

The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

Volume 39, No. 2 www.skagitaudubon.org Feb. 2020

February Meeting and Program "Tufted Puffins in a Dynamic Seascape" Presented by Scott Pearson, PhD.

Tuesday, Feb. 11th
7:00 Social; 7:30 Program
Padilla Bay Interpretive Center
10441 Bayview Edison Road
Mt. Vernon, Washington



Scott Pearson is a Senior Research Scientist with the Wildlife Science Division of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in Olympia where he has supervised the west-side research team for the past 16 years. He received his PhD. from the University of Washington. His research is focused on assessing wildlife population status and trends, diet, habitat use and quality, evaluating the effectiveness of conservation efforts, and identifying mechanisms responsible for population declines. He is currently monitoring and conducting research projects on the marbled murrelet, tufted puffin, snowy plover, streaked horned lark, and marine birds generally. His talk will focus on tufted puffin conservation status, population trends, and natural history.

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Skagit County heronries need protection; please see Conservation Notes on the Skagit Audubon website for more information: skagitaudubon.org/conservation/notes.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, from Jeff Osmundson

Greetings members and friends of the Skagit Audubon Society

Here we are in January of a new year, a new decade and now the start of a new environmental conservation scholarship. This year the Board discussed the idea of using \$1,000 of an earlier bequest to fund a scholarship in our local community. The Board feels that this scholarship is both an outreach to the community and a way to pay back, or pay forward, our wonderful community support.



An ad hoc scholarship committee recommended, and the SAS board approved, establishing a named scholarship for a Skagit Valley College student in the Environmental Conservation Degree Program. The scholarship will be administered through the Skagit Valley College Foundation. The ad hoc scholarship committee is working with the Foundation to establish selection criteria and screen applicants. The scholarship will be awarded in May, and we will invite the recipient to a future general meeting.

The Board also agreed to establish an additional account to support and supplement the scholarship budget going forward. Now Skagit Audubon members and friends have the option of donating directly to the **Scholarship fund**. We will see over the next year or two if it becomes an important source of funding, but for now you have three options for donating to Skagit Audubon Society.

1. The general fund
2. Education
3. Scholarships

According to our treasurer, Neil O'Hara, donations now make up about 30% of our annual budget. We are extremely grateful to those that donate, and now you have another option, if you choose, to direct your contributions. There are a number of scholarship opportunities in Skagit County and the committee chose one that could carry our name and support a student in the environmental or conservation program. Other opportunities are available as well. If you have an idea, please contact a board member.

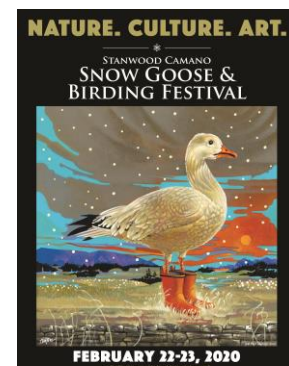
Thank You Skagit Audubon Members!

IT'S SNOW GOOSE FESTIVAL TIME!

For the past several years Skagit Audubon has provided guides for the Stanwood/Camano Snow Goose Festival. The guides can sign up for one of five sessions; three on Saturday February 22 and two on Sunday February 23. The groups are about 10-15 people, depending on weather, and are almost always novice or non-birders. Bird I.D. skill is helpful but not required. A scope would be helpful. Teams of 2 or more people are a great idea. **If you are interested in guiding or for more information, contact jeffo4297@gmail.com.**

In addition to providing guides for the Port Susan Bay field trips, Skagit Audubon also needs volunteers to help man our indoor exhibit table on Feb. 22-23. This is a fun way to engage with the public who are always interested in the bird mounts, field guides, and other information we have. You can choose your date and time – any amount of time is appreciated. **If you are interested in volunteering for the indoor exhibit table, contact Mary: publications@skagitaudubon.org.**

The festival is a fun way to introduce the public to birding and Skagit Audubon. For more information about the Snow Goose Festival go to <http://www.snowgoosefest.org/>.



FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS, by Libby Mills

Beginning birders and friends are always welcome on Skagit Audubon field trips. Membership in Skagit Audubon is encouraged but not required for participation. Please be prepared for the weather with suitable clothing and bring field guides, binoculars and spotting scopes (if you have them). Carpool whenever possible and contribute to the driver's expense. Watch the email reminders for the latest information, including any changes and/or additions to the field trip schedule. To be added to the email distribution list contact Libby Mills: libbymills@gmail.com. **NOTE:** If you plan to join a trip, contact the leader the day before to ensure a successful rendezvous. Trip plans may change.



Wednesday, February 5, 2020

Reifel Bird Sanctuary, British Columbia

7:30 am to Late Afternoon

Leader: Denny Quirk, denny@skagitaudubon.org; 360.333.2450 (mobile)

Denny will be our leader this year for a trip to the ever-popular birding sights in southern BC borderlands around Reifel Bird Sanctuary. Feed chickadees from your hand, observe waterfowl and their iridescent plumage at close range, and look for Saw-Whet Owls. Meet to arrange car pools at 7:30 am across from the Cook Road exit/Highway 99 Starbucks. This is just south of Cook Road on Highway 99. Come early enough to buy your coffee and use the restroom and leave by 8 am. Bring appropriate ID for the border crossing – either a passport or an enhanced driver's license – a crossing-friendly lunch, and a few dollars for the entry fee and bird feed at Reifel. There may be additional stops for any special birds reported in nearby areas. **Here's the link to the bird sanctuary to check out the information they provide (rules, bird checklist, etc.):** <http://www.reifelbirdsanctuary.com/index.html>. **Please contact leader: Denny Quirk, dennyquirk@gmail.com, if you plan to go. Weather in winter has potential to cause a cancellation.**

Sunday, February 23, 2020

Whatcom County Shores

8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Leader: Andrea Warner, warneraj@me.com; 360.734.9881 (home); 360.224.9291 (mobile)

The trip will start at Blaine Harbor, and move on to Semiahmoo, Birch Bay State Park and Sandy Point. Depending on how the time goes, we may make other short stops on the way to Sandy Point from Birch Bay State Park. Our stops will focus on water birds, targeting all three Scoters, three Loon species, Grebes, and Long-tailed Ducks, plus shorebirds, e.g. Sanderlings, Black Turnstones, and Dunlin. Bring binoculars, scopes, lunch, and wind and rain gear. If coming from south of Bellingham, meet (before and plan to leave) at 8:30 AM to arrange carpools at the Chuckanut Park & Ride lot just south of Exit 231 off I-5. We'll join the leader at 9:15 a.m. at the Arco Gas Station on Slater Road. Take I-5 Exit 260, turn right from the off ramp and you'll see the Arco station on your right. **Please Contact Leader: Andrea Warner (contact info above). A Washington State Discover Pass is required for parking at Birch Bay State Park.**

ACTION ALERT – NATIONAL AUDUBON

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) is our most important bird protection law. But in 2017, the Department of the Interior issued a policy to give a free pass for industries to kill birds. For the first time, companies are off the hook from having to protect birds from hazards such as open oil pits and power lines, and will no longer be held accountable when their actions result in bird deaths. Now leaders in Congress have introduced the Migratory Bird Protection Act to restore its protections and safeguard the law for the future.

Take action today by asking your U.S. Representative to support and cosponsor the Migratory Bird Protection Act. https://act.audubon.org/onlineactions/7q3Ky05r50irttToFGZy5w2?ms=policy-adv-web-website_nas-topmenubar-20190109_mbp_a_alert.

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

Brant 12 on Samish Island (Alice Bay) on 1-11 (SAS); 255 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

Cackling Goose 24 on Samish Flats on 1-17 (AW)

Wood Duck 3 at NSRA on 12-2 (GB)

Eurasian Wigeon 2 at SWAHR on 12-15 (NOH); 1 on Samish Flats and 1 on Samish Island (Alice Bay) on 1-11 (SAS)

White-winged Scoter 3 at SIPB on 12-11 (NOH); 10 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

Long-tailed Duck 1 at SIPB on 12-11 (NOH); 6 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

Common Goldeneye 2 at SIPB on 12-11 (NOH); 2 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

Hooded Merganser 8 at Anacortes Marina on 1-9 (RW)

Common Merganser 2 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

Red-breasted Merganser 160 at SIPB on 12-11 (NOH); 12 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

California Quail 4 12-20 to 1-16 at east Fidalgo yard (RW)

GREBES

Pied-billed Grebe 1 at SWAHR on 12-15 (NOH); 2 at SWAHR on 12-29 (NOH)

Western Grebe 1 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

HUMMINGBIRDS

Anna's Hummingbird 2 in Anacortes yard on 12-2 (TK); up to 15 at feeders at

east Fidalgo yard 12-20 to 1-17 (RW); 1 on Samish Island (Alice Bay); 1 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

PLOVERS

Black-bellied Plover 19 at SWAHR on 12-29 (NOH)

ALCIDS

Pigeon Guillemot 5 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

LOONS

Pacific Loon 1 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS); 1 at Burrows Bay, Anacortes on 1-6 (NOH)

Common Loon 6 at SIPB on 1-11 (SAS)

HAWKS, EAGLES and ALLIES

Bald Eagle 13 on Samish Flats on 12-11 (NOH); 5 at SWAHR on 12-15 (NOH); 6 at SWAHR on 12-29 (NOH); 2 adults perched in fir tree at east Fidalgo property on 1-8 (RW); 14 on Samish Flats and 7 on Samish Island (Alice Bay) on 1-11 (SAS); 26 on Samish Flats on 1-11 (SAS); 1 "dilute" near Sunset Rd, Samish Flats on 1-17 (AW)

Northern Harrier 2 on Samish Flats on 12-11 (NOH); 1 at SWAHR on 12-15 (NOH); 5 at SWAHR on 12-29 (NOH); 6 on Samish Flats on 1-11 (SAS)

Sharp-shinned Hawk 1 juvenile at east Fidalgo yard on 1-12 (RW)

Cooper's Hawk 1 at W. Bow Hill Rd on 12-22 (YH); 1 in Anacortes yard on 12-20 (YH); 1 adult at east Fidalgo yard on 1-8 (RW)

Red-tailed Hawk 3 on Samish Flats on 12-11 (NOH); 6 at SWAHR on 12-15 (NOH); 2 at SWAHR on 12-29 (NOH); 3 on Samish Flats and 2 on Samish Island (Alice Bay) on 1-11 (SAS); 1 juvenile "Harlan's" on Samish Flats on 1-17 (AW)

Rough-legged Hawk 1 on Samish Flats on 1-11 (SAS)

Golden Eagle 1 2.5 miles east of Sedro Woolley on 12-25 (DW); 1 at Telegraph Slough on 1-10 (GB)

OWLS

Great Horned Owl heard 3 (and saw 2) on east Fidalgo property on 1-16 (RW)

Short-eared Owl 2 at East/West 90, Samish Flats on 12-13 (YH); 1 on Samish Flats on 1-11 (SAS)

WOODPECKERS

Red-breasted Sapsucker 1 at east Fidalgo yard 12-20 to 1-16 (RW); 1 in Anacortes yard on 12-29 (YH); 1 near Cockreham Island on 1-9 (GB)

Downy Woodpecker 1 in Anacortes yard on 11-25 and 12-6 (TK); 1 male at east Fidalgo yard on 12-20 (RW)

Hairy Woodpecker 1 in Anacortes yard on 12-7 (TK); 1 male at east Fidalgo yard on 12-20 (RW)

Northern Flicker pair in Anacortes yard on 11-24 (TK)

FALCONS

American Kestrel 1 on Samish Flats on 12-11 (NOH); 2 on Samish flats on 1-11 (SAS)

Continued on pg. 5

Continued from pg. 4

Merlin 1 at SWAHR on 12-29 (NOH)

Peregrine Falcon 1 at SWAHR on 12-29 (NOH); 3 on Sullivan Rd, Samish Flats on 1-17 (AW); 1 at West 90, Samish Flats on 1-17 (AW)

SHRIKES

Northern Shrike 1 on Samish Flats on 1-11 (SAS); 1 on Samish Flats on 1-17 (AW)

CHICKADEES

Black-capped Chickadee 4 in Anacortes yard on 12-28 (TK)

Chestnut-backed

Chickadee 2 in Anacortes yard on 12-28 (TK)

BUSHTITS

Bushtit 13 at east Fidalgo yard 1-12 to 1-16 (RW)

CREEPERS

Brown Creeper 3 in Hillcrest Park, Mount Vernon on 1-12 (TM)

KINGLETS

Golden-crowned Kinglet 1 in Anacortes yard on 12-29 (YH); 1 in Hillcrest Park, Mount Vernon on 1-12 (TM)

THRUSHES

Varied Thrush 3 in east Stanwood yard on 1-14 (MS)

FINCHES and ALLIES

House Finch 6 in Anacortes yard on 12-28 (TK)

Pine Siskin 8 in Anacortes yard on 11-23 (TK); 11 in Anacortes yard on 12-2 (TK); 1 in Anacortes yard on 1-15 (YH); 1 in Sedro-Woolley yard on 1-15 (DW)

SPARROWS and ALLIES

Spotted Towhee 1 in Anacortes yard on 12-4 (TK)

Fox Sparrow 1 on Samish Island (Alice Bay) on 1-11 (SAS)

White-crowned Sparrow 4 on Samish Island (Alice Bay) on 1-11 (SAS)

Golden-crowned Sparrow 14 on Samish Island (Alice Bay) on 1-11 (SAS)

Dark-eyed Junco 2 in Anacortes yard on 12-29 (TK)

BLACKBIRDS and ORIOLES

Western Meadowlark 24 on Samish Flats on 1-11 (SAS); 8 on Samish Flats on 1-17 (AW)

WARBLERS

Northern Waterthrush 1 at SWAWS on 1-10 (GB)

Yellow-rumped Warbler 15 at Cap Sante Marina on 1-13 (JH)

Townsend's Warbler 1 in Cap Sante yard 12-31 to 1-1 (JBS); 1 in Hillcrest Park, Mount Vernon on 1-12 (TM)

MAMMALS

Raccoon 2 in east Stanwood yard on 1-14 (MS)

River Otter 7 on Anacortes Marina pier grooming on 1-9 (RW)

(GB) Gary Bletsch; (JH) Joe Halton; (YH) Yvonne Houppermans; (TK) Trevor Kyle; (NSRA) Northern State Recreation Area; (TM) Tim Manns; (NOH) Neil O'Hara; (MS) Mary Sinker; (SAS) Skagit Audubon Society Field Trip; (SIPB) Samish Island Public Beach; (SWAHR) Skagit Wildlife Area Hayton Reserve; (SWAWS) Skagit Wildlife Area Wylie Slough; (JBS) J. B. Smith; (DW) Daria Wheatley; (AW) Andrea Warner; (RW) Regan Weeks



How do you tell male and female flickers apart? The male has a red and gray face while the female lacks any red on the face. Photo by Mary Sinker.

Backyard Birds, by Mary Sinker

The Northern Flicker (pictured on the left) is a familiar bird in many yards. This year-round resident is easily attracted to suet feeders, and when the parents have young to feed, they can consume a large quantity of suet. In our yard, the suet feeder seems to be one of the first places the parents bring their fledglings.

Flickers are cavity nesters and will utilize nest boxes built to their specifications. If you can leave snags (safely) on your property, they will reward you by raising their young year-after-year in your yard.

Flickers forage extensively on the ground in search of their favorite food, ants.

FEBRUARY HIKES by Joan Melcher

Safety comes first so hikes may be canceled or destinations changed due to weather conditions or other unforeseen circumstances. All hikes are on a Wednesday and for questions or additional information contact Joan Melcher at jdmelcher@comcast.net or **360.424.0407**. Dogs are discouraged on Audubon-sponsored hikes and if present they must be on a leash at all times. NOTE: upon arrival at destination, if cancellation of the hike is determined at the discretion of the Audubon trip leader, any individual who elects to proceed is no longer considered to be a member of an Audubon-sponsored activity. Carpools are arranged at the discretion of the drivers.



FEB. 5 LUMMI ISLAND (Easy) HIKE IS DEPENDENT ON THE ROADS BEING DRIVABLE TO THE FERRY TO LUMMI ISLAND. Walk a 7 mile loop on the north end of Lummi Island. This hike features island, sea, and mountain views. \$7 foot-passenger ferry fare required. Mostly level, walking shoes recommended. Meet at **8:00 a.m.** at the Chuckanut Drive park-n-ride, exit 231 from I-5 on the east side of I-5. No specified return time although most will take the 1 pm ferry back.

FEB. 12 CAMANO ISLAND (Moderate to Difficult) Friends of Camano Island Parks, FOCIP, will lead us on hikes on Camano Island; up to 11.9 miles with shorter options available. Lunch provided; suggested donation of \$3 (Three dollars). Meet at **7:45 a.m.** in the S.E. corner of the Mount Vernon Safeway parking lot or at **8:30 am** at the Blue Camano Center Building on East Camano Drive. There will be a brief orientation there; hike options will be discussed; maps will be given out; restrooms will be available. Discover Pass required if you park in either Cama State Park or Camano Island State Park.

FEB. 19 CONWAY-AREA DIKE WALK (Easy) Hike up to 3.3 miles one way on the Conway area dike north towards Mount Vernon or drive over to Wylie Slough and hike the trails there. For all hikes, meet at 9 am to sign in at the parking area described below. You may leave when you return to your vehicle. Lunch at the Conway Pub & Eatery? If the weather is clear there will be great views. Birds should be plentiful. From I-5 take exit 221 which is signposted Conway and Lake McMurray. This is also the Pioneer Hwy (SR 534) which leads to Stanwood. Turn west toward Conway/Stamwood and very shortly (100 yds) turn right on Fir Island Rd into Conway. Go over the RR tracks and in 100 yds turn right on Dike Rd just before the bridge. Do not go over the South Fork of the Skagit River Bridge onto Fir Island! Parking is available on the left in 200 yds. north of the unsigned dike district building. If you go to Wylie Slough, WA Discover Pass required for parking lot.

FEB. 26 FRAGRANCE LAKE (Moderate to Difficult) Hike to a lovely mirror lake above Larrabee State Park. 7 mile loop. 1400 ft. total el. gain. Meet at 9 am at the Lost Lake Trailhead parking lot, formerly known as the Clayton Beach Parking lot, at the south end of Larrabee State Park on Chuckanut Drive. You may leave when your carload has safely returned to the trailhead. Discover Pass required for your vehicle.

MAR. 4 GOOSE ROCK PERIMETER HIKE (Moderate to Difficult) Hike a loop that includes Cranberry Lake, beaches, the south side of Deception Pass, Cornet Bay and a 450 foot climb up Goose Rock. Total el. gain for the day is about 1150 feet. Meet at 9 a.m. in the east side parking lot at Cranberry Lake near the main entrance to Deception Pass State Park 6.2 miles for the basic loop hike; add 4.0 miles if you hike on beach south to the naval station border (10.2 miles); You may leave when your car or people has returned to the trailhead. Discover Pass required to park in the park. **NOTE: HAVE EAR PROTECTION WITH YOU IN CASE THE WHIDBEY JETS ARE FLYING LOW AND LOUD.**

Education and outreach are core activities of the Skagit Audubon mission, and volunteers to help the Education Committee are always needed. If you are interested in helping Sheila Pera and Kim Nelson, please let them know. Our educational activities have grown to the point that Sheila will lead the adult programs and Kim will lead the youth programs. Contact: Sheila at skagiteducation2@gmail.com or Kim at kimn@skagitaudubon.org. Help carry the Audubon mission to our local community and thank you!

Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count – December 28, 2019

Eighty birdwatchers, plus 5 feeder watchers spent a cloudy day counting birds in western Skagit County for the National Audubon Society's 120th annual Christmas Bird Count. We tallied all-time high counts for this count circle for 7 species, including Canada Goose, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Bald Eagle, Black Oystercatcher, Eurasian Collared-Dove, and Anna's Hummingbird. Total count for individuals was about average for our count circle. Total number of species was slightly below the mean of 123 species. A big thank you to Tim Manns, count coordinator; Bob Kountz, count compiler; Denny Quirk and Alice Turner for their help to organize the 2019 count. Count results are below:

Red-throated Loon	782	Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	Pileated Woodpecker	10
Pacific Loon	36	Cooper's Hawk	17	Northern Shrike	4
Common Loon	66	accipiter (sp.)	4	Steller's Jay	36
Pied-billed Grebe	26	Red-tailed Hawk	125	American / NW Crow	369
Horned Grebe	84	Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk	2	Common Raven	186
Red-necked Grebe	32	Rough-legged Hawk	10	Black-capped Chickadee	269
Western Grebe	24	American Kestrel	12	Chestnut-back. Chickadee	461
Double-crested Cormorant	493	Merlin	10	Bushtit	158
Brandt's Cormorant	164	Peregrine Falcon	7	Red-breasted Nuthatch	86
Pelagic Cormorant	148	Gyr Falcon	1	Brown Creeper	54
cormorant (sp.)	20	Ring-necked Pheasant	1	Bewick's Wren	57
Great Blue Heron	255	California Quail	48	Pacific Wren	189
Tundra Swan	9	Virginia Rail	3	Marsh Wren	4
Trumpeter Swan	1083	Killdeer	11	Golden-crowned Kinglet	526
swan (sp.)	830	Black Oystercatcher	171	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	98
Snow Goose	3556	Greater Yellowlegs	2	Hermit Thrush	4
Brant	1406	Spotted Sandpiper	2	American Robin	273
Cackling Goose	58	Black Turnstone	5	Varied Thrush	67
Canada Goose	674	Least Sandpiper	9	European Starling	6556
Am. Green-winged Teal	1892	Dunlin	279	Hutton's Vireo	4
Mallard	13453	Wilson's Snipe	1	Orange-crowned Warbler	1
Northern Pintail	4933	Mew Gull	953	Spotted Towhee	382
Northern Shoveler	7	Ring-billed Gull	15	Savannah Sparrow	4
Gadwall	58	Western Gull	3	Fox Sparrow	132
Eurasian Wigeon	62	Thayer's Gull	4	Song Sparrow	601
American Wigeon	18289	W. x Glaucous-w. Gull-hyb.	240	Lincoln's Sparrow	9
Am. X Eur. Wigeon-hybrid	2	Glaucous-winged Gull	710	Golden-crowned Sparrow	414
Canvasback	2	gull (sp.)	1131	White-crowned Sparrow	244
Ring-necked Duck	50	Common Murre	63	sparrow (sp.)	7
Greater Scaup	1007	Pigeon Guillemot	90	Dark-eyed Oregon Junco	1694
Lesser Scaup	58	Marbled Murrelet	24	Dark-eyed Slate-colored Junco	1
scaup (sp.)	307	Rock Pigeon	587	Red-winged Blackbird	1819
Harlequin Duck	5	Eurasian Collared Dove	238	Western Meadowlark	27
Long-tailed Duck	29	Mourning Dove	81	Brewer's Blackbird	560
Surf Scoter	258	Barn Owl	6	blackbird (sp.)	12
White-winged Scoter	184	Great Horned Owl	14	Brown-headed Cowbird	75
Common Goldeneye	317	Barred Owl	4	Purple Finch	29
Barrow's Goldeneye	11	Short-eared Owl	1	House Finch	650
Com. X Bar. Goldeneye-hybrid	1	Northern Saw-whet Owl	2	finch (sp.)	32
Bufflehead	1259	Anna's Hummingbird	177	Red Crossbill	13
Hooded Merganser	259	Belted Kingfisher	39	Pine Siskin	1684
Common Merganser	295	Red-breasted Sapsucker	3	American Goldfinch	45
Red-breasted Merganser	725	Downy Woodpecker	34	House Sparrow	432
Ruddy Duck	13	Hairy Woodpecker	22		
duck (sp.)	3611	Northern Flicker	103	Total # of Species	121
Bald Eagle	402	N. Red-shafted Flicker	47	Total # of Individuals	80747
Northern Harrier	34	N. R-sh. X Y-sh. Flicker-hyb.	3		

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT TAKES FLIGHT from Feb. 14-17, 2020 and if you enjoy watching birds, have basic identification skills, and want to help ornithologists answer a range of questions about birds, the GBBC is an easy way to participate. Since 1998, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and National Audubon Society have collaborated on the GBBC to gather bird information over a wide geographic area. Additional partners include Bird Studies Canada and many organizations in other countries.

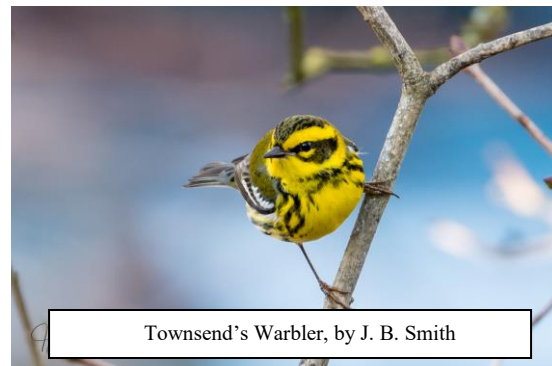
Participants count birds in their yards, or anywhere in the world, for at least 15 minutes on one or more of the count days and submit the data online. During the four days of the count, you can submit as many lists as you want, from as many locations as you choose. The GBBC website reports that, “In 2019, 224,781 GBBC participants counted 6,699 species on 204,921 checklists.” These figures represent new records for participation, species seen and checklists submitted. The GBBC is free, fun and submitting your data online is easy. To register or for more information, including results from prior year counts, please visit: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org>.

Now, what about how to count birds? Most bird counting is easy because you are observing individual birds or small groups of birds and you record the highest number of birds you see. However, sometimes you’ll come upon a large flock of birds, like the iconic flocks of Snow Geese or Trumpeter Swans of the Skagit Valley, and counting each individual bird is neither possible nor practical. Wildlife managers can do aerial surveys of large flocks of geese, ducks, swans and shorebirds, but the average birder remains on the ground and at eye level with the birds. So, how does one estimate the size of a large flock?

If the flock is small, you can count a group of 10 birds. This will give you an idea of the amount of space the 10 birds occupy and then extrapolate that number to the rest of the flock. You don’t need to worry about capturing every single bird but rather an estimate that seems reasonable to you. If the flock is large – perhaps occupying an entire field – you can count a group of 100 birds, again noting the amount of space they occupy, and then extrapolate that number to the rest of the flock. You will probably end up with an estimate in the thousands. You won’t be able to see every bird in a large flock so remember that under-estimating rather than over-estimating is preferred. For more tips and examples, visit: <https://ebird.org/news/counting-101/>.

2019 GBBC Top 10 Most Frequently Reported Species (# of Checklists)

Northern Cardinal	56,785
Dark-Eyed Junco	50,397
Mourning Dove	45,449
Downy Woodpecker	42,095
Blue Jay	40,386
American Crow	39,467
House Finch	37,726
House Sparrow	37,149
Black-Capped Chickadee	35,757
White-Breasted Nuthatch	33,284



Townsend's Warbler, by J. B. Smith

2019 GBBC Top 10 Most Numerous Species (# of Individuals Across All Checklists)

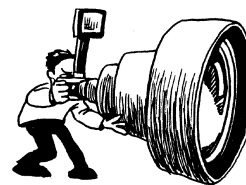
Red-Winged Blackbird	4,290,218
Snow Goose	2,481,082
European Starling	2,031,493
Canada Goose	1,716,620
Common Murre	755,193
Ring-Billed Gull	748,766
Mallard	720,105
American Robin	491,102
American Coot	448,816
Northern Shoveler	446,105

2019 GBBC Top Ten States by Checklists Submitted (* indicates new state record)

California	10,059
Texas	9,121*
New York	8,453*
Florida	7,696*
Pennsylvania	7,640
Virginia	6,332*
Washington	4,905*
Ohio	4,901*
North Carolina	4,620
Michigan	4,596

CALLING ALL BIRD PHOTOGRAPHERS – IT’S TIME FOR THE ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS!

You’re crazy about birds and photography. Now combine your twin passions by entering your best bird photos in the 2020 Audubon Photography Awards. You could win a cash prize or, if you’re our Youth winner, a special trip that will help you become an even better birder or bird photographer. Winning photos will be published in future issues of *Audubon* and *Nature’s Best Photography* magazines and will travel across the country in a special Audubon Photography Awards exhibit.



Entry Period:

January 13, 2020–April 6, 2020 at 12 p.m. (noon) Eastern Daylight Time (EDT)

Win: Cash prizes up to \$5,000

Special Youth prize: Six days at the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine (transportation included)

No purchase necessary. Contest begins 1/13/20 and ends 4/6/20. Must be at least 13 years of age and a legal resident of the 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, or Canada (excluding Quebec) to enter. Entrants under the age of majority must get permission from their parent or legal guardian to enter. Subject to Official Rules, <https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/2019-audubon-photography-contest-prizes>. Void where prohibited. (Not affiliated with or sponsored by Skagit Audubon Society)



FROM YOUR EDITOR, by Mary Sinker (photo of Northern Pygmy Owl by Mary Sinker)

The owls have it when it comes to being a supreme predator, day or night. With feathers that are serrated on one side and fringed along the other edge, their flight is silent. The result is a complete surprise for their prey, ranging in size from insects to small game.

Not only do owls fly in silence, their asymmetrical ears enable them to pinpoint the location of prey because sound is received in multiple dimensions. Owls have immobile tube-shaped eyes and because of this their vision is binocular with better depth perception so prey is fully focused. One particularly fascinating feature is that owls can rotate their necks 270 degrees; and the Northern Pygmy Owl has “false eyes” on the back of its head. This gives the impression the owl is looking at you from behind and could be a defense mechanism from predators. Yes, owls do have predators, often other owls. Great Horned Owls prey on the smaller Barred Owl and Barred Owls will out-compete Spotted Owls when the two have overlapping habitats.

The smallest owl in the world is the Elf Owl at 5-6 inches tall and weighing in at about 1-1/2 ounces. The largest owl in the world is the Blakiston’s fish owl at 2-1/2 feet tall and weighing in at 10 lbs. or more. Found only in Russia, China and Japan, this owl is endangered. Owls are found on every continent, except Antarctica, and in every ecosystem from the Arctic to the desert. Of the 216 species found worldwide, 18 of them belong to the Barn Owl family (Tytonidae) and 198 belong to the typical owl family (Strigidae).

In Western Washington we are fortunate to have several resident* owls – Great Horned, Barred, Northern Saw-whet, Northern Pygmy, Northern Spotted, Short-eared*, Long-eared and Barn. Barn owls can eat up to 1,000 mice a year and Short-eared owls are active during the day, feeding early in the morning and again before dusk. In some years, Snowy Owls spend the winter here when prey is reduced in their home ranges in northern Canada, Alaska and the Arctic. *Short-eared owls are found throughout Western Washington in the winter months.

Keep your eyes and ears open and you never know which of these owls may turn up in your neighborhood!

CONSERVATION, by Tim Manns

The Washington State Legislature's 60 day session opened January 13th and is scheduled to end March 12th. Our state has a two-year budget cycle, and in non-budget writing years such as 2020 the session is very short and the pressure to get things done correspondingly intense. Nonetheless, the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), whose twenty member organizations include Audubon Washington, is pursuing 4 legislative priorities with the help of member volunteers and staff. Please participate in your state government by calling or writing the elected officials who represent you.

The Coalition is focusing on setting a clean fuels standard, updating the goals and timeline for limiting climate pollution, improving the potential for Southern Resident Orcas to survive, and banning single-use plastic bags as many other jurisdictions around the world have already done. Read <https://wecprotects.org/environmental-priorities-coalition/>. The one-pager links with the description of each priority give details and associated bill numbers for legislation introduced in the current session in Olympia. Contact your elected representatives and ask for their support.

Audubon Washington staff produced a summary of legislative priorities adding a few to the EPC's 4, some addressing the climate crisis, identified by National Audubon research as the number one threat to birds, and some on related matters such as improved funding for Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. WDFW manages much habitat where we enjoy birding and is responsible for studying and protecting rare species. Read the Audubon summary and details and sign up for weekly legislative updates by Adam Maxwell, Audubon Washington's Director of Government Affairs at <https://wa.audubon.org/conservation/legislative-session-2020> (scroll down to "[Overview of 2020 Priority Issues](#)"). Note Audubon's increasing emphasis on leveraging nature's ability to sequester carbon by protecting forests and improving farming practices, both very relevant in Skagit County.

The State Legislature's informative website is a great tool for active citizens: <http://leg.wa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>. To check on a particular bill in the House or Senate, click on "Bill Information" along the left margin. On this website you can comment on bills and sign up to receive e-mail notification when there's action on legislation of special interest to you.

We probably all can cite instances of regret when we didn't speak out and a bad bill passed. Nothing is easier than telling ourselves we can't make a difference. In fact, there are many examples in Washington State of concerted and persistent action by enough people resulting in positive change. Active citizens can change the world. March 12th is not far off. Let's make a difference for people, for birds, for the planet.

For information on more conservation issues of concern to Skagit Audubon: <https://skagitaudubon.org/conservation/notes>.

Seeking New Volunteers for the Christmas Bird Count

Skagit Audubon started the Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count in 1973 and has held it yearly since 1980. This event is one of thousands of official Christmas Bird Counts across the U.S. and other countries. The data collected supports research on trends in avian populations and ranges including in response to climate change. For many years Bob Kuntz has compiled the Padilla Bay count results and reported them to National Audubon. Over the past 7 years, Tim Manns has recruited and organized the count participants. Bob and Tim are ready to give other Skagit Audubon volunteers the opportunity to make the Padilla Bay CBC happen. If you would like to contribute a bit of time and talent to Skagit Audubon Society, please contact them for details (Tim: conservation@skagitaudubon.org., 360.333.8985; Bob: annebobkuntz@gmail.com., 360.424.9099).



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.

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Immediate Past President:	Vacant

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

Feb. 4 – Skagit Audubon Board Meeting

Feb. 5 – Skagit Audubon Field Trip Reifel Bird Sanctuary, BC, Canada

Feb. 5 – Skagit Audubon Hike Lummi Island

Feb. 11 – Skagit Audubon Program and General Meeting

Feb. 12 – Skagit Audubon Hike Camano Island

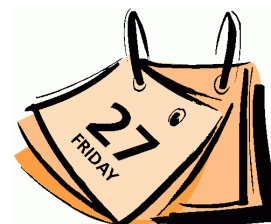
Feb. 19 – Skagit Audubon Hike Conway Area Dike Walk

Feb. 23 – Skagit Audubon Field Trip Whatcom County Shores

Feb. 22-23 Stanwood/Camano Snow Goose Festival

Feb. 26 – Skagit Audubon Hike Fragrance Lake

Mar. 4 – Skagit Audubon Hike Goose Rock



**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 Skagit Flyer*, available in color at <http://www.skagitaudubon.org/newsletter>. Membership includes all members of your household.

Check one: _____ \$20/one year _____ \$40/two years _____ New _____ Renewal

Additionally, I wish to donate to Skagit Audubon Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, in the amount of \$_____. 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
PO Box 1101
Mt. Vernon WA 98273-1101

Name: _____ Areas of Interest (check all that apply)

Address: _____ Birds_____ Gardening_____

City/State/: _____ Education_____ Conservation_____

ZIP: _____ Phone: _____ Field Trips _____ Hiking _____

Email: _____ Other: _____

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