



The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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JANUARY MEETING – PRESENTED ON ZOOM (no in-person attendance)

"A Bird's Eye View: Skagit Land Trust and the March Point Heronry"

Presented by: Anne Winkes and Stacy Dahl, Skagit Land Trust

Tuesday, January 10th at 7:00 pm

March Point herons are very sensitive to humans; flushing from their nests if anyone comes near. As a result, most observations of the heronry during the breeding and nesting season have been done from outside the heronry. This year, following placement of three wildlife cameras within the heronry, volunteers were able to observe within the heronry itself. Camera views have expanded understanding of the herons. Using photos captured from the heron cams, Anne will show us what life was like for the herons during the 2022 breeding and nesting season. Stacy will provide background on Skagit Land Trust, the history of the heronry, and Community Science opportunities with the Trust.



Anne Winkes is a community science volunteer who has been observing Great Blue Herons as part of Skagit Land Trust's heronry monitoring program since 2013. For the past four years she has observed at the March Point heronry. *Stacy Dahl* is Volunteer and Education Programs Coordinator at Skagit Land Trust. She coordinates the Trust's Community Science volunteer programs, including monitoring activity at the March Point heronry.

This month's meeting will be a virtual (remote) meeting on Zoom ONLY. To attend the Zoom event, please register at: <https://bit.ly/SASJan1023>. Preregistration is required and please only one Zoom registrant per household. After you register, you will receive an email with the link to sign in at the time of the event. Questions? Contact programs@skagitaudubon.org.

NOTES: If you missed the Nov. 8th Presentation "Using Birds as Indicators of Habitat Objectives" by Phyllis Reed, U.S Forest Service North Zone Wildlife Biologist, it may be viewed at the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-yqltXKLIU>.

Additionally, a link to the YouTube recording of the Dec. 13th Holiday Photo Program will be made available in the coming weeks.

ABOUT SKAGIT AUDUBON: Skagit Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. General membership meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 7 pm. Some meetings will be presented on Zoom only. Others will be hybrid meetings on Zoom and in-person at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, 10441 Bayview-Edison Rd., Mt. Vernon. Check the monthly Flyer for upcoming meeting details. The board of directors meets on the first Tuesday of each month, September through June, at 7 pm. Skagit Audubon membership provides a local chapter affiliation and newsletter, the Skagit Flyer, for individuals who want all their funds to benefit their local chapter. The Skagit Flyer is produced monthly from September through June and full color issues are available at: www.skagitaudubon.org/newsletter. Unless noted, all images, drawings, clip art, etc. appearing in The Skagit Flyer are in the public domain. We reserve the right to edit.

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Hospitality: Pamela Maxwell
Newsletter Distribution: John Edison

In response to the COVID-19 virus, some of our general meetings are being held at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center with an option to attend via Zoom, while others will be available on Zoom only. Please check the monthly program description for meeting details. As with our hikes and field trips, only vaccinated, symptom-free individuals should attend meetings in person. Please visit our website: www.skagitaudubon.org for updates.

AVIAN INFLUENZA IN SKAGIT COUNTY

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in Washington and Oregon. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) also confirms that AI is present in Whatcom and Skagit Counties. There have been hundreds of bird mortalities overall with some showing up in the snow goose population here in the Skagit and Samish areas.

Following WDFW's recommendations, Skagit Audubon recommends that you do not handle or collect dead birds in the fields this winter. If you must collect a bird please wear gloves and bag and dispose of the bird appropriately. For additional information on avian influenza please visit: wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/bird-flu

MEET THE BEWICK'S TUNDRA SWAN (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) by Jeff Sinker

Named after British illustrator and wood engraver Thomas Bewick, the Bewick's Tundra Swan is the smallest swan found on the North American continent. It is considered the Eurasian subspecies of the North American Tundra Swan and is distinguished by the considerable



amount of yellow on the beak. Although often found on the Aleutian and Bering Sea islands in Alaska, this swan's primary range generally extends from the Kola Peninsula (northern coast of Russia along the White Sea and extending to the northernmost tip of Norway) east throughout arctic Siberia and then wintering throughout Western Europe, China, Korea, Japan and south of the Caspian Sea.

They prefer freshwater lakes, ponds, coastal shallow pools, and wide, slow-moving rivers with emergent vegetation, low-lying sedge grasses, pondweeds, and similar habitats. In winter, they use coastal areas adjacent to agricultural fields, which

are a major winter food source. Breeding pairs arrive on nesting grounds from early March through late June and renew their pair bonds. These swans remain paired until one mate dies, and the surviving swan may wait years to take another mate or may never mate again.

Beginning in mid-October, family groups migrate to their winter grounds. These swans are social when not breeding and can form large flocks. They feed by day and roost on open water at night. A single Bewick's Swan has found its way to Fir Island and is mingling with a small mixed flock of Snow Geese and Trumpeter Swans.

For more information on the Bewick's Swan, please visit: www.beautyofbirds.com/bewicks-swans.

HIKING

Skagit Audubon is pleased to offer scheduled hikes. Please visit our website: www.skagitaudubon.org/activities/hikes for full details on the hikes. All hikers must have a current signed liability release form (available on the website) on file prior to participating in any Skagit Audubon hike. Please be prepared to follow current COVID pandemic safety protocols. Questions? Contact Tom Ozretich, tom.ozretich@gmail.com; 360.424.8466 *Means Wash. State Discover Pass required.



- Jan. 4:** Interurban Trail*
- Jan. 11:** Sugar Loaf and Mt. Erie
- Jan. 18:** Fragrance Lake*
- Jan. 25:** The Tommy Thompson Trail (The TTT)
- Feb. 1:** Whatcom Falls & Creek, Big Rock Loop

REMEMBERING JOAN MELCHER



In late November, Joan Melcher's passing came as sudden and sad news to Skagit Audubon's board and members. Organizer of the chapter's hiking program for almost three decades, Joan served on the Skagit Audubon board for many years. Her knowledge of this region's numerous trails and her flair for organization made Joan the ideal person to keep this popular program active for so long. Through her efforts, many, many people became acquainted with each other and with the wealth of public lands we enjoy. At the same time, her efforts brought many new members to Skagit Audubon. Joan and her husband Duane helped found the Skagit, Whatcom, Island Trail Maintenance Organization (SWITMO) and were great advocates for the Pacific Northwest Trail, including successfully pushing for its designation as a National Scenic Trail. Each was President of the Pacific Northwest Trail Association for six years.

As a board member Joan also faithfully attended to other Skagit Audubon matters. She was often the quickest to review draft comment letters on a wide range of conservation issues and was always a strong voice for the Audubon mission of protecting and restoring wildlife habitat for birds and other creatures. Joan's life exemplified selfless dedication to public service. We and all our community miss her deeply. As long-time Audubon hiking participant Terry Slotemaker said, "Hers was truly a life well-lived." Photo by Ronan Ellis.

FIELD TRIPS – by Colleen Shannon

Beginning birders and friends are always welcome on Skagit Audubon field trips. Please be prepared for the weather with suitable clothing and bring field guides, binoculars, and spotting scopes (if you have them). Please note specific COVID guidelines in each field trip description. Questions? Contact Colleen Shannon, fieldtrips@skagitaudubon.org.



Saturday, January 14, 2023 – 12:00 until 2:30 approx. (depends on weather)

Port Susan Bay Nature Conservancy property, Stanwood; Trip Leader: Jeff Osmundson

Winter is a great time to study waterfowl and look for unusual passerines and raptors. Port Susan Bay is a salt marsh estuary and pond just south of the Skagit Delta. We have the potential to see thousands of snow geese, ducks, and trumpeter swans in the estuary. There are usually lots of eagles and hawks, and if we are really lucky, a short-eared owl sometimes works the area. We will have our typical winter high tides which means you should bring binoculars and spotting scope (optional) to see out to the bay. Dress for the weather. It can be very windy on Port Susan Bay. We will be walking approx. one mile each way on the dike and this trip is not accessible.

Directions and Parking: From I-5 (exit 212) to WA-532 W in Snohomish County. Continue on WA-532 West Turn left onto 267th St NW and then right onto Pioneer Hwy and in 1.4 miles turn right onto Boe Road and continue to the end. Plan to park at the end of Boe Road.

Reserve your spot: Please enter your information here to register:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0D4CA5AE29A7FFC25-port>.

Wednesday, January 25, 2023 – 9 am until 12:00 pm

Ala Spit and Dugualla Bay Preserve, Deception Pass Area; Trip Leader: Alice Turner, aliceT2@msn.com

South of Deception Pass and toward the north end of Skagit Bay are two restoration sites that offer interesting birding. Ala Spit was restored as part of the Island County Salmon Recovery Program. A constantly changing, dynamic environment shaped by winter storms and tides, Ala Spit offers views of Hope Island Marine State Park, Skagit Island Marine State Park, Mt. Baker, and Mt. Erie. We may see eagles, great blue herons, scoters, grebes, loons, cormorants, mergansers, oystercatchers, turnstones, and more. Be prepared to walk about 1-mile round trip, plus walking over and around some logs.

Dugualla Bay Preserve is managed by Whidbey Camano Land Trust. The preserve includes both fresh and saltwater marshes that attract a variety of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl. A small parking lot leads to a very short dike trail, and one can also walk along the saltwater shore.

Meet 9:00 at the Deception Pass State Park West Beach parking lot, where we can arrange carpools if wished. To get there, cross Deception Pass bridge, turn right to enter the state park, and follow the main road to the ocean. We can start the trip by looking for birds over the water by Deception Pass, then drive to Ala Spit.

Dress for the weather. This is not an accessible trip. To indicate you plan to attend and to provide contact information in case trip plans change, please sign up at:

[https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F4CA5AA2EA7F8C61-alaspit#/.](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F4CA5AA2EA7F8C61-alaspit#/)

CONSERVATION – by Tim Manns

Washington State Legislature

The State Legislature's 2023 session runs from January 9th to April 23rd. In odd years, our legislators write the two-year state budget. Thus, there will be both policy and funding bills with implications for Audubon's priorities. Skagit Audubon is one of 25 Audubon chapters in Washington State. Audubon Washington, the state office, chooses priorities for the legislative session. For an overview of these for the 2023 session, go to [Advocacy | Audubon Washington](#) (scroll down to "Advocacy News Feed" and the article "Speak Up for the Birds this Legislative Session".) For more detail, see item number three on page two of the Skagit Audubon Conservation Notes for December 2022 (<https://skagitaudubon.org/conservation/notes>). We anticipate there will be weekly updates on the progress of these priorities during the legislative session. Watch for these at [Advocacy | Audubon Washington](#).

To track the progress of a given bill it's helpful to know the bill's number. As of this writing in mid-December we do not yet know the numbers associated with Audubon Washington's legislative priorities. I will send those out when they are available plus links to more specific information about Audubon's priorities.

At Audubon Washington's "Take Action and Advocate Effectively" web page ([Take Action and Advocate Effectively | Audubon Washington](#)) you can sign up for action alerts sent when legislators especially need to hear from Audubon members across the state or in specific districts. On that page there are also links to information about how the legislative process works and much other useful information for engaging with our state elected officials. Rather than waiting for an action alert, you can always comment on bills by going to [Bill Information \(wa.gov\)](#) and typing in the bill's number. You can read the draft bill and related reports, see where the bill is in the legislative process, and indicate whether you support the measure.

Environmental Priorities Coalition

Audubon Washington is one of more than twenty conservation groups participating in the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC). The coalition members collectively focus on a few priority bills each year during the state legislative session. As of this writing in mid-December there is preliminary information about the EPC priorities, most of which overlap those of Audubon Washington: [Environmental Priorities Coalition - Washington Environmental Council \(wecprotects.org\)](#). You can sign up to receive a weekly update on the progress of the EPC priorities and other relevant bills at [Bills to Watch - Washington Environmental Council \(wecprotects.org\)](#). Another source of updates and alerts on conservation matters during the legislative session is Bellingham-based RE Sources, which sends occasional alerts and provides tracking of bills. Sign up at [Join RE Sources' legislative action team! \(p2a.co\)](#).

Many important policies and laws relevant to Audubon's mission are enacted at the state level. Relatively few citizens communicate with their state legislators, who, for the most part, do want to hear from you and will take into consideration what you have to say. We cannot take for granted that birds and other wildlife - or people - will have the conditions they need. Let your legislators know where you stand.

FIELD SIGHTINGS – by Ann Skinner (will return in February)

It's not too early to think about visiting spring migration hotspots on the Washington Coast. Neil O'Hara shares his experiences from 2022 in a two-part article (Part One is below and Part Two will appear in the February Flyer) – enjoy!

GRAY'S HARBOR (Part One) – by Neil O'Hara

Peak shorebird viewing at Gray's Harbor occurs in late April and early May. I recommend a base in Aberdeen, from where you can spend one day focused on north shore locations and a second on the south shore.

For best results, you need to know not only where to go, but when the tide is right at each location. On my north shore day, the jetty at Point Brown in Ocean Shores had a low tide of -0.91 feet at 8:42 a.m., so I started there at about 9:30. Near the jetty, I saw American brown pelicans, pelagic and double-crested cormorants fishing, three gull species and Caspian terns—but no wandering tattlers or black turnstones, which are often seen on the jetty rocks. The shorebirds were a short walk north up the beach: sanderlings, western sandpipers, semipalmated plovers and a lone killdeer.

By 11 a.m., the tide was still only +1.2 feet, which meant the birds would be too far away at Bill's Spitt, my next shorebird hotspot. To pass the time, I visited the Oyhut Wildlife Area, known for the waterfowl found on a freshwater lagoon close to the beach. My list included nine duck species and several passerines but few shorebirds: one killdeer, one semipalmated plover and one greater yellowlegs.

The drive to Bill's Spitt meanders through a residential neighborhood to the end of a cul-de-sac with no formal parking area. A small "Beach Access" sign partly obscured by a tree branch at the entrance to the turnaround circle is the only indication you have found the right place. A short trail leads to steps down to the beach, for which waterproof footwear is essential. When I arrived at 12:30 p.m., the tide at Point Brown was up to +5 feet but I still had to walk at least 300 yards to get close to birds foraging at the water's edge. These included short-billed dowitchers, dunlin and black-bellied plovers, but the highlights were 35 whimbrels and 18 marbled godwits.

Leaving Ocean Shores, I drove back to Hoquiam to check out the sewage treatment ponds. In addition to 11 waterfowl species, a couple of gulls and a handful of passerines, I found one dunlin, one least sandpiper, three western sandpipers and five short-billed dowitchers. Timing at these ponds is not tide dependent, of course.

My final stop was at the nearby Gray's Harbor National Wildlife refuge, which I reached at 3:45 p.m., just 10 minutes after a +8.79-foot-high tide. The optimum time is two hours either side of high tide, which pushes the shorebirds much closer to the boardwalk viewing area; at low tide the basin runs dry, and the birds disappear. Huge numbers of dunlin and western sandpipers hang out here—perhaps 5,000 or more of each that day. I also found 200 semipalmated plovers, 30 least sandpipers, three dowitchers, two black-bellied plovers and two greater yellowlegs.

**SKAGIT AUDUBON SOCIETY
PO BOX 1101
MOUNT VERNON, WA 98273**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Skagit Audubon Society Membership Form

Membership: ____ \$20/one year **OR** ____ \$40/two years • ____ New **OR** ____ Renewal

Additionally, I wish to donate \$_____ to Skagit Audubon Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Please designate my donation to: ____ General ____ Education ____ Scholarship Fund.

Payment: (1) Pay online with a credit card or PayPal (see skagitaudubon.org for details) **OR** (2) Mail this form & your check to: Skagit Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1101, Mt. Vernon WA 98273-1101

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Email: _____

By providing your email address and those of any household members, you/they consent to SAS's use of electronic transmission, such as email and website postings, for notices about SAS business. You may revoke this consent at any time on written request to the Secretary of SAS.

Membership includes those members of your household whose names & emails you provide to us:

Name: _____ Email: _____

(If you have more than one additional member of your household who wishes to become a member of SAS, please provide their name(s) and email address(es) to membership@skagitaudubon.org)

I want to be involved in (check all that apply): Education ____ Conservation ____ Field Trips ____ Hiking ____ Other ____

(To join National Audubon Society, a separate membership, please visit: www.audubon.org)