

The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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ALL SKAGIT AUDUBON SOCIETY EVENTS (MEETINGS, FIELD TRIPS, HIKES AND EDUCATION EVENTS) ARE CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE DUE TO THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEW CORONAVIRUS. WE WILL UPDATE THIS NOTICE AND RESUME ACTIVITIES WHEN THE GOVERNMENT HEALTH AUTHORITIES SAY THAT IT IS SAFE TO DO SO.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings members and friends of Skagit Audubon;

Well here we are a whole month after our last newsletter and some of the surprise and uniqueness of the situation has worn off. We are grateful that things seem to be slowly getting better and we look forward to seeing you at our member meetings, field trips and education offerings. Meanwhile, to avoid cabin fever some of us have ventured out to walk, bike ride or look at birds. Colleen and I have been checking out some areas for various activities but it is a learning experience. Sometimes the trail is more crowded than we like; sometimes there are people that seem to be oblivious of this distancing idea; sometimes we just choose to stay in the yard or walk the neighborhood. We have felt o.k. meeting people at trails for a walk while keeping our distance.

The migratory birds are on the move and it serves as a reminder that we are just a small cog in the great ecosystem that keeps on month after month and year after year. Mother Nature seems to be enjoying the break as well. Skies are clearer and water is generally cleaner worldwide.

Your Board has been working together to try and figure out how and when we can get back together. We have an election coming up and are weighing options if we cannot meet as a group. We are very aware that much of our membership is in the higher risk category and our overriding goal is to avoid putting people in danger. The old saying (neither Chinese nor ancient, being recent and western) is "May you live in interesting times". Be it a blessing or curse, we are indeed living in interesting times. Right now we can take care of ourselves, reach out to others and have the patience to get through this historic pandemic. We honestly don't know when we may see you again but hope it is soon and under wonderful circumstances.

Queen Elizabeth of England gave a rare Easter message and ended with these inspiring words. ""We know that coronavirus will not overcome us. As dark as death can be — particularly for those suffering with grief — light and life are greater... better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again." We hope to see you on the birding trail soon.

Jeff Osmundson President Inside This Issue:

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Skagit Audubon Society

Board status after April 7, 2020 Board Meeting, Including non-board positions: For Election Annual Membership Meeting in June, 2020 – Watch our website and the next issue of the *Flyer* for more information about the plans for our annual meeting of members.

(Board totals 19 members)

President Jeff Osmundson
Vice President Denny Quirk
Immediate Past President Vacant
Secretary Vacant
Treasurer Neil O'Hara

COMMITTEE CHAIRS:

ConservationTim MannsEducationSheila Pera - Adult
Kim Nelson - YouthField TripsLibby Mills

Field Trips
Libby Mills
Finance
Phil Wright
Hikes
Joan Melcher
Membership
Program
Carla Helm
Publications
Mary Sinker
Board Representatives
Jane Brandt
Alan Brewer

Alan Brewer Jeff Ernst Don Jonasson Katherine O'Hara Ann Skinner Alice Turner

Non-Board Positions:

Bird SightingsPam PritzlNewsletter DistributorJohn EdisonHospitalityPamelia MaxwellWebmasterRon Pera



FIELD TRIPS will return when government and public health officials have determined it is safe to hold group activities.

Spring migration is underway now and breeding birds will be showing up in our yards and on our public lands in the coming days and weeks. Enjoy even if it's from a distance!

THANK YOU to everyone who has led field trips over the past year and we look forward to planning more trips in the future.

The adjoining list of nominees for Skagit Audubon Board (and non-board) positions is presented for your consideration prior to our election annual membership meeting in June.

Ron Holmes, who has diligently served as our Secretary for many years, has decided to retire when the term ends in June.

Skagit Audubon depends upon volunteers to fill Board and non-board positions and we hope you will consider volunteering for this important position.

If you have any questions or wish to place your name on the nomination list, please contact Phil Wright at phil@skagitaudubon.org or Tim Manns at conservation@skagitaudubon.org.

Thank you!

The Purple Martins of the Ship Harbor Interpretive Preserve wish to thank Don

Jonasson for going solo this year with the annual nesting box maintenance project. Normally Don would have plenty of helpers, but COVID-19 changed those plans. Don checked, cleaned and repaired the boxes just in time – first sightings of Purple Martins were reported on April 13th!

Measuring 7.5 inches, Purple Martins are North America's largest swallow. They migrate from South America, feed almost entirely on the wing, and for reasons not well understood are seriously declining in parts of the West. 4-5 eggs are incubated by the female and both parents feed the nestlings who leave the nest in 26-31 days.

The nesting boxes are located next to the vehicle holding area at the Anacortes Ferry Terminal, so be sure to watch for these handsome aerial acrobats while you're waiting for your next ferry.





BACKYARD BIRDS, by Mary Sinker I'm not shy to admit that, as a group, Sparrows can be difficult to

identify. Often varying shades of brown, with or without stripes and other distinguishing markings, it can be tough to sort them out. Enter the White-crowned Sparrow who stands out, dressed as he is in his smart black-and-white crown (both sexes have the back-and-white crown). These sparrows are common winter birds from Sept.-April throughout North American yards and parks, and are easily attracted to feeders serving sunflower seeds. They also eat a wide variety of insects, including caterpillars, beetles and wasps as well as some fruits.



Most White-crowned Sparrows breed in open or scrubby habitats, tundra, alpine meadows or forest edges where bare ground and grasses are present in abundance. Nests are placed from 1 to 10 ft. high up in shrubs and in the Arctic they nest right on the ground, the nest hidden among the moss and lichens on the tundra. These long-distance migrants don't waste time when they arrive on their breeding grounds. They pair up quickly and have 1-3 broods with 3-7 eggs in each brood. After raising their young, the pairs break up and winter separately; however, about 2/3 of the pairs will reunite the following season if both members of the pair return to the same breeding area. Photo of White-crowned Sparrow by Mary Sinker. More info: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/White-crowned_Sparrow/id.

FROM YOUR EDITOR, by Mary Sinker When I last wrote this column, America was shutting down in response to the COVID-19 virus. One month later, we've learned the importance of resources, or the lack thereof, and how our families and communities are affected by responsive efforts. As birders we're disappointed by the cancellation of spring birding festivals but thankful that the resources of the National Wildlife Refuge System are in place to serve the thousands of migratory birds passing through Washington.

The National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), at more than 1 million acres of wetlands, located on 356 refuges and 3,000 waterfowl production areas throughout all 50 states, is a huge resource for migratory birds. The NWRS was established for the purpose of conserving migratory birds, and where appropriate restoration of native species dependent upon lands within the refuge system. As a result, most activities allowed on NWRS lands must be consistent with these purposes and some refuge lands are off-limits or have limited access to the general public. Of these 356 refuges, more than 200 were established specifically to provide breeding or wintering habitat for migratory birds. Every US state has at least one refuge and Washington State is home to 21 refuges. Although each refuge has its unique characteristics, they all share a common and interconnecting theme – the conservation of migratory birds. Some of the jewels of the NWRS system are located right here in Western Washington.

One of the world's longest sand spits is found at **Dungeness NWR**. The spit protects the nutrient-rich tideflats for spring and fall migrants and the bay for wintering waterfowl. The small, fragile wilderness islands of **San Juan NWR** host about 80% of the breeding pairs of Black Oystercatchers in the Salish Sea region. Approx. 800 offshore rocks, reefs, and islands located within and adjoining **Flattery Rocks NWR** provide critical nesting habitat for most of Washington's seabirds, including Tufted Puffins, and more than 1 million seabirds utilize the refuge during spring and fall migration. **Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually NWR** is home to over 200 species of birds that depend upon the restored estuary for resting and feeding during migration or breeding and raising their young. **Grays Harbor NWR** encompasses about 1,500 acres of intertidal mudflats, salt marsh, and uplands. From late April to early May hundreds of thousands of shorebirds, including most of the world's population of Western Sandpipers, rest and feed here on their journey to Alaska and Arctic summer breeding grounds.

In the decades since the National Wildlife Refuge System was formed, these resources are even more precious today in the face of increased demand and pressure for resource extraction – think oil drilling in the biological heart of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The NWRS lands belong to all of us – even if they are off-limits or restrict public access - and as birders and individuals concerned about conservation, we must ensure these resources are available for generations to come. For more information about these and other refuges, the birds that depend upon them, and public access or restrictions, please visit www.fws.gov/refuges/index.html.

CONSERVATION, by Tim Manns

At this writing, Earth Day's 50th anniversary on April 22nd is a few days away. The first Earth Day marked the awakening of many people to environmental degradation and the threat it poses to all living things, people included. A half century later, politics around environmental protection vividly reveal the fragility of many long-standing

environmental regulations. It still seems beyond the grasp of many people that protecting the planet is in human's self-interest as well as simply the right thing to do.

Environmental protection became law in the 1970's because enough people demanded it. The organized power of individual voices can win the day now too. In 1970, the U.S. population was 203 million. Today there are 330 million of us, and world population has more than doubled from 3.7 billion to about 7.8. Making room for people has meant huge habitat loss for other inhabitants of this shared, finite planet and a stunning decrease in natural abundance. We humans are innately attuned to a shifting



baseline of what's normal and natural, taking what we experience as the way it's always been. We can only read about how incredibly abundant wildlife was in North America long ago; in our hearts we can't truly miss what we never knew. What we can do is acknowledge that what natural abundance and diversity remain must not be taken for granted, and we can and must act to protect and restore habitats and species. The clouds of Snow Geese and ducks, great flocks of swans, and many hundreds of Great Blue Herons in the March Point Heronry: these are among the few examples around us of a once much greater and wider abundance. Changes in climate and land use are among the causes of the concentrations of birds we see. Other human-induced changes, or failures to act, could as readily end this remaining abundance.

A case in point: Some months ago the Skagit County Planning Commission voted against recommending that the County Commissioners amend code to better protect heronries. A principal argument was that herons are common, need no protection, and can readily find other nesting areas if March Point were abandoned. Skagit Audubon and other conservation organizations need to continually and energetically counter such shortsightedness and blindness to the arc of wildlife loss all over the planet. We can never assume that conditions as they are today will continue. It is urgent now, and always will be, to counter the roll-back of environmental protections and to expand protection as quickly as possible in the face of climate change and human population growth.

In April, Skagit Audubon joined Skagit Land Trust and many of you in urging the Department of Ecology (DOE) to be much more deliberative in approaching the important cleanup of the old March Point Landfill. Many toxins polluting Padilla Bay were dumped here from 1950 to 1973. The March Point Heronry, whose over 650 nests make it the largest in the western U.S., lies directly across the road. If DOE is not sufficiently careful in the cleanup work the birds could abandon the heronry even with chicks in the nests. The Planning Commission's notion that herons can simply move elsewhere is fantasy. Sometime in the months ahead, Skagit County' three Commissioners will meet to ponder the Planning Commission's "do nothing" recommendation. Two votes will decide whether the largest heronry in the western U.S. gets serious protection. We'll try to alert you when the decision point is nearing so you can let the Commissioners know how you feel. Let's not risk losing this reminder of America's once much greater natural abundance. For other issues Skagit Audubon is tracking go to Conservation Notes on the Skagit Audubon website (https://www.skagitaudubon.org/). To regularly receive these monthly notes and alerts on local issues, contact Tim Manns (conservation@skagitaudubon.org).

GLOBAL BIG DAY AND NEST WATCH are just around the corner

Global Big Day (May 9th) - learn how to participate and more info: <u>ebird.org</u>
Nest Watch (ongoing) — learn how to participate and more info: <u>nestwatch.org</u>

Skagit Audubon Field Notes by Pam Pritzl This column reports submitted sightings.

For help with rare sightings or locations, please contact birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org. For recent updates, check out **ABA Tweeters** and **Skagit County Ebird List** on the SAS website (Birding Menu, Bird Sightings submenu). **Please submit** your sightings to birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org

WATERFOWL

Greater White-fronted Goose 1 at Telegraph Slough on 4-4 (GB)

Brant 100 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH)

Cackling Goose 2 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH)

Wood Duck 2 at ACFL on 3-26 (YH)

Cinnamon Teal 1 at NSRA on 3-17 (GB) early

Northern Shoveler 6 at SWAWS on 3-22 (NOH); 1 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH)

Eurasian Wigeon 1 at SWAWS on 3-22 (NOH); 1 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH)

Green-winged Teal 1
"Eurasian" at NSRA on 4-9
(TM)

Ring-necked Duck 10 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 2 on 3-22 (NOH); 2 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH); 1 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH)

Greater Scaup 2 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH)

Lesser Scaup 6 2 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH)

Hooded Merganser 2 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 4 on 3-22 (NOH); 2 at SHIP on 3-25, 2 on 3-30, 2 on 4-2 & 2 on 4-7 (NOH)

Common Merganser 4 at SWAWS on 3-22 (NOH)
Red-breasted Merganser 2 at SHIP on 3-28, 2 on 4-2 & 2 on 4-7 (NOH); 2 at WA Park, Anacortes on 3-31 & 4 on 4-8 (NOH); 8 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH)

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS California Quail 4 in Anacortes yard on 3-17 and

8 on 4-8 (TK); 6 in Anacortes yard on 4-12 (YH)

GREBES

Pied-billed Grebe 2 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 1 on 3-22 (NOH)

Red-necked Grebe 2 at SHIP on 3-25 & 1 on 3-30 (NOH); 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 3-31 & 7 on 4-8 (NOH)

Eared Grebe 1 at March Point on 3-19 (GB)

HUMMINGBIRDS

Anna's Hummingbird 1 in Anacortes yard on 4-9 (TK) Rufous Hummingbird 1 at SWAWS on 3-22 (NOH); 2 at SHIP on 3-28, 1 on 4-2, 3 on 4-7 & 2 on 4-11 (NOH)

RAILS and COOTS

Virginia Rail 1 at SHIP on 3-23, 1 on 3-25, 1 on 3-28, 2 on 3-30 & 2 on 4-2 (NOH); 2 at Smiley's Bottom, Anacortes on 4-7 (JH); 1 at NSRA on 4-9 (TM); 1 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH) American Coot 2 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 2 on 3-22 (NOH)

OYSTERCATCHERS

Black Oystercatcher 3 at WA Park, Anacortes on 3-31 (NOH); 3 at Ala Spit County Park. Whidbey Island on 4-3 (YH); 3 at SHIP on 4-11 (NOH); 2 at Maple Grove, Camano Island on 4-17 (SPS)

SANDPIPERS and ALLIES Long-billed Dowitcher 50 at SWAWS on 3-18 (NOH) Wilson's Snipe 5 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH)

Greater Yellowlegs 2 on Alice Bay 4-1 to 4-12 (HA); 12 on Alice Bay on 4-9 (HA)

LOONS

Common Loon 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 3-31 (NOH); 1 at SHIP on 4-2 and 1 on 4-7 (NOH); 1 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH)

HERONS and ALLIES American Bittern 1 at NSRA on 4-9 (TM)

OSPREYS

Osprey 2 at SHIP on 4-7 (NOH); 2 at SHIP on 4-12 (DJ); 1 at Fidalgo Bay on 4-13 (TM)

HAWKS, EAGLES and ALLIES

Bald Eagle 3 at SWAWS on 3-18 (NOH); 1 at SHIP on 3-25, 2 on 3-30, 2 on 4-7 & 2 on 4-11 (NOH); 2 at WA Park, Anacortes on 3-31 (NOH); 1 at March Point on 4-4 (NOH); 1 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH)

Northern Harrier 4 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 1 on 3-22 (NOH)

Cooper's Hawk 1 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 1 on 3-22 (NOH)

Red-tailed Hawk 2 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 1 on 3-22 (NOH); 1 at SHIP on 3-30 & 2 on 4-7 (NOH)

OWLS

Great Horned Owl 1 at ACFL on 3-20 (YH); 1 at SWAWS on 3-22 (NOH); 1 at east Fidalgo home on 4-1 (RW)

Field sightings continued pg. 6

Field sightings from pg. 5
Northern Pygmy-Owl 1 at
Illabot Creek alluvial fan on
4-2 (GB)

Barred Owl heard at east Fidalgo home on 4-1 (SP) Short-eared Owl 2 at the East 90, Samish Island on 3-20 (YH);

Northern Saw-whet Owl 1 at Cockreham Island on 3-27 (GB)

WOODPECKERS

Red-breasted Sapsucker 1 at east Stanwood home 3-29 to present (MS)

Downy Woodpecker 1 in Anacortes yard on 3-19 (TK) **Northern Flicker** 1 female in Anacortes yard on 3-20 (TK)

Pileated Woodpecker 2 at SHIP on 3-30 (NOH); 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 4-8 (NOH)

FLYCATCHERS Black Phoebe 2 at SWAWS on 3-18 (NOH)

SHRIKES

Northern Shrike 1 at Camano Island home on 3-29 (RR); 1 juvenile near Cockreham Island continuing through 4-14 (GB)

CORVIDS

California Scrub-Jay 1 at Burlington home on 4-12 (LE)

SWALLOWS

Tree Swallow 2 at east Stanwood home 4-12 (MS) Violet-green Swallow 12 flying over east Fidalgo home on 3-21 (RW) BUSHTITS Bushtit 1 at SWAWS on 3-18 (NOH)

WRENS

Marsh Wren 12 at SWAWS on 3-22 (NOH); 1 at SHIP on 3-23, 2 on 3-25, 4 on 3-28, 3 on 3-30, 4 on 4-2 & 5 on 4-7 (NOH); 21 at NSRA on 4-9 (TM); 4 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH)

Bewick's Wren 1 at SWAWS on 3-18 (NOH); 1 at Burlington home on 4-11 (LE); 1 at SHIP on 3-25, 1 on 3-28 & 1 on 4-7 (NOH); 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 3-31 & 1 on 4-8 (NOH)

THRUSHES

Western Bluebird 1 at Corkindale on 4-10 (GB) Mountain Bluebird 1 west of Lyman on 3-31 (GB) Townsend's Solitaire 1 at Camano Island home on 2-17 (RR); 2 on Rockport-Cascade River Rd on 4-10 (GB)

Varied Thrush 1 in Anacortes yard on 3-24 (YH); 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 3-31 (NOH)

FINCHES and ALLIES

Evening Grosbeak 6 at east Stanwood home 4-6 to 4-12 (MS); 20 at Camano Island home throughout sighting period (AW)

Pine Siskin 3 in Anacortes yard on 3-27 (YH)

American Goldfinch 2 in Anacortes yard on 4-1 (YH); several males at east Fidalgo home on 4-15 (RW)



SPARROWS and ALLIES Spotted Towhee 1

"leucistic" at March Point on 3-22 (VBK)

Savannah Sparrow 4 at Dugualla on 4-10 (NOH) Fox Sparrow 1 at SWAWS on 3-22 (NOH); 1 at SHIP on 3-23, 1 on 3-25, 3 on 3-28, 2 on 3-30, 3 on 4-2 & 1 on 4-11 (NOH); 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 4-8 (NOH) Golden-crowned Sparrow 1 in Anacortes yard on 4-9 (TK)

WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler heard at east Fidalgo home on 4-4 (RW)

Yellow-rumped Warbler several "Audubon's" at east Fidalgo home on 3-26 (RW) 1 at SHIP on 3-30 (NOH) Townsend's Warbler 1 at east Fidalgo home on 3-23 (RW)

REPTILES

Garter Snake 1 in ACFL on 4-10 (YH)

Northern Alligator Lizard 1 at east Fidalgo home on 4-4 (RW)

(ACFL) Anacortes Community Forest Lands; (HA) Howard Armstrong; (**GB**) Gary Bletsch; (LE) Larry Edwards; (JH) Joe Halton; (NOH); Neil O'Hara; (YH) Yvonne Houppermans; (DJ) Don Jonasson; (VBK) Von & Betty Kuehn; (TK) Trevor Kyle; (NSRA) Northern State Recreation Area; (TM) Tim Manns; (SP) Scott Petersen; (RR) Roxie Rochat; (SPS) Scott & Patty Sebelsky; (MS) Mary Sinker; (SHIP) Ship Harbor Interpretive Preserve; (SWAWS) Skagit Wildlife Area Wylie Slough; (AW) Allison Warner; (RW) Regan Weeks

HIKES by Joan Melcher Due to the rapidly evolving situation with the COVID-19 virus, the hiking section will return when government and public health officials have determined that group activities are safe to resume.



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/7:00 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. 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

President: Jeff Osmundson....president@skagitaudubon.org

Vice President:Jane Brandt....janeb@skagitaudubon.orgSecretary:Ron Holmes....ronh@skagitaudubon.org

Treasurer: Neil O'Hara....treasurer@skagitaudubon.org.....781-290-9083

Immediate Past President: Vacant

Committee Chairs and Representatives

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR: Due to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 virus response, there will be no scheduled Skagit Audubon meetings, hikes, or field trips in May. For the latest updates on Skagit Audubon activities, please visit our website: skagitaudubon.org.



SKAGIT AUDUBON SOCIETY PO BOX 1101 MOUNT VERNON, WA 98273

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Skagit Audubon Society Membership Form
Annual membership in the Skagit Audubon Society includes 10 issues of our newsletter, *The*

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

Education Conservation

Other:

Field Trips _____ Hiking ____

City/State/: _____

ZIP: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____