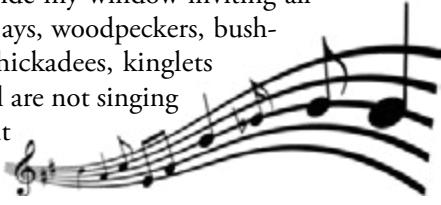
Birdathon Fundraiser, see [page 3](#)



President's Column: The Window Seat Perch

By the time you get this *Shorelines*, spring will have sprung. Already, the days seem longer and my Cornelius cherry dogwood is in bloom outside my window inviting all the sparrows, finches, jays, woodpeckers, bush-tits, hummingbirds, chickadees, kinglets and warblers. They still are not singing up to full capacity, but I am already practicing my bird songs and ID skills that Tom Blanchard taught us in his online course.

In April, Whitney Neufeld-Kaiser will be presenting her special on learning avian music. If you missed Tom's class, catch Whitney's. As far as I'm concerned, you can never get enough tips for learning bird songs. Every bird watcher I know has their own ideas about how to remember bird songs. I am a musician and yet, I don't always approach it from notes *per se*. When I started learning bird songs, it was with Frances Wood in a class she taught, probably five years ago now. I remember her telling us to start with a few birds and gradually expand. I was probably able only to identify 10 common birds and now, I can identify more than



30. Now to go out and practice. Yeah, SPRING!

We have designed a brand-new updated Birds of Whidbey Checklist that will be printed by the end of March, hopefully. The team has been working steadily on it for several months. It uses monthly bar charts with the birds listed in current taxonomic order following *eBird/Clements Checklist* of the Birds of the World. It can be more easily updated, and we will be reviewing the information often. We have tried to be as accurate as possible for our birds on Whidbey. I want to thank the team: Jay Adams and Joe Sheldon, coleaders; Sarah Schmidt, Kathy Obersinner, and peripherally, Steve Ellis and Dave Parent for dedicated work on the project. I want to especially thank Sarah for her layout and design of the form. Please use the new bird list and tell us what you think.

Bird to the max!

— Patty Cheek, President

Would that I were under the cliffs, in the secret-hiding places of the rocks, that Zeus might change me to a winged bird.

— Sophocles, *Hippolytus*; 428 B.C.

U.S. Congressman Rick Larsen Visits Whidbey Island



Photos compliments of Congressman Larson's office

Short-eared Owl



Rick Larsen, left, listens to Pat Powell of the Whidbey Camano Land Trust and WAS President Patty Cheek.

Congressman Rick Larsen made a visit in late January to Whidbey Island and the Important Bird Area (IBA) at Crockett Lake to better understand how this important habitat is being protected and preserved. He invited members from the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, the Washington State Parks staff and members of Whidbey Audubon Society to share their experiences on how and why Crockett Lake and the surrounding area is so critical to birds, other wildlife and humans, and what work is being done to protect this habitat.

His second reason for visiting was his recently discovered interest in birding. Larsen became a "pandemic birder" when he had to quarantine at this home office this past winter and he began to notice and enjoy bird watching.

Most importantly however, is Larsen's desire to strengthen the century old Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) that was recently diminished under the Trump Administration. Larsen is a signer on the Migratory Bird Protection Act 2020 which will strengthen the MBTA.

Oh yes, Nature came through for Larsen, just before he left the Crockett Lake birding platform: a Short-eared Owl appeared soaring low over the grasslands right in front him, capping a perfect winter's day of birding at Crockett Lake.

— Ann Casey



Larsen and Patty using spotting scopes on the birding platform on Crockett Lake. Ann Casey is hidden behind Larsen

Volunteer Corner: Pigeon Guillemot Survey Gears up for Summer

A signature program of the Whidbey Audubon Society is our on-going Pigeon Guillemot breeding survey, which has been occurring since 2002! Every summer volunteers spend one hour per week on the beaches of Whidbey Island recording population numbers and behaviors of these engaging seabirds.

Volunteers typically work in teams at the approximately 26 guillemot colonies around the island. We will train you and assign you a team. You only need binoculars and a willingness to commit to recording activities of these birds from early June to the end of August. (We do allow for vacations.) Due to ongoing concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic, the training will be comprised of online videos and, for new volunteers, a live virtual meeting via Zoom and beach orientation. Specifically, along with volunteers needed for other sites on the island, we are looking for folks with access to the Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey as



Photo by Govinda Holtby

Pigeon Guillemots on the bluff at Ledgewood.

there are three active Pigeon Guillemot colonies on the base that need monitoring.

Please visit the [Salish Sea Guillemot Network](#) website for a description of our survey. For further information contact [Frances Wood](#) or [Debbi Williams](#). We look forward to having you join us.

Birdathon Fundraiser, from [page 1](#)

Washington State Department of Health, Whidbey Audubon will hold a modified Birdathon for 2021. Modeled on Global Big Day of Birding (check out Cornell Lab for more information), this annual Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) fundraiser brings birding teams into the field, in a friendly competition that is similar to a walk-a-thon, but instead of getting a pledge per mile walked, there is a pledge for each bird species spotted.

Team participants collect pledges per species or a flat amount from family, friends, work colleagues and others who want to support Whidbey Audubon. Then in early May, during peak bird migration, they count and record as many species as they can see in a 24-hour period, anywhere on **Whidbey Island and immediate surrounding waters**.

Funds raised during Birdathon 2021 will support our mission to connect people to nature through community education and conservation, focused on birds and the habitats they need. It is our major fundraiser for the scholarship fund, providing scholarships for high school seniors going into environmental studies.

How can you participate?

You don't have to be an expert birder to take part in Birdathon! This year, with COVID-19 still a major health concern, we have adapted Birdathon's more traditional look to include social distancing for the protection of all.

- **You can make a pledge per species or one-time donation to an existing team.** On the [WAS Birdathon webpage](#) is a list of this year's participating teams. At the push of a virtual button, you can make a difference for birds while

supporting the team of your choice.

- **You can form your own team:** this is really pretty easy! Again, go to the WAS website, under Events, to Birdathon, where you'll find all the information you need to create a team of your own.
- **Solo Birdathon:** it's always important to be safe while birding, and birding with family or a friend is encouraged. But you are welcome to bird alone, whether in your own backyard, neighborhood or any public greenspace on Whidbey Island. The Birdathon webpage has all the information you need to turn in a list of species you spot and the pledges or donations you gather.
- **Backyard Birding:** maybe you just want to see what birds come to your backyard space. Simply write down all species that come to your feeder or yard, either by yourself, with someone in your "bubble" or outdoors, socially distanced.

Please see our website for more information on making a pledge/donation or forming a team.

As usual, the coveted **Golden Binocular Award** will go to the team that sights the most species, while the team that raises the most money will earn the **Bronze Owl Bank**. Thanks to your support and generosity, 2019's Birdathon pledges and donations came to an amazing \$7,400, of which \$2,692.50 was designated for the general fund and \$4,707.50 for the scholarship fund!

Birdathon coordinator Kathy Obersinner will answer questions at the April 8 general meeting on Zoom. For more information, email birdathon@whidbeyaudubonsociety.com.

Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings

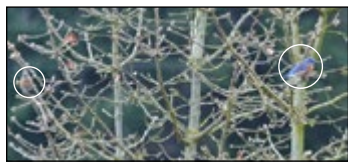


Photo by Steve Ellis

Western Bluebirds at Pacific Rim Institute, the female is circled on the left and the male on the right.

March 2: A pair of **Western Bluebirds** were perched in a couple of small trees at Pacific Rim Institute. The female foraged on the ground a few times before they flew off.

— *Steve Ellis*



Photo by Mary Jo Adams

Horned Lark at Crockett Lake.

March 8: Two **Horned Larks** were foraging in the gravel along the side of the beach road across from Crockett Lake. — *Mary Jo Adams*

March 11: I observed my first **Osprey** of the season. It was circling overhead while in conversation with two **Bald Eagles**. Then after several minutes, three more eagles joined up. Location: Greenbank on the Holmes Harbor side.

— *Bill Mayhew*

March 13: I only got two blurry photos as traffic was whizzing by and clouds moving in, but I located a **Storm Wigeon** at Ewing Marsh.

— *Deb Stewart*

[*Sightings Editor's Note:* a

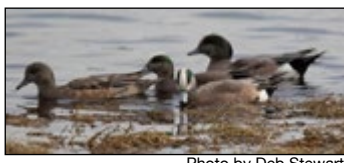


Photo by Deb Stewart

Storm Wigeon with white cheeks in front of three American Wigeons.

Storm Wigeon or white-cheeked wigeon is a rare natural variant American Wigeon with an all-white face rather than speckled gray.]



Photo by Mary Jo Adams

Horned Grebes

March 16: One of the **Horned Grebes** at the Oak Harbor marina is changing into breeding plumage. — *Mary Jo Adams*

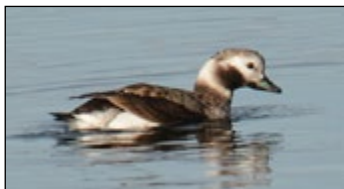


Photo by Darwin and Mike Wile

Long-tailed Duck, female

March 17: Two **Horned Larks** on Dirt Road across State Route (SR) 20 from Crockett Lake in Coupeville. Also, one **Long-tailed Duck** (presumably nonbreeding female). Location: Second small pond across SR 20 from Crockett Lake in Coupeville.

— *Darwin and Mike Wile*

March 17: The first sighting for me of a **Band-tailed Pigeon** this year on the ninth of March and the second sighting which I photographed on the 17th of March. Very happy to have them back and looking forward to seeing many, many



Photo by George Heleker

Band-tailed Pigeon

more here over the next seven months! Location: At our home, two miles southwest of the Clinton ferry.

— *George Heleker*

March 18: Five **Swans (Trumpeter?)** seen on Lone Lake. They flew off shortly after I noticed them.

— *Linda Griesbach*

March 19: Gray Catbird. On small branch in shrubbery. About eight feet off the ground. Smooth gray body and distinctive black cap. I

was only a few feet away. The sighting was accidental, and I did not have a camera ready. It flew away a minute after I spotted it. Location: In Clinton, next to Island Drug parking lot. **Confirmation:** I am aware that gray catbirds are rare in western Washington, although they are seen in western British Columbia.

— *Jennifer Townsend*

March 20: A **Prairie Falcon** was on the powerline along Zylstra Road. **Crows** began to attack it before we could get a photo. It flew to a powerline along Arnold Road only to be chased away again. We lost it when it went to the trees east of Zylstra. Sandy brown in color, much light underneath when in flight. Black facial streaks. There is quite a bit of open country along Zylstra and nearby Grasser's Hill.

— *Steve Ellis*

PLEASE POST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS to the *Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) website*. Select the aqua button, "Report a Sighting." You can also submit a photo using the aqua button labeled "Submit Gallery Photos."

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 or on our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/WhidbeyAudubonSociety.

Birding in Neighborhoods South: Contrasting Weather

February 25: Last week's Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) was short and sweet, and we observed only what might be expected with our optics shivering in our hands and shaking in the breeze. We saw and/or heard at least 36 species out at Deer Lagoon. Noticeably absent — even the geese and herons knew enough to hunker down out of the weather. We did some of our never-ending work on the differences between **Common** and **Barrow's Goldeneyes**. There was a beauty close in to get a good look at. Pretty certain it was a Common. Maybe.

March 11: Great turnout last Thursday — both birds and bird-

ers — on a lovely day to be at the beach.

We identified over 50 species out at Sunlight and the East Dike. We're still enjoying sea-and-shorebird season and especially with close views for comparing **Dunlins**, **Sanderlings** and **Black-bellied Plovers**, plus **Loons**, **Grebes** and about a dozen different **ducks** and **geese**.

— Cathi Bower, *Bird early, bird often*

Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) South meets every other Thursday morning. The time varies with the season. Contact Cathi for time and place: whidbird@whidbey.com.

Birds and Birders Come Together at Crockett Lake

March 10: It was a lovely day and many recently vaccinated birders came out to enjoy some spectacular birding at Crockett Lake. There was still no carpooling and masks were worn, but somehow it felt almost *normal*. All the usual suspects were there to greet us. The **Bald Eagles** in the trees, a **Harlequin** and **Pigeon Guillemots** by the ferry landing, all three **Cormorants** on the old pier and the **Belted Kingfisher** were there to welcome us back. Without even leaving the parking lot we were able to see **Short-eared Owls** and **Northern Harriers** hunting for brunch.

Our usual route took us down to the gravel ponds and on

to Admiral's Cove. We had some nice surprises with a close-up look at a female **Long-tailed Duck** (thanks, Becky), six **Western Meadowlarks** and a gigantic flock of **Scaup**. A **Red-tailed Hawk** and the first **Swallow** of the year for most of us joined the list of sightings. At the very end of the morning, a **Ruddy Duck** and the elusive **Rough-legged Hawk** were spotted (thanks, Cathi). An excellent morning with 40 species seen.

— Marcia Lazoff

Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) North usually meets the second Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m. To be included on their email list, contact Marcia at mlazoff@comcast.net.

It's All About the Optics — a Confession

A Binocular Review

AH — THAT NEW BINOCULAR SMELL...

For a lot of years now, I've owned Jeeps. Not because of their reliability (ha!) or because of any misguided Made-in-America hoo-hah. But they are cute and they appeal to my sense of individuality, and I really like being able to depend on the local service center without leaving the island. However, while I'm enjoying my image, my Toyota-and-Honda-driving friends are enjoying reliability and value.

So I ordered the Maven binoculars. Who?!? What? Sure — my Nikon Monarchs are hands-down the best value ever, and you would think that I would have learned from my Jeep relationships, but I've been taken in by all those online reviews and the opportunity to be just a little odd.

When did an optics purchase become this sort of personal and a matter of image? I suspect that we all have at least once glanced over at an associate's Swarovski emblem with envy, or at least admiration, and then have had the inevitable self-conversation about why or why not to join the ranks. We wear our personal uniform that makes our statement — from our clothes, to our transportation, to our homes and pets and our birding gear. We

look for our group — we are drawn to our people. We are first, *birders*, and *Whidbey Islanders*. Then we may think of ourselves as the *counters*, the *listers*, or *observers*, early or late risers, northenders



or southenders, old-timers or newcomers. We share and hopefully celebrate one another's unique daily moments with the birds. We are a congregation of sightings and perspectives and all the ups and downs of that individual and collective experience. But first, we're birders on Whidbey Island. After that, it hardly matters how we see them or how we've arrived there.

I nearly didn't fess up about the Mavens, but it turns out that my birding buddies still love me, or at least that's what I've been told.

It's not that I don't listen to my friends. It's just that being a little different than them is bigger than me. After all, an optics acquisition may have as much to do with optics as image, as it does with the glass itself. Once you've grasped at some level, an understanding of the numbers and the jargon — magnification, objective, subjective, prism, exit pupil, diopter, field of vision,

About Optics, see [page 6](#)

Page Peepers Book Group April Selection: *The Thing with Feathers* by Noah Strycker

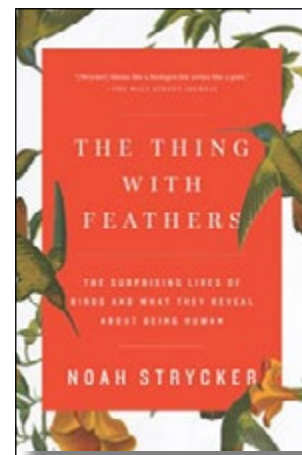
Noah Strycker writes in his introduction:

By studying birds, we ultimately learn about ourselves. Bird behavior offers a mirror in which we can reflect on human behavior. In The Thing with Feathers, the mirror is all around, glinting from the wingtips of hundreds of billions of the 10, 000 species of birds that share this planet with us. Lucky for us, birds are everywhere. All we have to do is watch.

Join us on Zoom at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 28. New members to the group sign up at Events on the Whidbey

Audubon Society website, [click here to register](#).

The Thing with Feathers:
The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal about Being Human by Noah Strycker; Riverhead Books, March 3, 2015.



About Optics, from page 5

twilight factor and so on (all beyond the scope of these musings) — the rest of the decision might have as much to do with regional preferences, availability, what's on sale or who most recently developed the latest, greatest slight advancement.

Plus, there's the cost of the price — I often wonder if the inflicted anxiety and stress of hauling that kind of investment around in the out-of-doors is even worth the view.

When it came time to get serious about shopping an upgrade, after first consulting friends, I turned to *YouTube*, as serious shoppers do. A nice young man with a channel called “Best Binoculars Reviews” patiently explained to me about cheap and expensive bins and how to know the difference, besides price.

The Mavens are perfectly comparable with the Nikons. However, as is typically the case with fantasy, anticipation often outshines reality. Based in Wyoming, the fairly new company has an intriguing business concept and presentation; and their customer service is, so far, excellent. They are nearby, their marketing is clever, they definitely appeal to my sense of individuality, and there's that cool raven logo. Their gimmick is customization, and I'm certainly a sucker for that — engraving and every imaginable color option. I had a great time ordering and awaiting the Maven delivery.

Still, I prefer the Monarchs and now that I have back-up binocs, I can send the Nikons in for an overdue cleaning and service.

And I get to share my experience with my birding community, whose eye rolls speak louder than words. You're welcome.

I figure I can still hold my head up, and for the time being, can breathe easy — until the next hankering for an upgrade stirs and the anticipation begins again.

Or perhaps I will win those Zeiss Binoculars from Cornell. Every month's a new contest challenge through *eBird*. Somebody's gotta win them.

— Cathi Bower
Bird early – Bird often

Birdathon 2021



Sign up for Birdathon and try to win the Golden Binocular Trophy or BOB, the Bronze Owl Bank. Register for a team or make a pledge on the Whidbey Audubon website, look under the Events menu for *Birdathon* (click the red text for the hyperlink.)

Dates to Remember

Please check the [Whidbey Audubon Society website](#) for more detailed information and how to enter Zoom for some of these upcoming events.

APRIL

- 8: Whidbey Audubon Program: *Dragonflies and Damselflies*** on Zoom with Dennis Paulson 7 p.m.
- 12: Online Class: *Birding by Ear* Session 1** with Whitney Neufeld-Kaiser
- 15: Deadline for May *Shorelines***
- 16: Birds 'n' Beer**, Zoom 5 to 6 p.m.
- 19: Online Class: *Birding by Ear* Session 2** with Whitney Neufeld-Kaiser
- 22: Board Meeting**, on Zoom 7 to 9 p.m. Members welcome; contact [President Patty Cheek](#)
- 26: Online Class: *Birding by Ear* Session 3** with Whitney Neufeld-Kaiser
- 28: Page Peepers Book Group** via Zoom 7 to 8 p.m.

MAY

- Early May: Birdathon.** Participate and/or donate!
- 13: Whidbey Audubon Program: *Phenology, the Study of the Seasons*** with Erin Posthumus, via Zoom
- 13: Board elections** at the general membership meeting
- 20: Deadline for June *Shorelines***
- 26: Page Peepers Book Group**, via Zoom 7 to 8 p.m.
- 27: Board Meeting**, via Zoom 7 to 9 p.m. Members welcome; [contact President Patty Cheek](#)

Bird of the Month: **Varied Thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*): A Thrush Like No Other**

Take a walk in the North Cascades on a foggy spring morning and you'll hear the haunting song of the Varied Thrush, the defining sound of our mountain forests. The late nineteenth-century American ornithologist and artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes described this song "as perfectly the voice of the cool, dark peaceful solitude which the bird chooses for its home as could be imagined."

Varied Thrushes, at 9.5 inches in length and with a wingspan of 14 to 16 inches, are slightly smaller than their American Robin cousins. The bodies are stout, and they have large dark eyes which allow them to see well in low light. Males have a slate-gray nape, back and wings. Distinctive orange 'eyebrows,' throat, belly and wing bars give them their descriptive name, *varied*. A black breastband rounds out the field marks. One would think this striking plumage would make them highly visible, but it's perfect camouflage for their forest haunts.

These birds have a number of calls: a sharp "chekt" is used when disturbed at winter feeders and a "churr" indicates disturbance or aggression toward other species. Variations of "vreee" also express disturbance.

Their distinctive song is deceptively simple: an eerie 2-second quavering whistle that seems to be on one pitch but actually incorporates multiple notes simultaneously (rather than a trill), and it's virtually impossible to describe without digressing into poetry. Nineteenth-century Canadian naturalist John William Dawson wrote of the Varied Thrush in *Birds of California*, "He mounts the chancel of some fir tree and utters at intervals a single long-drawn note of brooding melancholy and exalted beauty, a voice stranger than the sound of any instrument, a waif echo stranding on the shores of time." The song is often repeated several times with several seconds of pause between, usually on different pitches and often seemingly in a minor key.

A western species, Varied Thrush breeds in forests from central Alaska down through western Canada to northern California. The easternmost range extends to far western Montana.

Two migration patterns have been identified. One is the usual north-to-south route in the fall, with the more northerly birds leapfrogging to winter farther south than the more centrally-located birds. The second migration is altitudinal, with snow driving birds down out of the mountains. Doubtlessly, Whidbey's forests host wintering birds from both migration patterns. These begin arriving on the island in mid-September.

Their main food items in summer are insects and other invertebrate prey. Martha and I once watched Varied Thrushes spaced about twenty feet apart along a campground road in Olympic National Park. Behemoth rvs were driving in and out, knocking down flying carpenter ants, and the thrushes would rush out and grab the

stunned ants from the pavement.

In late summer, thrush diet switches to berries and other fruit. An Alaska study showed berry seed germination is enhanced when passed through the digestive system of the Varied Thrush, as opposed to that of other fruit-eating birds, or mammals such as black bears.

Favorite foraging sites are on the ground (about 86% of the time), away from bushes but under trees. Individuals tend to forage alone. A thrush moves forest litter — leaves, fallen bark bits and other natural material — by grasping the item in its bill and hopping backwards, tossing the litter aside, and then examines the exposed area for prey. We've often seen them tossing fallen bigleaf maple leaves in our yard, searching for sow bugs and other invertebrates.

Winter brings changes to their foraging strategies. They'll occasionally abandon the safety of the forest to join robin flocks searching for earthworms on lawns. They also include more seeds in their winter diet, attracting them to seed and suet feeders.

Varied Thrushes often feed on the fruits of our local madrones; in fact, it's quite possible thrushes have planted many of the madrones you encounter in the woods.

By mid April, most Varied Thrush have left Whidbey for their summer breeding homes. So why are we highlighting them in this month's *Shorelines*? There have been a handful of tantalizing clues pointing to possible breeding here on the island. Certainly, the Hoypus Point area of Deception Pass State Park has the requisite habitat for breeding. Please contact Whidbey Audubon if you see or hear a Varied Thrush in the late-May through early-August time period!

Varied Thrush is currently listed as a species of least concern, yet there are warning signs due to forest fragmentation on their breeding grounds. Many birds are also killed in window strikes on their wintering ranges. They're rarely caught by predators; their cryptic coloration and ability to retire quickly into heavy cover protect them well. They're most vulnerable as eggs and young in the nest. Steller's Jays and red squirrels take a heavy



Photo by Martha Ellis

Varied Thrush

Dan's Blog: *Meanwhile, What's This Hanging from a Tree?*

from *Upside Down*, #442, March 3, 2021; pedersenwrites.blogspot.com/2021/03/442-upside-down.html

Dan's Blog is usually published on Saturday mornings. Click the red text to see the blog. If you'd like to be added to Dan's email list to receive the link to the latest post each week, email to [Dan Pedersen](mailto:Dan.Pedersen@pedersenwrites.com) by clicking his name in red.

Notwithstanding February's hail and snow, the days are warming and nature is looking ahead to spring. This week Kate Poss asked if I knew what bird made this hanging sock nest. She and her husband, Bill, came upon it when they

were out walking.

This seems upside down to me. Most birds build their nests from the bottom up.

I've never found one of these personally, but was pretty sure it was a Bushtit nest. In fact my blog partner, Craig Johnson, happens to have a wonderful narrated video about bushtits on his website, which shows them building a nest like this in his yard.

"Most people who offer suet during fall and winter months have witnessed a swarm or flock of Bushtits engulf the entire feeder," Craig said, "but their natural diet consists of tiny insects, spiders and, at times, seeds. Listening to Bushtits chatter back-and-forth will bring a smile to anyone's face as they search for and glean insects from underbrush."



Screen capture from Craig Johnson's video, *Puget Sound Backyard Birds*

Bushtit fledglings snuggle together on a branch between feedings.

The tiny birds keep on the move.

"I've only seen these birds at rest when taking in a spot of winter-time sun or tired fledglings in need of a



Photo by Bill Poss

Bushtit nest.

"nap," Craig said. "Often, kinglets and chickadees may join a foraging flock, but all go their separate ways come spring, when birds begin to pair up to raise families. As with wrens and other small birds, Bushtits typically have two broods each year, if food and conditions are right. Bushtits mate for life, at least much of it."

What's especially fascinating about Bushtits is the way they help each other.

"Most birders know a breeding pair of American Crows often receive aid from their previous year's brood. In other words, their "teenagers" help them in raising the new offspring. Interesting is the fact that Bushtits may also receive help from other bushtits, but not necessarily from their own gene pool. A video I captured revealed more than a single pair entering and leaving the nest opening.

"A Bushtit nest is something to behold, a real work of art and engineering! As with hummingbirds, spider silk is the

Varied Thrush, from [page 7](#)

toll on both. Information on survivorship from egg to fledging was unavailable.

Varied Thrush probably has more unofficial common names than any other of Whidbey's bird species. These include Alaska Robin, Rain Thrush, Mountain Thrush and Oregon Robin. Call it what you will, *Ixoreus naevius* is among the most interesting and attractive species of North American thrushes.

— Steve Ellis



Photo by Martha Ellis

A suitable ending, the south end of a north-bound Varied Thrush.

Dan's Blog, see [page 9](#)

Dan's Blog, from page 8

“glue” that holds plant down and other materials together. Species like Bullock’s Orioles also construct a sock-like, hanging nest, but it is amazing to watch tiny Bushtits build such an elaborate home.



Screen capture from Craig Johnson's video, *Puget Sound Backyard Birds*

The bird on the left is a “leaner.”

“If you can get close enough, you will notice females have pale yellow irises, while males have brown. Otherwise, they are monomorphic — they share the same plumage coloring.”

Nesting season for Bushtits starts about mid-March, but some nest construction starts earlier in February. Whether the nest Bill and Kate Poss found is a new nest or one from a previous season, we should know pretty soon. Bushtits generally don't reuse old nests, so any activity with birds entering and leaving it will indicate a new nest.

— Dan Pedersen

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Whidbey Audubon Society

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

Meetings are conducted virtually this year using ZOOM, register at www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org

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Thursday, April 8

7 to 8:30 p.m. via Zoom

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Western Washington: Identification and Natural History with Dennis Paulson

Class series April 12, 19 and 26

Birding by Ear with Whitney Neufeld-Kaiser