



The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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OCTOBER MEETING – PRESENTED IN-PERSON AND ON ZOOM

"Protecting Coastal Western Screech-Owls of Vancouver Island"

Presented by: Toby St. Clair, MSc, R.P.Bio

Tuesday, October 11th at 7 pm

Please join Skagit Audubon Society for our hybrid member meeting at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, 10441 Bayview-Edison Rd., Mt. Vernon, or attend virtually on Zoom (see below for Zoom registration details).

Western Screech-Owls have been disappearing from coastal British Columbia for decades, yet we still don't know why.

Toby St. Clair is a wildlife biologist focused on improving our understanding of biological systems to enable a more sustainable relationship between our society and the environment. He has conducted a wide range of studies in coastal and terrestrial ecosystems. More recently, he has also applied his knowledge of experimental design and nocturnal systems to dig into the ecology of coastal Western Screech-Owls.



In-person attendees must be fully vaccinated and please do not attend if you have any symptoms of illness. Masks are optional unless guidance from the Wash. State Dept. of Health changes.

If you plan to attend the event virtually on Zoom, please register for this Zoom event at: <https://bit.ly/SASOct1122>. Preregistration for the Zoom event is required. 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.

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 at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, 10441 Bayview-Edison Rd., Mt. Vernon on the second Tuesday of each month, September through June. Social/7 pm and Program/7:30 pm. The board of directors meets at the same location 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
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In response to the COVID-19 virus, our member meetings are once again being held in person at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center; but those who would prefer the option of attending via Zoom will still be able to do so. Hikes and birding field trips are being organized for vaccinated individuals and participants need to comply with the activity leader's guidelines. Please visit our website: www.skagitaudubon.org for updates.

HIKING – by Joan Melcher

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 Joan Melcher, jdmelcher@comcast.net or 360.424.0407. *Means US Forest Service parking permit required.



- Oct. 5:** Ruby Arm
- Oct. 12:** Lake 22*
- Oct. 19:** Baker Lake Trail (from the south)*
- Oct. 26:** North Chuckanut Mountain
- Nov. 2:** Little Cranberry Lake

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, October 8th – 8 am until 5 pm

The Big Sit

Wiley Slough, Conway (Skagit Wildlife Area-Headquarters' Unit)

Annual community birding event – full details on Page 4

Thursday, October 27th – 9 am until around noon

Washington Park and Ship Harbor, Anacortes

Leader: Jeff Osmundson

Washington Park is both scenic and a good place to see Harlequin Ducks, Black Oystercatchers, Marbled Murrelets, Pacific Wrens, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and many other birds on the water or in the forest. Plan for a .5 mile walk to Green Point as we look for shoreline and forest birds. We'll then drive to the end of Edwards Way and walk the Ship Harbor Trail. Beginning birders are encouraged to come! Accessibility is very good for both Washington Park and Ship Harbor. Bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one. Meet at the parking lot at the beginning of the Washington Park loop drive. Dress for the weather, anticipating wind along the shore. We request that participants be fully vaccinated for Covid 19. Please sign up on Signup Genius so that we can notify you with changes.

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

Leader: Jeff Osmundson, education@skagitaudubon.org

THE BIG SIT – October 8th – 8 am until 5 pm

The Big Sit is a free community birding event open to individuals and teams all over the world. Mark your calendars as this year **The Big Sit for Skagit Audubon** will be held on Saturday, October 8th, from 8 am-5 pm. For the past couple of years, Skagit Audubon Society (SAS) has fielded Big Sit teams at Wiley Slough (Skagit Wildlife Area-Headquarters Unit).

Rotating cadres of observers identified 50 species from a single location over a ten-hour period! Generous SAS members took the initiative to pledge \$1 per species seen by the team in support of the Skagit Audubon Society Environmental Conservation Scholarships. Through the generosity of SAS members, we raised about \$1,000 each year which enabled Skagit Audubon Society to award additional scholarships.

We will be at Wiley Slough again this year. You are also encouraged to conduct your own Big Sit and participate from wherever you want – backyard, park, public wildlife area, etc. Visit www.thebigsit.org to learn more about the event. To volunteer for shifts, to sign up for birding your own backyard, or to donate, please contact Colleen Shannon at fieldtrips@skagitaudubon.org. Colleen will be at Wiley Slough on Oct. 8th from 8 am-5 pm and teams will sign up for two-hour shifts. Also, visitors are welcome to stop by.

MEET THE BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER – by Jeff Sinker

Our largest plover, at 11.5" tall with a wingspan of 29", the Black-bellied Plover can be found worldwide on open mudflats, beaches, fields, and tundra. In typical plover behavior when foraging, these birds will run a few steps and then pause to look or listen for prey like insects that they pluck from the ground. They will also probe for hidden worms and mollusks, but they don't probe deeply into the mud because



although their bills are stout, they are short. Their large eyes help them to spot prey when they are feeding during low-light hours or on moonlit nights.

Black-bellied Plovers nest on both dry and wet tundra in the northernmost high-latitude areas of North America and Eurasia. They are ground nesters and will try to lure predators away from the nest site by pretending to have a broken wing. Both parents tend to the young (3-4 eggs are laid and incubated for 23-

27 days); and once hatched, the downy youngsters leave the nest within one day and feed themselves. Both parents tend to the young for a few days and the female may leave before the young are two weeks old.

Black-bellied Plovers spend most of their year along coastlines, mudflats, and beaches although they also use nearby agricultural fields (both during non-breeding seasons and on migration). Their non-breeding plumage (August-April) is mottled grayish but their mournful clear whistled "pee-a-wee" gives them away if they are blending into the brown tones of the mudflats. They can be found along the coastlines in Western Washington during the non-breeding months of August-April. Photo credit: Matt Davis/Macaulay Library.

CONSERVATION – by Tim Manns

October marks the return of the abundant birds of winter from their northern and inland breeding grounds. The sound and sight of snow goose flocks high overhead confirm the season's change as tens of thousands fly in from Russia's Wrangel Island. Tundra Swans, Red-throated Loons and many other species reappear after nesting on the Arctic Slope. Trumpeter Swans and ducks of many kinds that summered on northern ponds and lakes touch down now on Skagit fields and bays. The five falcon species fortunate birders can spot and the varied subspecies and color morphs of Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks will soon arrive on Samish and Skagit Flats.

All this avian variety and abundance reminds us of what's at stake when the list of potential new commercial airport sites includes Samish and Skagit Flats, essential places on which these birds depend. Skagit Audubon and other chapters and organizations plus many individuals have written the Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission ([Commercial Aviation Coordinating Commission | WSDOT \(wa.gov\)](#)) expressing their concern, their dismay even, that the Commission's criteria even allowed these sites to appear on the list. October is when the Commission is to narrow the list to two sites. Early next year they will recommend a single site



to the state legislature for eventual development of a large new airport west of the Cascades at the scale of Sea-Tac. Picture Sea-Tac plunked down on Samish Flats.

This whole exercise of the CACC, at the legislature's direction, appears premised on the notion that the future will be a continuation of the present with ever increasing demand for air travel and freight,

quite a stretch in these changing times. It was with good reason that National Audubon long ago included such places as Samish and Skagit Flats in designating two Important Bird Areas ([Samish/Padilla Bays | Audubon Important Bird Areas](#) and [Skagit Bay | Audubon Important Bird Areas](#)). The CACC's comment period is now closed, but it is still possible to send a message to the Commission's communications person, Christina Crea (CACC@wsdot.wa.gov). The Commission should hear from as many people as possible who know the real value and importance of these places.

There are other important issues ongoing but with no significant changes to report as of this writing in mid-September. To read about these issues Skagit Audubon is following, see the September Conservation Notes on the chapter's website at <https://skagitaudubon.org/conservation/notes>. We will continue to hammer home to our County Commissioners, state legislators, and other elected officials and agency staff that birds and other wildlife and the habitat they need are an essential part of Skagit County and are not to be ignored or shunted aside as these public servants pursue other priorities. The active participation of Audubon members in asserting this perspective is essential. We can't assume that our elected officials, even those who have spent their entire lives here, know, understand, or care about the natural values of this place where we all live. It's up to us to protect these places. Now let's all go out and enjoy some great fall birding in the Skagit!

FIELD SIGHTINGS – by Ann Skinner

This column reports a summary of selected sightings. Rare sightings should be submitted with detailed written documentation and if possible, a photograph. A second person to verify rare sightings is encouraged. Do not hesitate to contact any observer to help document unusual sightings.

Please submit your sightings to birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org

For recent updates on bird sightings, check out **ABA Tweeters** and **Skagit County Ebird List** on the SAS website (Birding menu, Bird Sightings submenu).

PIGEONS and DOVES

Band-tailed Pigeon (10) Stanwood area 9/6 (MS/JS)

STILTS and AVOCETS

American Avocet (2) (FIFR) 9/3 (LM), (MS/JS), (SAS)

SHOREBIRDS

Whimbrel (2) (FIFR) 9/5 (MS/JS)

PELICANS

American White Pelican (100+) Padilla Bay 9/4 (LM), (MS/JS)

HAWKS, EAGLES and ALLIES

Female Cooper's Hawk (1) at birdbath, E Fidalgo Bay area 8/18 (RW)
Cooper's Hawk adult pair, E Fidalgo Bay area 9/4 (RW)

OWLS

Great Horned Owl (2) "duet hooting" E Fidalgo Bay area 8/23 (RW)

VIREOS

Red-eyed Vireo (11) Marblemount boat launch 8/27 (RM)

SWALLOWS

Tree swallow (1) Marblemount boat launch 8/27 (RM)

THRUSHES

Swainson's Thrush (1) Stanwood area 9/5 (MS/JS)

CATBIRDS

Gray Catbird (2) Marblemount boat launch 8/27 (RM)

PIPITS

American Pipit (1) Healy Rd. 9/9 (GB)

WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler (2) E. Fidalgo Bay area 8/15 & 9/4 (RW)
Wilson's Warbler (2) E Fidalgo Bay area 8/15 & 9/4 (RW)

TANAGERS and ALLIES

Western Tanagers, E. Fidalgo Bay area 8/19 (RW)

(GB) Gary Bletsch; **(FIFR)** Fir Island Farm Reserve aka Hayton Reserve; **(LM)** Libby Mills; **(JS)** Jeff Sinker; **(MS)** Mary Sinker; **(SAS)** Skagit Audubon Society Field Trip; **(RW)** Regan Weeks; **(RM)** Ryan Merrill

OLYMPIC COAST NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY is one of the nation's most treasured ocean areas, and home to a rich abundance of marine mammals, seabirds, fish, and thriving invertebrate communities. The sanctuary is also rich in cultural resources, with over 200 documented historical shipwrecks and the vibrant contemporary cultures of the Hoh Tribe, Makah Tribe, Quileute Tribe, and the Quinault Indian Nation.

The United States Postal Service has debuted a new series of Forever stamps showcasing the abundant wildlife and diverse ecosystems that can be found throughout the National Marine Sanctuary System. The Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act, which established a framework for designating national marine sanctuaries, was signed into law on Oct. 23, 1972. Each one of these sanctuaries plays an important role in safeguarding breeding and feeding habitats for numerous species of migrating and resident seabirds, shorebirds, ducks, waterfowl, marine mammals, fish, and the plant and invertebrate communities they depend upon.



For more info or to order, visit the USPS online store at: store.usps.com.

FROM YOUR EDITOR – by Mary Sinker

As I write this, the transition to fall is beginning. The nights and mornings are cooler, the days are warm but not hot, hiking trails are dry, fall shorebird migration is underway, and the leaves are starting to fall. Oh yes – those leaves – what to do with all those leaves!

Well, simply put – leave the leaves – or leave as many leaves as you can on the ground. During the winter and into early spring, leaves provide important habitat for numerous insect and butterfly species and in turn food sources for many bird species. When I see a Spotted Towhee or Varied Thrush foraging through leaves piled along one of our pathways or on top of a garden bed, I've helped provide a high-protein food source because bugs use the leaves as



shelter, food for themselves, and a place to lay their eggs. The bugs are drawn to the leaves, the birds are drawn to the bugs in the leaves, and the cycle goes on.

Around our house, my husband loves to use his leaf blower, which is welcome when leaves accumulate on the sidewalk (a hazard), and I prefer to have them accumulate on the garden beds or the brush/shrub borders along pathways. No problem, and the reward is watching sparrows, thrushes, jays, doves, and even flickers search for tasty morsels.

Enjoy the fall – and the leaves – the birds will thank you!

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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Join or renew online at: www.skagitaudubon.org/about-us/join-us

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

Mail form and payment to: **Skagit Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1101, Mt. Vernon WA 98273-1101**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/: _____

ZIP: _____ Phone: _____

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)