

# The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society  
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

Find us on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/skagitaudubon](https://www.facebook.com/skagitaudubon)  
Volume 39, No. 10 [www.skagitaudubon.org](https://www.skagitaudubon.org) December 2020

\*\*\*\*\*

## DECEMBER MEETING – PRESENTED ON ZOOM

*Skagit Audubon Holiday Member Photo Show*

**Presented by You!**

**Tuesday, December 8, 7:00 PM**

Please join us from the comfort of your home for our annual December Member Photo Program. The program will be a bit different this year, as it will be presented virtually on Zoom. Photos submitted by our members will be the stars of the show!

The December SAS member meeting will precede the photo presentation.

**Register for this Zoom event at the following link:**

<https://bit.ly/SASdec>



Preregistration is required and is limited to 100 attendees. Please only one registrant per household. After you register, you will receive an email with the link to sign in at the time of the Zoom event. Questions? Contact [carlajhelm@comcast.net](mailto:carlajhelm@comcast.net).

## WDFW SWAN HOTLINE ACTIVATED

From now through the end of March, 2021, anyone observing or finding a sick, injured or dead Trumpeter or Tundra Swan should call the hotline number (24/7): 360.466.4345 ext. 266. Please be prepared to leave a short detailed message, including your name, phone number, location and condition of the swan(s). WDFW stresses the importance of not approaching or handling the swan(s).

---

**Due to the continuing emergency response to the COVID-19 virus, our in-person member meetings, field trips and hikes, and most other activities have been cancelled until further notice. This includes the offer of personal field trips for future donations to Skagit Audubon Society of \$100 or more. Please visit our website for updates.**

---

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE** –Greetings members and friends of Skagit Audubon,

I hope this message for December finds you well and safe. The election is over but Covid is not. We continue to see our numbers go up and threat increase for some of our at-risk populations. I'll not dwell on the Covid part of where we are but move on to how we can help entertain ourselves and participate in community science at the same time.

As the days grow short and it is cooler outside it is easy to think that bird watching is over. But, we have some great winter bird populations here in western Washington and I'll bet several are in your back yard (or deck or patio).

Project Feeder Watch is a Cornell Lab offering that lets you keep track of your backyard birds and enter them into the database for Cornell Lab. It does cost a small amount but in return you get bird identification sheets and instructions. See Project Feeder Watch at <https://feederwatch.org/join-or-renew/>. Skagit Audubon member Pam Pritzl has been doing this project for over 28 years and finds it very enjoyable. Pam was one of the winners of the Big Sit backyard contest by identifying a fox sparrow in her yard.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is coming up in February. Anyone can participate in this Audubon sponsored event. From the Audubon website:

*The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.*

You can also create an eBird hotspot in your own backyard to keep track of what you see. It is called a "Yard List" and can be found on the eBird page marked "Explore". It is a fun way to log the species you see and keep track of anything unusual. Last year Skagit Audubon member Tim Manns found a mountain chickadee in Mount Vernon by simply looking out his window. What can you find?

The summer edition of Living Bird, the Cornell Lab's magazine, had some tips for birding from home. One great one included taking a dedicated 15 minute birding break. This is a great idea if you are working from home, binge watching a series or just reading your favorite novel. Take a break and look outside to see what may be in the yard or at the feeder. It will be refreshing for you and help community science if you enter it into eBird.

Until next month, stay safe and wash your hands.

Jeff Osmundson  
President

## **Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count**

At this writing in mid-November, Skagit Audubon plans to hold the Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 26. Skagit County is currently in Covid Phase 2, limiting outdoor gatherings of non-household members to 5 or fewer people, staying at least 6 feet apart. Count participants must follow all public health requirements. There won't be carpooling or sharing spotting scopes or binoculars, and there will be no in person gathering to compare results at the end of the day. If changes in Skagit County's pandemic situation necessitate further restrictions which make the count infeasible, it will be cancelled and participants will be notified. Following the necessary public health measures means that the count, the 43<sup>rd</sup> for this CBC circle, will not be able to use the help of as many volunteers as in the past (71 in 2019). Please direct questions about the count to Tim Manns ([conservation@skagitaudubon.org](mailto:conservation@skagitaudubon.org)).



## FROM YOUR EDITOR – by Mary Sinker



It's that time of year when all sorts of decorative bird feeding ideas pop up in catalogs and on shelves in stores catering to bird lovers. Bird seed ornaments shaped like stockings, stars, trees or bells, and seed wreaths sporting beautiful bows, decorate our yards and feed our feathered friends.

An easy and fun project for adults and children alike is assembling your own holiday wreath. Straw or grapevine wreaths hold together well and can be used several times (assuming raccoons don't do them in) over the winter months. Coat the wreath base with peanut butter. Now comes the really fun part! Adding assorted seeds, dried fruits and/or nuts lets you customize the wreath with the favorite foods your birds enjoy. I recommend assembling this wreath close to where you will hang it since it is a bit messy. The birds will happily eat any leftovers that end up on the ground when you've finished your masterpiece. You may even attract some new avian visitors!

Wishing you a safe and healthy holiday season and see you in 2021!

## Skagit Audubon Offers Remote-learning Opportunities for Area Youths

Although Skagit Audubon has postponed all of our in-person programming due to Covid-19, we want to still promote getting kids outside to enjoy nature and birds. With that in mind, we decided to partner with local libraries to offer remote-learning opportunities for area youths. We provided Burlington Public Library with materials for 30 bilingual take home Junior Birder kits, which included journals, activities, Skagit Audubon patches, and pencils. We also provided the Burlington Public Library and the Anacortes Public Library with multiple pairs of binoculars, field guides, activities, children's books, and maps for permanent check-out kits. In addition to that, we recently conducted a virtual presentation for a large group of 3rd grade students from the Burlington School District on the birds of Skagit Valley. The presentation discussed bird identification, behavior, adaptations, and conservation issues. We hope to do more virtual presentations like this in the near future.



## COMING UP – AUDUBON ADVOCACY DAY – DEC. 9<sup>th</sup>



As mentioned last month, Audubon Washington will hold an advocacy day on December 9<sup>th</sup> to communicate environmental priorities to our state legislators. On December 2<sup>nd</sup> there will be an opportunity to learn about these priorities and related message points. To register, go to [www.birdscan.win](http://www.birdscan.win). Even if you can't participate, resolve to contact your state legislators regularly during the 2021 session, which begins January 11th. Our state senators and representatives really do want to hear from constituents.

Watch for some available avenues in the January Conservation Report.

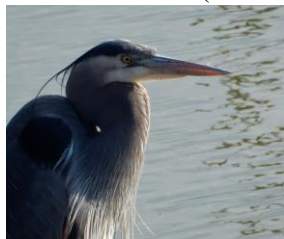
## CONSERVATION REPORT – by Tim Manns

At this writing near mid-November, certain election results remain up in the air, but we can reasonably see some things on the horizon for environmental issues. In their transition planning, the incoming Biden administration has a strong focus on getting the federal government on track addressing climate change in a comprehensive way. National Audubon has called for concerted action since at least 2014 when its research showed that more than half of North American bird species could lose half their current ranges by 2080 due to warming temperatures. In Washington State, with Governor Inslee at the helm and his party the majority in both houses, we'll see continued emphasis on climate legislation even with pandemic-related budget challenges.

In our state, transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Audubon's priorities for environmental legislation will again focus on passing a Clean Fuel Standard as in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. This would support electrification of transportation and require lowering greenhouse gas emissions per unit of transportation fuel. With other conservation groups, Audubon will advocate updating the Growth Management Act. When passed in 1990, the act didn't mention climate change. Including planning for climate resilience in the comprehensive plans of municipalities and counties is one proposed change. During the 1900's, Puget Sound lost almost 80% of its tidal wetlands to agricultural conversion to the detriment of salmon, shorebirds, and more. Protection and restoration of these wetlands is a focus of Audubon's new Puget Sound Conservation Strategy and supports multi-benefit natural solutions to climate resilience.

Here in Skagit County, in late 2020 and in 2021, we'll continue to add our voice in support of wildlife habitat. Many government and non-governmental groups are engaged in restoring salmon habitat along Skagit's rivers, streams, and in estuaries. Audubon weighs in on these projects because of their relevance to our mission. The planned restoration of estuarine wetlands on the "Farmed Island" portion of Skagit Wildlife Area is a current example. We'll continue to speak too for the protection of the wetlands at Anacortes' Ship Harbor Interpretive Preserve with its very high avian diversity.

There are many other continuing issues which Skagit Audubon will track in 2021, expressing our chapter's support for protecting habitat for birds and other wildlife. We'll watch for the next development in the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) plan to manage Marbled Murrelet habitat on state trust lands. Conservation groups have brought suit against DNR, arguing for updating the age-old interpretation of its mandate to produce benefits for the trust beneficiaries (i.e. various public institutions) in managing these public lands. We'll see what DNR does in



reaction to recent concerted criticism of the very inadequate environmental review of the latest proposal for the Cascade Big Bear Mine near Marblemount and the proposals to mine gravel on Fidalgo Island and near the Samish River. We'll see whether the Navy modifies plans for training Growler crews flying from Whidbey Naval Air Station over Olympic National Park's Marbled Murrelet and Spotted Owl habitat, and whether the State Parks & Recreation Commission allows Navy special operations training in 29 state parks. At some point the Skagit County Commissioners will decide whether to improve protection for large heronries against concerted opposition from most Planning Commission members - - and if our optimism for a better outcome in the City of Anacortes is warranted. We'll see if our three County Commissioners, one newly elected, continue to stretch their portfolio to include a role in wildlife management in regards to elk in the Skagit Valley, the potential re-start of grizzly bear restoration planning under a new federal administration, and whatever other such matters arise.

A new year will bring new issues and the continuation of many old ones. What will remain unchanged is Audubon members' connection to this place, its birds and other wild inhabitants, and our readiness to spend time and talent in defense of the place and its wildlife. We'll do this recognizing that people have valued this place for thousands of years, the traditional home of the Salish People, our neighbors and friends. We'll work on environmental issues and pursue all Skagit Audubon's activities realizing that opportunities have not been equal for all and that environmental impacts have often fallen disproportionately on people of color and members of other less represented groups.

In addressing environmental issues, Skagit Audubon benefits from the wide range of experience and expertise in its membership. If there are Audubon issues with which you'd like to get involved, contact Tim Manns at [conservation@skagitaudubon.org](mailto:conservation@skagitaudubon.org). For more about issues, go to "Conservation" on the Skagit Audubon website: [www.skagitaudubon.org](http://www.skagitaudubon.org).



## Meet Some Rare and Secretive Skagit County Birds

**Sharp-tailed Sandpiper:** When this long-distance migrant shows up in Washington, birders get excited, and this fall has been no exception. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers cross the Bering Strait arriving in Alaska in the spring. In the fall some of them, mostly juveniles, migrate down the west coast of Alaska, Canada and Washington. After resting and feeding, they turn west to cross the Pacific Ocean to spend winter in Australia or New Zealand.



Sharp-tails breed in wet tundra and during migration they use coastal marshes and mudflats, moving steadily across the ground while probing for marine invertebrates and picking insects from the surface. During breeding season, males mate with multiple females. Females build the nest and incubate the eggs. After hatching, the young leave the nest within a couple of days and can feed themselves. The female continues to protect them and the young learn to fly in approximately 21 days.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers are usually seen from mid-August to mid-November. Their rufous caps and distinctive white eye-line distinguish them from the more common Pectoral Sandpiper. Photo by Mary Sinker

**Snow Bunting:** Even in winter plumage, male Snow Buntings are still very handsome members of the Sparrow Family. Rare visitors to Skagit County from mid-October through March, Snow Buntings can be found in a variety of habitats with a common preferred food source – seeds. Seeds make up a major part of their diet year-round and farmland, beaches, grassy fields or roadsides are attractive to these birds.



Snow Buntings breed on rocky tundra and their nesting sites require rock piles. When rock piles aren't available, they have been known to nest on buildings or use artificial nests. Females build the nest and incubate the eggs. The male feeds the female while she is incubating the eggs. After hatching, both parents feed the young almost exclusively insects and continue to protect and provide for them after they leave the nest. Adults will also eat large numbers of insects during the summer but never fully abandon their seed-based diet. Photo of Snow Bunting, above right, by Ron Holmes.

**Virginia Rail:** Often heard before (or even if) seen, this very secretive medium-sized year-round resident loves fresh and saltwater marshes with emergent vegetation and flooded areas. Look for them where cattails are present. Although they are most active at dawn and dusk, Virginia Rails can be heard calling or vocalizing at all times of day.



Their long bill lets them probe into mud and shallow water for favorite meal items, including small fish, slugs, earthworms and snails. Virginia Rails also eat seeds and aquatic plants.

Both parents build the nest – including dummy nests – and share incubation duties. The young forage for themselves within a week after hatching and both parents continue to protect and tend them. Wylie Slough and Fir Island Farm (Hayton) are good places to look and listen for Virginia Rails. Photos of Virginia Rails are by Joe Halton (Virginia Rail in water, above) and Ron Holmes (Virginia Rail youngsters, left).

## **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- Rd., Mt. Vernon on the second Tuesday of each month, September through June. Social/7:00 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 7:00 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](http://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.

### **Board of Directors - Officers**

President:	Jeff Osmundson..... <a href="mailto:president@skagitaudubon.org">president@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Vice President:	Denny Quirk..... <a href="mailto:denny@skagitaudubon.org">denny@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Neil O'Hara..... <a href="mailto:treasurer@skagitaudubon.org">treasurer@skagitaudubon.org</a> ...781-290-9083
Immediate Past President:	Vacant

### **Board of Directors - Committee Chairs and Representatives**

Conservation:	Tim Manns..... <a href="mailto:conservation@skagitaudubon.org">conservation@skagitaudubon.org</a> .....360-333-8985
Education:	Sheila Pera..... <a href="mailto:skagiteducation2@gmail.com">skagiteducation2@gmail.com</a> Kim Nelson..... <a href="mailto:kimn@skagitaudubon.org">kimn@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Field Trips:	Libby Mills..... <a href="mailto:libbymills@gmail.com">libbymills@gmail.com</a> .....360-757-4139
Finance:	Phil Wright..... <a href="mailto:phil@skagitaudubon.org">phil@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Hikes:	Joan Melcher..... <a href="mailto:jdmelcher@comcast.net">jdmelcher@comcast.net</a> .....360-424-0407
Membership:	Pam Pritzl..... <a href="mailto:membership@skagitaudubon.org">membership@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Programs:	Carla Helm..... <a href="mailto:programs@skagitaudubon.org">programs@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Publications:	Mary Sinker..... <a href="mailto:publications@skagitaudubon.org">publications@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Representative:	Alan Brewer..... <a href="mailto:alanbre@live.com">alanbre@live.com</a>
Representative:	Alice Turner..... <a href="mailto:alicet2@msn.com">alicet2@msn.com</a>
Representative:	Ann Skinner..... <a href="mailto:anns@skagitaudubon.org">anns@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Representative:	Don Jonasson..... <a href="mailto:donjonasson@hotmail.com">donjonasson@hotmail.com</a> .....360-299-1415
Representative:	Jane Brandt..... <a href="mailto:janeb@skagitaudubon.org">janeb@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Representative:	Katherine O'Hara..... <a href="mailto:katherineoh@skagitaudubon.org">katherineoh@skagitaudubon.org</a>
Representative:	Vacant

### **Other Volunteers**

Bird Sightings:	Pam Pritzl..... <a href="mailto:birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org">birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org</a> .....360-387-7024
Hospitality:	Pamelia Maxwell
Newsletter Distribution:	John Edison
Webmaster:	Ron Pera..... <a href="mailto:skagitaudubon@gmail.com">skagitaudubon@gmail.com</a>

## **Open Board Position – Secretary**

We are now recruiting for a new Secretary and if you could spare some volunteer time, Skagit Audubon would be grateful.

If you, or someone you know, would be interested in the Secretary position, please contact any Board member or President Jeff Osmundson at [president@skagitaudubon.org](mailto:president@skagitaudubon.org).

## **Field Sightings – will return in January, 2021**

## Great Gray Owls & Snowy Owls Featuring Paul Bannick



Skagit Audubon Society and North Cascades Institute are thrilled to be partnering together to welcome award-winning author and photographer Paul Bannick for a special two-part series on owls! We hope you'll join us as Paul shares an intimate look into the life histories of two of North America's most charismatic birds, the Great Gray Owl and the Snowy Owl!

For both presentations, Paul will combine his breathtaking images, first-hand accounts, video, sound, and science to help inspire conservation and education efforts as well as to help spread awareness about the threats

facing these owls and what we can do to protect them. You will also be given a chance to ask Paul all of your burning owl questions after his presentation.

The Great Gray Owl presentation will take place on Thursday, January 7th and the Snowy Owl presentation will take place on Tuesday, January 19th, both at 7 pm. Both presentations are only \$5 and you can sign up for either class at the following link: <https://ncascades.org/signup/programs/classes>.

Paul is proud to have recently published two new books: Great Gray Owl: A Visual Natural History and Snowy Owl: A Visual Natural History. Both books feature several dozens of never-before-published images, some of which capture behaviors rarely witnessed and perhaps never photographed. The photos work with first-hand field accounts, which are illuminated by our most up-to-date understanding of these species. You can order copies of the books signed by Paul if you go to his website: <http://paulbannick.com/shop>.



## ACTION ITEM FROM AUDUBON WASHINGTON

### Weigh in with your support for Greater Sage-Grouse up-listing in Washington State

As many of you are aware, Greater Sage-Grouse are in a perilous state here in Washington, with pre-fire estimates of just 770 individuals in Washington State. According to the WDFW 2020 status review, the estimated effective population size following the devastating fires in Douglas County and elsewhere is ~ 117 birds, with all three remaining populations being affected by fire. We are clearly at a pivotal point in sage grouse conservation in our state. Lend your support to the Department's recommendation to up-list the species from Threatened to Endangered by submitting a comment letter via their public process.\* Learn more at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/status-review> and submit your comments by email by December 30 to [TandEpubliccom@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:TandEpubliccom@dfw.wa.gov).

=====

**John Thomas "Jack" Hubbard** passed away on Oct. 15, 2020 at the age of 99. During his life, Jack had many interests and when he moved to Skagit County, "He and Grace took up mushrooming and birdwatching – they helped found Skagit Audubon – cross country skiing and photography." (Skagit Valley Herald). Skagit Audubon extends condolences to Jack's widow Grace and their family. <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/skagitvalleyherald/obituary.aspx?n=john-thomas-hubbard-jack&pid=197060700>

**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

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](mailto: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](http://www.audubon.org))