

The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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Volume 39, No. 8 www.skagitaudubon.org October 2020

OCTOBER MEETING – PRESENTED ON ZOOM

The Pribilof Islands: Big Years, Big Lists and Fowl Obsessions

Presented by Ron Force

Tuesday, October 13, 7:00 PM

The Pribilof Islands, a volcanic group in the Bering Sea off Alaska, have become famous among birders after being featured in the book *The Big Year*. Besides having a variety of Arctic and sub-arctic nesting species, the islands collect stray migrants from Asia making a visit a must for birders trying to build a large ABA bird list. In May of 2019, Ron Force and friend Mike Scott joined a tour to St. Paul Island. They found fellow birders and the birding culture almost as fascinating as the unique landscape and rare birds. The visit also made stark the challenges facing the Arctic, its wildlife, and inhabitants at a time of climate change.



Ron Force is Dean of Library Services Emeritus at the University of Idaho, and Past President of the Palouse Audubon Society. Before the pandemic, he enjoyed traveling nationally and internationally and birding along the way. He has shared his photos and experiences with regional Audubon chapters.

The October SAS member meeting will precede Ron Force's presentation.

Register for this Zoom event at the following link: bit.ly/sasoct

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.

A recording of John S. Farnsworth's September 8th SAS virtual presentation is now available for viewing at: <https://youtu.be/uCs7IkOlf5I>

A recording of Neil O'Hara's scope photography presentation is available at: youtu.be/g9ysPJN51eM

Due to the continuing emergency response to the COVID-19 virus, all in-person meetings, field trips, hikes and other activities have been cancelled until further notice. Please visit our website for updates.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – Gardening is for the Birds!

Greetings members and friends of Skagit Audubon,

If you remember last year about this time we had our message on leaving a messy garden in the fall. The gist of the article was to leave the old fading plants, especially those with seeds, for the winter birds to use as feed and cover. Falling leaves and stalks also compost and add texture and nutrition to the soil. With all the spare time we have not cleaning our fall gardens, perhaps we can look ahead to next season and see what we might want to consider to attract more birds to our yards and gardens.

Do you love hummingbirds? Maybe these plants are worth considering for the next spring planting; honeysuckle, milkweeds, sages and penstemons. I tried a mass planting from the sage family, Hot Lips Salvia, this year. The planting box was swarmed with hummingbirds, bees of all varieties and butterflies, and still is as we enter the fall season.

Maybe you are just not sure what might work for your particular area. Well, you can visit the Audubon website and get recommendations for native plants suitable for our area. Our friends at the Native Plant Society would remind us that native plants are better for birds and bugs. You can customize your own list at www.audubon.org/native-plants. And, if you are new to birding or a little rusty on your skills, you can practice your skills with back yard birding. From the comfort of your deck or porch you can practice finding and focusing on birds with your binoculars. Now that breeding and defending territories are not as important, the birds are singing less and using more calls and chips. Now is a good time to learn to associate those quieter and shorter sounds with their feathery owners.

With any luck we can be meeting again in the near future, enjoying field trips, hiking again with our friends, and bringing our education programs to both kids and adults. Until then, stay safe, mask up and wash your hands.

Jeff Osmundson, President

THE BIG SIT!

The Big Sit! is a free community birding event open to individuals and teams, all over the world. This year The Big Sit! begins Saturday October 10 at 12:01 am and closes Sunday October 11 at 11:59 pm. The goal is to identify as many species as possible in 24 hours, from a circle no more than 17' in diameter. Sitting not required. The Big Sit! is Covid-friendly. Anyone can participate from wherever they want - backyard, park, public wildlife area, etc. Participate by yourself, with other family members, or a limited number of other people outside your family. ***Requirements for 6' social distancing and wearing of face coverings should be observed.***

Skagit Audubon Society is fielding a Big Sit! team Saturday October 10 at Wiley Slough (Skagit Wildlife Area - Headquarters Unit). The circle will be located at the junction of the West Dike Trail and Spur Dike Trail - a short walk from the parking lot (w/restrooms) closest to the headquarters buildings. One to two hour shifts are being scheduled 7 am to 7 pm with the goal of staffing the circle continuously during this period. Social distancing limits the number of participants to four in the circle at any time. This event is for birders of all experience levels. We will pair those new to birding with more experienced team members. A member has pledged \$1 per species seen by the team at Wiley Slough to the Skagit Audubon Society Environmental Conservation Scholarship. Please consider a similar pledge to support this annual award.

Anyone is welcome to just come by and visit, (***use face coverings and practice 6' social distancing***), especially if you bring Covid-friendly snacks or refreshments to share! Vehicles parked at this location must display a current Discover Pass, or Vehicle Access Pass. Visit www.thebigsit.org to learn more about the Big Sit!. Email denny@skagitaudubon.org if you would like to join the Wiley Slough team, conduct your own count (so we can track participation and your species list), or wish to make a pledge. There might be some Skagit Audubon swag for the circle that sees the most total species, or sees the "secret" species!

Hope and a Red-winged Blackbird, by Thomas Bancroft

The black eyes glared right at me, a penetrating stare that seemed to pierce my flesh. He then opened his mouth while flexing up his shoulders and leaning toward me. His red epaulets glowed in the sun as his song rang out, a sharp two whistles followed by a trill that lasted about a half-second and then another whistle. At the same time, he expanded his tail and flared his wings slightly, all the while those eyes scowled.



Red-winged Blackbird, Ron Holmes

I stood only twenty feet from him, amazed that this male Red-winged Blackbird seemed to be threatening me as if I was an intruder into his world. He sat on the top of a cattail, his feet gripping the brown cylindrical spike that had been the plant's flowers. It was early June and one of my first trips to a suburban park since the Governor asked folks in March to stay at home. The COVID19 pandemic had gripped the country. It had been ten minutes since I walked over to this marsh at Union Bay in Seattle, and he initially paid me no heed. By now, his females would have produced their first brood, and he might be courting ones for a second attempt.

He looked over his right shoulder and back across his marsh. Males defend a territory, and if their area has good nesting sites and suitable food sources, they may attract more than one female. Scientists have found males with as many as fifteen females in their harem, but two to five seems much more common. Females' reproductive success doesn't seem to be hurt by joining a harem, and anyways, they may go elsewhere to fertilize their eggs. What appears critical in their choice is that it's a good place to build their nest, one that is protected from predation and disturbance.

The male's primary job is to defend a patch of cattails from other male blackbirds, from predators, from critters like me that might disturb the nesting females. The word "defend" ran through my mind. It seemed appropriate right then. Washington State had begun to open back up from the coronavirus lockdown. I needed a plan to start moving outside my house without catching the virus. But countering the despair that had filled me seemed equally important. The lockdown had meant isolation, no face to face with friends, no plans to see family, canceled dreams for the coming months. The seclusion had zapped my motivation, my enthusiasm for much of anything. Much of my time had been spent staring out the window or watching the same movie over and over again.

This red-wing stood tall on the cattail, looking one way and then another. He was exposed to the open and yet didn't seem afraid. Not a quarter-mile away was an active Cooper's Hawk nest. These hawks specialize in capturing birds, and this blackbird would make the perfect meal. The red-wing must protect himself but also keep an eye out for his females. Male blackbirds in an area work together in watching for predators. Ornithologists have discovered that they change their calls when they see danger, and then all the males will take up that new call. It is the change that signals the threat and not the call itself. Males will mob an American Crow or Red-tailed Hawk until they chase it out of the area and attack Great Blue Herons. All these birds represent threats to adults, nestlings, or eggs. It is a joint effort that helps each be successful. He left his perch and flew a low circle over his marsh. The blackbird landed on a far cattail, and there, he let out his *conk-la-ree* song while looking over his wetland. Content and assured was what he appeared to me.

A sense of hope welled up in me. This male looked confident about the future. Perhaps if he can beat the odds, so can I. With some diligence and help from others, we can defend ourselves from the virus and the despair that it has brought to our lives.



OCTOBER BIG DAY – Oct. 17, 2020

Big Days are a 24 hour opportunity to celebrate the birds both near you and around the world. You don't need to be a bird expert or go out all day long. Watching birds from your own backyard for as little as 10 minutes helps and you can submit your sightings to eBird. It's fun, free and helps scientists to better understand birds. For more info, visit: www.ebird.org/octoberbigday.

WELCOME TO ERNIE HAYDEN, OUR NEW SECRETARY!

Ernie and his wife, Ginny, moved to Anacortes in early 2019 from North Bend. Before their move last year, they often drove to Skagit and Whatcom counties to observe and photograph eagles, snow geese, and trumpeter swans. Hence, a move to Anacortes truly fit their plans for getting closer to nature and beautiful landscapes.

In the spring of 2019 they joined the Skagit Audubon Society and have enjoyed the people and programs very much.

Ernie's professional background includes a BA and Masters from the University of Washington and 45 years in technical management including his current role as a consultant focused on cyber and physical security and critical infrastructure protection. Over the years Ernie has been a Corporate Secretary for a large not-for-profit in Atlanta and has been CEO of a technology company in Bellevue, Washington.



Black Oystercatcher, Ernie Hayden

Ernie has also been active in wildlife and landscape photography and has sold some of his work and had some photos published in the *Anacortes American*. He has a photography business – *Rising Moon NW, LLC*.

His wife Ginny is a graduate from the University of Washington Nursing School. After raising their daughter, Ginny transitioned from Nursing to being a full-time mom then a pre-school teacher. She retired in 2018. Ernie and Ginny have a 31-year old daughter, Karina, and a 5-year old Cardigan Welsh Corgi, Meghan. Their daughter lives in Newcastle and is a blood collection supervisor for Bloodworks Northwest. They thoroughly enjoy living in Anacortes and Skagit County and Ernie looks forward to supporting the Skagit Audubon Society as an active member and the Secretary.

CONSERVATION, by Tim Manns

In this pandemic year and divisive political situation, focusing on birds has provided many of us escape and relief. But each time we return home, the day's birding done, we remember the importance of this moment for the future of our country and of the environment, including birds. No one needs to be reminded how many environmental regulations have been weakened in the last 4 years, even the venerable, century-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the essential National Environmental Policy Act.



Audubon as a non-profit organization cannot suggest who to vote for, but Audubon can urge you to consider how important your choices are, how important your vote is, for the future of much we hold dear. More than any other election in our lifetimes, this one is about what kind of country and future we want. I suggest we want ours to be a country in which all people are respected and valued and have the opportunity to live healthy and fulfilling lives. A country in which legislation passes and regulations are implemented addressing climate change in a way commensurate with the reality and seriousness of the problem. And one in which government at every level values the birds and other wildlife that share this planet and restores and protects the habitat they need. There is much work to be done on specific issues in the weeks and months ahead, but what is most important right now is looking closely at the candidates for local, state, and federal offices and, in every way we can, including our votes, supporting those who share our love for the diversity of life on the only planet we'll ever know.

For specific issues on which Skagit Audubon is focusing, see "Conservation Notes" under the Conservation tab at www.skagitaudubon.org.

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

Cinnamon Teal 2 at

SWAWS on 8-22, 1 at FIFR on 8-26 & 2 at Bos Lake, Swantown on 9-6 (NOH)

Ruddy Duck 4 at Bos Lake, Swantown on 9-6 (NOH)

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

California Quail 1

"leucistic" at Rosario Beach on 8-20 (NOH); 22 at east Fidalgo home on 9-10 (RW)

GREBES

Western Grebe 15 between Sucia & Orcas Islands on 9-11 (RW)

RAILS and COOTS

Virginia Rail 1 at SWAWS on 8-26, 9-2 & 9-10 (NOH)

PLOVERS

Black-bellied Plover 8 at FIFR on 8-17 & 8-20 & 1 on 9-5 (NOH); 1 at Bos Lake, Swantown on 9-6 (NOH)

American Golden-Plover 1 at FIFR on 9-4 (GB); 1 at FIFR on 9-5 (NOH)

Pacific Golden-Plover 1 at FIFR on 8-25 (GB); 1 at FIFR on 9-5 (NOH)

Semipalmated Plover 10 at FIFR on 8-12, 1 on 8-31 & 12 on 9-5 (NOH)

SANDPIPERS and ALLIES

Ruddy Turnstone 1 at FIFR on 8-27 (GB)

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper 1 at SWAWS on 9-4 (GB)

Sanderling 1 at FIFR on 8-29 (GB)

Baird's Sandpiper 1 at SWAWS on 8-22 (NOH); 2 at Channel Drive on 8-30 (GB); 2 at Leque Island, Eide Road on 9-4 (PP)

Pectoral Sandpiper 2 at

SWAWS on 9-2 & 4 on 9-10 (NOH); 1 at SWAWS on 9-6 (MS, JS); 1 at FIFR on 9-7 (NOH); 1 at Leque Island, Eide Road on 9-17 (PP)

Semipalmated Sandpiper 1 at FIFR on 8-12 & 3 at SWAWS on 8-22 (NOH)

Wilson's Snipe 1 at SWAWS on 8-12 & 2 on 9-10 (NOH); 1 at Leque Island, Eide Road on 9-17 (PP)

Red-necked Phalarope 1 at FIFR on 8-25 & 3 at Channel Drive on 8-29 (GB)

JAEGERS

Parasitic Jaeger 1 at Hamilton Boat Launch on 9-17 (NC) **unusual upriver**

GULLS and TERNs

Franklin's Gull 1 at FIFR on 8-19 (GB)

Heermann's Gull 3 at Rosario Beach on 8-25 & 12 at BOS Lake, Swantown on 9-6 (NOH)

California Gull 4 at Rosario Beach on 8-25, 2 at FIFR on 8-31 & 60 at Bos Lake, Swantown on 9-6 (NOH)

HERONS and ALLIES

Great Egret 3 at Channel Drive on 8-20 (AT); 1 at Lake McMurray on 8-30 (AM); 2 at March Point on 9-8 (GB)

Green Heron 1 at SWAWS on 9-2 (NOH)

OWLS

Great Horned Owl 1 at SWAWS on 8-26 (NOH); pair at east Stanwood home on 9-10 & 9-13 (MS, JS); 1 at FIFR on 9-15 (JS); 2-3 hooting regularly at east

Fidalgo home from 8-22 to 9-18 (RW)

Northern Pygmy-Owl 1 east of Rockport on 8-20 (GB)

WOODPECKERS

Downy Woodpecker 1 at Anacortes home on 8-26 (TK)

Northern Flicker 1 female at Anacortes home on 9-4 (TK)

FALCONS

Merlin 1 at FIFR on 8-17 & 1 at SWAWS on 8-22 & 8-29 (NOH)

Peregrine Falcon 1 at FIFR on 8-17, 9-5 & 9-7; 1 at SWAWS on 8-29, 9-7 & 9-10 (NOH); 1 at Leque Island, Eide Road on 9-17 (PP); 1 at Iverson Spit, Camano Island on 9-18 (PP)

FLYCATCHERS

Western Wood-Pewee 1 at SWAWS on 8-26 (NOH)

Willow Flycatcher 1 at SWAWS on 8-29 (NOH)

Pacific-slope Flycatcher 1 at Cap Sante, Anacortes home on 9-4 (JH)

Black Phoebe 1 at SWAWS on 8-12, 26 & 29 & 1 on 9-2 & 10 (NOH)

VIREOS

Hutton's Vireo 1 at Cap Sante, Anacortes home on 9-8 & 9-11 (JH)

CORVIDS

California Scrub-Jay 2 at Anacortes home on 9-8 (TK)

LARKS

Horned Lark 1 at Skyline, Anacortes on 9-10 (GB)

Field sightings continued Pg. 6

Sightings continued from Pg. 5

SWALLOWS

Purple Martin 3 at FIFR on 8-25 (GB); 6 flying overhead at east Fidalgo home on 9-7 (RW)

CHICKADEES

Mountain Chickadee 1 at Cutthroat Pass on 9-10 (NOH)

KINGLETS

Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1 at SHIP on 9-13 (NOH)

THRUSHES

Hermit Thrush 1 at Cap Sante, Anacortes home on 9-14 (JH)

Varied Thrush 1 male at Cap Sante, Anacortes home on 9-7 (JH) **early**

PIPITS

American Pipit 12 at Cutthroat Pass on 9-9 (NOH); 1 at Leque Island, Eide Road on 9-17 (PP)

FINCHES and ALLIES

House Finch 2 male & 7 female at Anacortes home on 9-7 (TK)

Red Crossbill 4 at Rosario Beach on 8-20 & 1 on 8-25 (NOH)

SPARROWS and ALLIES

Spotted Towhee 1 at Anacortes home on 9-11 (TK)

Fox Sparrow 1 at Cap Sante, Anacortes home on 9-11 (JH)

Lincoln's Sparrow 1 at Barnum, Camano Island on 9-15 & 2 at Iverson Spit, Camano Island on 9-18 (PP)

White-crowned Sparrow 1 at Anacortes home on 8-20 (TK)

Dark-eyed Junco 1 at Anacortes home on 9-13 (TK)

BLACKBIRDS and ORIOLES

Yellow-headed Blackbird 1 at FIFR on 8-31 (NOH)

WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler 1 at Cap Sante, Anacortes home on 8-31 (JH); 3 at east Fidalgo home on 9-1 (RW)

MacGillivray's Warbler 1 at Rosario Head on 8-19 (GB)

Yellow-rumped Warbler 1 at Anacortes home on 8-26 (TK)

Black-throated Gray Warbler 1 at Barnum, Camano Island on 9-7 (PP)

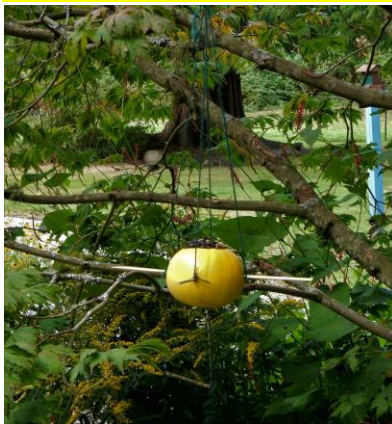
Townsend's Warbler 1 at east Fidalgo home on 9-1 (RW)

MAMMALS

Deer 1 doe with 2 **albino** fawns at Cornet Bay State Park on 6-24 (KC)

(GB) Gary Bletsch; (KC) Kathryn Cavit; (NC) Ned Currence; (FIFR) Fir Island Farm Reserve, aka Hayton Reserve; (JH) Joe Halton; (NOH) Neil O'Hara; (TK) Trevor Kyle; (AM) Ann McFeely; (PP) Pam Pritzl; (JS) Jeff Sinker; (MS) Mary Sinker; (AT) Alice Textor; (SHIP) Ship Harbor Interpretive Preserve; (SWAWS) Skagit Wildlife Area Wylie Slough; (RW) Regan Weeks

FROM YOUR EDITOR, by Mary Sinker – Fall Means Pumpkins!



As we enter October, colorful leaves and cooler temperatures signal the change of season and pumpkins take center stage. A fun project for kids and adults alike is making a pumpkin bird feeder.

Steps for Success: cut the top off a small to medium size pumpkin and scoop out the seeds and pulp. Pat dry excess moisture with a paper towel and let the cut pumpkin dry for an hour or so. Insert two wooden skewers so they cross in the middle and tie strong twine to each skewer, joining the twine at the top to hang the pumpkin. Fill with your birdseed of choice – black oil sunflower or mixed sunflower seed with peanut pieces are both popular choices for birds (and squirrels). You may wish to hang this feeder where squirrels cannot access it and depending on the weather, it may last a couple of weeks before being tossed on the compost pile. Have fun!

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. 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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SHIP HARBOR (Anacortes) PURPLE MARTIN UPDATE

Skagit Audubon Board member Don Jonasson is pleased to report that as of Aug. 20th there was a high probability of 18 nesting pairs of Purple Martins. He counted 17 nestlings visible at box entrances, usually in pairs, and 10 adults flying or perching. Of the 30 boxes, one had blown down and he was able to retrieve it. For reasons not well understood, Purple Martins are declining in the West so every successful nest is important for America's largest swallow. The Purple Martins thank Don for getting their boxes ready last spring and for monitoring them during the nesting season. Birders look forward to the return of the Martins in spring 2021! Photo by Don Jonasson.



**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
Donors of \$100 or more receive a personal field trip by a Skagit Audubon field trip leader.

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/: _____

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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)