



# Shorelines

Newsletter of the Whidbey Audubon Society

April 2022

*Whidbey Audubon Society is dedicated to the understanding, appreciation, and protection of birds and other wildlife species and their habitat on Whidbey Island and surrounding waters.*

## Whidbey Audubon Society Meets Thursday, April 14 *The Aerialists: One tough way to make a living*



All bird species in our area have the ability to fly, and many of them make contact with their food from the air. Of the 232 species on Whidbey Audubon's checklist, however, less than 10 percent feed almost exclusively on flying prey. These are the aerialists: swallows, swifts, nighthawk, flycatchers, accipiters and falcons.

There's a simple reason why seed eating species such as sparrows are so numerous: their food can't escape. And while we rightfully marvel at a Red-tailed Hawk dropping on a vole, try catching an evasive insect traveling six inches above the ground while you're flying 25 to 45 miles per hour. Or attempt to single out a bird in flight from a twisting flock of 500 Dunlin. The slightest miscalculation will result in serious harm.

The aerialists are some of the most overlooked and underappreciated bird species. Each has its unique adaptations and habits that allow them to exploit food sources unavailable to other birds. Each also faces daunting challenges.

All the aerialists, from the frequent flier champ (the Barn Swallow) to the ultimate speed machine (the Peregrine Falcon) share this particular characteristic: they have one tough way to make a living.

Presenters are longtime Coupeville residents Steve and Martha Ellis. Steve is a past president of Whidbey Audubon Society and Martha is a member of the Washington Native Plant Society.

Together they have been leading field trips and giving talks on a wide range of natural history topics for more than 30 years.

Please join us on Thursday, April 14 at 7 p.m., for Whidbey Audubon's monthly meeting. **This is a hybrid meeting**, which means attendees may come in person or participate online via Zoom. Preregistration for in person attendance is required and is limited to 35 people — first come, first served.

The meeting is at the Bayview Cash Store, upstairs in the Front Room, 5603 Bayview Road, Langley. There are restrooms and an elevator.

The program is free and open to the public. All Whidbey Audubon members will receive an email with the Zoom link by the early afternoon of April 14. **Anyone wishing to attend in person must preregister** under the events listing on the Whidbey [Audubon website](#) (red text is hyperlinked, just click). Nonmembers must also preregister to attend either online or in person.



Photo by Beth Stephens

Steve and Martha Ellis present *The Aerialists*, about birds that catch their prey in flight.

## Upcoming Field Trips

**Saturday, April 9: HOYPUS POINT/DECEPTION PASS STATE PARK.** Meet at 10 a.m. in the parking lot near the marina. Take SR I-5 north to Mount Vernon, take exit 230; at the freeway off ramp turn left onto SR 20 west, follow this for 18 miles to Deception Pass. Continue another mile. There will be a stoplight at the main entrance to Deception Pass State Park, which is on the right. You will turn left at the stoplight onto Cornet Bay Road. If coming north on SR 20 from Oak

Harbor the turn will be on your right. Follow Cornet Bay Road to its end at the marina, 1.4 miles from the stoplight. There is plenty of parking and restrooms available. The trail starts at the road closure. Discover Pass is required per vehicle. Trip leader is [Patty Cheek](#).

**Tuesday, April 19: WATERMAN PRESERVE.** *Birding by Ear*

Upcoming Field Trips, see [page 5](#)



## President's Column: From the Window Perch

Yeah! The Spring Equinox with longer days and the earth awakening.

I started drawing birds, very poorly, in November 2019 as part of my grief process after my mother died. It was a struggle because I was trying to be *Patty Perfect* again. As soon as I loosened the reins and started having fun, things improved.

The online classes offered by John Muir Laws have been wonderful. He talks about the ability to draw and remember details of the bird that you have never thought of before. As often as I

### Dates to Remember

Please check the Whidbey Audubon Society Events Calendar and Listings on its website for more detailed information and how to enter Zoom for some of these upcoming events: [www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org](http://www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org). There also might be further information elsewhere in this issue.

April is Earth and Ocean Month throughout Whidbey Island. Check out the many events listed on the Goosefoot website: [whidbeyearthday.org](http://whidbeyearthday.org).



#### APRIL

- 9: Field Trip: Hoypus Point**, Deception Pass State Park, 10 a.m.
- 14: Audubon Meeting: *The Aerialists: One Tough Way to Make a Living*** with Steve and Martha Ellis, 7 p.m.
- 19: Field Trip: Birding by Ear**, 8 a.m. at Waterman Preserve
- 20: Birds 'n' Beer**. 5 p.m.
- 21: Deadline for May Shorelines**
- 23: Field Trip: Bowman Bay**, Deception Pass State Park, 10 a.m.
- 27: Page Peepers Book Group: *Vesper Flights*** by Helen Macdonald, 7 p.m.
- 28: Board Meeting**. 7 p.m. Members welcome

#### MAY

- 7: Field Trip: Hoypus Point**, Deception Pass State Park, 8 a.m.
- 12: Program meeting: *White Pelicans*** with Cathy Scott; and Board elections; 7 p.m., hybrid
- 17: Field Trip: Birding by Ear**, 8 a.m.
- 18: Birds 'n' Beer**. 5 p.m.
- 19: Deadline for June Shorelines**
- 21: Field Trip: West Beach**, 10 a.m.; details to come
- 25: Page Peepers Book Group, *The Ravenmaster*** by Christopher Skaife, 7 p.m.

#### SAVE THE DATE:

- JUNE 2: Whidbey Audubon Society's 40th Anniversary Celebration**; details to come

can, I try to meet with several birding friends to draw and paint birds. I am taking a class in advanced birding too and this is a BIG STEP. Observation! Attention, attention, attention!

Aldous Huxley used this as a mantra in his book *Island*. A mynah bird screams, "Attention, attention, attention." I read the book in 1966 for an English course and again, in the mid-80s for a sociology course for my second degree. The book is a philosophical masterpiece that emphasizes being *here* now and paying attention. I am using this mantra to approach one of most difficult assignments in my course: *Drawing a bird without looking at a picture*. Oh my. Entirely from memory? Really?

"I can't begin to do it," I first tell myself. Then the mantra: *Attention! Be here now*.

So, how do I approach this? I concentrate on observing the bird in existing illustrations or photographs, going from its bill, to the crown, to the eyes, the face, the neck, the breast, the tail, the wings and of course, the legs and feet. I go slowly. What kind of a beak is it? Short, stubby, all-purpose, or long, all the way to dagger like? Does it curve here, remain straight, down-curved or upcurved? How long is it in relation to the head? I try to picture this over and over until it becomes ingrained in my brain. I close my eyes and picture it. Then I open my eyes, look again, observe and pay attention. Close my eyes and then visualize the beak again. I draw it in the air with my eyes closed and then again, with them open. Next, I draw the beak with a picture close at hand. I turn the picture over and try to draw it as I remember it. After that, I look back at the picture with my drawing and notice all the things I missed. Yikes! How could I miss that? Do it again and again and again. Notice more details.

At first, my drawings looked childish. Little by little they became more like the bird I was trying to draw. Now, I am working on the whole bird in one sitting without first looking at the picture. It's so HARD! I can only do this for a few minutes and then, I have to stop and look out the window. My curiosity is sparked by watching the yard birds' behavior. I draw snippets of different movements. ATTENTION!

Now, I can identify birds that I have drawn because I know so much more about the details. This is the great benefit of drawing. I've also absorbed much more about their shapes and postures. My curiosity is supercharged.

It all begins with attention. Then practice and perseverance. And of course, be *here* now. Bird often and pay attention.

— *Patty Cheek, President*

*Would that I were under the cliffs, in the secret-hiding places of the rocks, that Zeus might change me to a winged bird.*

— *Sophocles, Hippolytus, 428 B.C.*

# Whidbey Audubon Birdathon 2022: The Sky Is the Limit!

## What is the Birdathon?

Spring has arrived with buds opening and birds increasing the volume and intensity of their songs. It is a reminder to start thinking about *how you can take part* in this year's annual Birdathon.

Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) remains committed to protecting native birds and the natural spaces they need to thrive in. Funds raised during the Birdathon support this mission to connect people to nature through community education and conservation. It is our major fundraiser for the scholarship fund, which provides scholarships for high school seniors going into environmental studies. Thanks to your support and generosity, 2021's Birdathon pledges and donations came to an amazing \$9,446.25!

Modeled on Global Big Day of Birding (this year on May 14, 2022) this annual WAS fundraiser brings birding teams into the field, in a friendly competition that is similar to a walk-a-thon, but instead of getting a pledge per mile walked, there is a pledge for each bird species spotted. Team participants collect pledges per species or a flat amount from family, friends, work colleagues and others who want to support Whidbey Audubon. Then in early May, during peak bird migration, they count and record as many species as they can see in a 24 hour period, anywhere on Whidbey Island and immediately surrounding waters.

## How can you participate?

- **You can make a pledge per species or one-time donation to an existing team.** On the WAS webpage is a list of this year's participating teams. At the push of a virtual button, you can make a difference for birds while supporting the team of your choice.
- **You can form your own team.** This is really pretty easy. Again, go to the WAS website, under Events: Birdathon, where you'll find all the information you need to create a team of your own.
- **Solo Birdathon.** You can bird alone, whether in your own backyard, neighborhood or any public greenspace on Whidbey Island. The Birdathon web page has all the information you need to turn in a list of species you spot and the pledges or donations you gather.
- **Backyard Birding.** Maybe you just want to see what birds come to your backyard space. Simply write down all species



Photo by Jim Gage

Common Loon heralds the 2022 Birdathon.

that come to your feeder or yard, either by yourself, with someone in your "bubble" or outdoors, socially distanced.

Please see the [WAS website](#) for more information on making a pledge/donation or forming a team.

As usual, the coveted **Golden Binocular Award** will go to the team that sights the most species, while the team that raises the most money will earn the **Bronze Owl Bank**.

The annual Whidbey Audubon Society fundraiser is a huge success because of people like you who care about birds and protecting our natural environment. No matter how you choose to participate, we thank you for being proactive and for all your support.

As Birdathon Coordinator, I will answer questions at the April 14 meeting. For more information, email [birdathon@whidbey-audubonsociety.com](mailto:birdathon@whidbey-audubonsociety.com).

— Kathy Obersinner, Birdathon Chair

## Birding by Ear Field Trips Begin April 19

*Birding by Ear* is a new series of field trips being launched by Charlotte Ginn and myself, Patty Cheek. They are once a month, the third Tuesday, from April through August. The focus is on listening and learning the various songs and calls of different birds. Participants are limited to 10, plus me as the leader. These trips will be a different type of field trip. Quiet, meditative, just whispering. We will be using the "sit spot" off and on for 10+ minutes in each spot. No one will identify the bird until all have listened to it and thought about the sound — whistle, croak, melodic, dissonant, trills, two-note calls, three-note calls, how long is the song, does it stay the same, go up or down, is the song fast or slow, etc. We'll talk about the different calls and describe them as well. Finally, if we can, we will identify the bird. There will be little talk on these walks. More listening than anything else. If it's possible to identify or make a mnemonic, we'll do so. Come and have fun with us! The first walk will be on April 19 at 8 a.m., Waterman Preserve, at Bob Galbreath and Wilkinson Roads, Langley. Please contact me at [president@whidbeyesocietyaudubon.org](mailto:president@whidbeyesocietyaudubon.org) or call 425-246-1766. If you try to reach me by cell phone, be sure to leave me a message so I don't assume that you're a scammer.

— Patty Cheek

# Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings

**February 26:** Heard my first **Hutton's Vireo** of the season. No other birds were vocalizing on the cold afternoon. Heard south of Langley on Wilkinson Road near intersection with Surface Road.

— *Frances Wood*



Photo by Linda Greisbach

Eurasian Wigeon among American Wigeons.

**March 3:** Two **Western Meadowlarks** were at Ebey's Prairie this morning. One of them sang several times. I found 20 bird species from the Prairie to Bluff and Pratt Loop Trails. East of the Prairie-to-Bluff Trail just before the deep dip in the trail. — *Steve Ellis*

**March 5:** At least two **Turkey Vultures** over SR 20 north of Oak Harbor this afternoon. It was a good day for soaring with many **Bald Eagles** and **Red-tailed Hawks** in the air.

— *Steve Ellis*

**March 21:** I saw a male **Yellow-rumped Warbler** in the Sunlight shores area. This appears to be an early arrival.

— *Barbara Bennett*

**March 24:** First **Orange-crowned Warblers** (one was singing) of the year today at Fort Ebey State Park near the beach access parking area. And the first **Violet-green Swallows** at Crockett's Lake. Also

flying at the lake at 11 a.m. were both a **Northern Harrier** and a **Short-eared Owl**. I don't often see Short-eareds quite so early in the day.

— *Steve Ellis*

**March 24:** A kettle of raptors formed over Coupeville this afternoon: six **Bald Eagles** and two **Red-tailed Hawks**. Yesterday afternoon I saw a **Common Raven** shadowing a **Peregrine Falcon** that was cruising over the town toward the pier. It pays to look up!

— *Steve Ellis*

**March 27:** I sighted **swans** at



Photo by Libby Hayward

Tundra and Trumpeter Swans at Deer Lagoon.

Deer Lagoon this afternoon, not rare but not seen previously here this year by me.... I believe both **Tundra** and **Trumpeter** based on their dif-

fering postures and distinction between the eye and beak (=Tundra) and little distinction (=Trumpeter). I saw 12 to 13 total, actively swimming, standing, and feeding from the west dike trail at Deer Lagoon, about mid estuary looking west. — *Libby Hayward*

**March 29:** First **Goldfinch** of the season came onto our backyard feeder this morning on Aquila Drive in Langley.

— *Stef Neis*



Photo by Carlos Andersen

Mountain Bluebird.

**March 31:** Five **Mountain Bluebirds** at Pacific Rim Institute south of Coupeville. Two males and three females.

— *Carlos Andersen*



Photo by Steve and Martha Ellis

Leucistic Bald Eagle.

**February 27:** A leucistic adult **Bald Eagle** is hanging out around Penn Cove. It appears to be darker than the one last year, or the same bird after molting. We saw it at Captain Coupe Park Saturday and today it was at San de Fuca near Penn Cove Pottery.

— *Steve Ellis*

**March 2:** **Eurasian Wigeon** amongst a flock of his American cousins. Seen at south Lone Lake wetland from the Apollo Road cul de sac.

— *Linda Griesbach*

**March 2:** **Tree Swallows!** They're back over the Land Trust Wetland on Cultus Bay Road. — *Dyanne Sheldon*

## Visiting an Old Freund

**March 9:** It had been a long time since the Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) North group had visited Freund Marsh. I had always called it "Froind" like Sigmund, but I guess it is Freund like, well, Friend. Freund Marsh is at the south end of Oak Harbor and has a trailhead at both Scenic Heights and off Beekma. The property includes parking, interpretive signs and a trail map. A long open trail gives access to salt water views on the south end and the rest of the trail is brushy. Apparently, the

Old Freund, see page 6

**PLEASE POST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS** to the *Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) website*, Select the aqua button, "Report a Sighting." You can also submit a photo using the aqua button labeled "Submit Gallery Photos."

Sightings should be on Whidbey Island or relate in some way to Whidbey Audubon. Reports should refer to birds or other wildlife that are not commonly seen here. Alternatively, they may refer to migratory birds that arrive outside their normal seasons.

Reports of especially interesting sightings in nearby areas are welcome. Greater selectivity is needed to keep the email volume reasonable so editors will exercise judgment on whether the rarity, proximity and significance of sightings merit inclusion.

These guidelines reflect the interests of local birders. Please respect the essentially scientific nature of the Sightings feature. Thanks for your cooperation.

There are designated spaces to submit your information, such as what you saw, where you saw it and the date and approximate time. Although we are asking those who post to leave a phone number or email address with your sighting, they will not be included on the actual "Sightings" page. Thank you!

Keep up with "Sightings" on the was website or on our Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/WhidbeyAudubonSociety](http://www.facebook.com/WhidbeyAudubonSociety).

## Field Trip Reports: Deer Lagoon Field Trip

A group of 12 of us enjoyed a sunny morning at Deer Lagoon on February 25. The last time I had led a trip here, before Covid, it was so wet you could not use your optics as they became useless with all the fogging up and rain on them. This trip was pleasantly different. We were able to see the start of the restoration project with plants being put in on the dike and Patty Cheek and Carol Russo gave an update as to what was going on.

Birding was fun with a total of 27 species being recorded. Lots of great birds on the water on the marsh side. During the first part of the trail we saw **Spotted Towhee**, **Dark-eyed Junco**, **Northern Flicker**, **American Robin** and **Black-**

**capped Chickadee**, to name a few. Once we got to the sign where the trail opens up, interesting birds we saw were **Dunlin**, **Hooded Merganser**, **American Coot**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, **Green-winged Teal**, **Gadwall**, **Mallard**, **Marsh Wren**, **Bald Eagle**, **American Crow**, **Northern Harrier**, **Canada Goose**, **Bufflehead**, **Lesser Scaup**, **American Wigeon**, **Northern Pintail**, **Northern Shoveler** and **Pied-billed Grebes**. The **Marsh Wrens** were their pretty chatty selves. It was a beautiful dry sunny morning with great birders and birds!

— Carlos Andersen

## Fort Casey State Park Bird Trip

Nineteen people braved the weather forecast and came out for the Fort Casey State Park field trip on March 12. The weather cooperated with the rain holding off but it was windy. The bird of the day was the **American Robin**. There were robins everywhere calling, singing, foraging and even a warning call. Seems many of the other birds were hunkered down, possibly,

because of the cold and windy conditions. A **Common Raven**, **Bald Eagle** and **Northern Harrier** seemed to enjoy riding the wind. The **Dark-eyed Juncos**, a **Song Sparrow** and a **House Finch** didn't seem bothered by the wind.

Fort Casey, see page 9

### Upcoming Field Trips, from page 1

is a new field trip offering, see the description on page 3. Trip Leader is **Patty Cheek** or call 425-246-1766, leave a message if no answer.

**Saturday, April 23: BOWMAN BAY/DECEPTION PASS STATE PARK.** Meet at 10 a.m. in the lower parking lot-boat launch. To find it, take SR20 north of Deception Pass bridge; turn west on Rosario Road then quick left onto Bowman Bay Road. This trip we will be able to see waterfowl at the marina and then have a look at the forest edge for woodland species. Discover Pass is required per vehicle. Trip leader is **Charlotte Ginn**.

**Saturday, May 7: HOYPUS POINT/DECEPTION PASS.** Meet at the trail head near the boat ramp. Trip starts promptly at 8 a.m. We will be looking for, and most importantly, listening for resident and migratory songbirds. The focus is on the call notes of **Hammond's Flycatcher**. Participants may want to do some vocalization homework in preparation for the walk. Discover Pass is required per vehicle. Trip leader is **Jay Adams**.

**Saturday, May 21: WEST BEACH** at 10 a.m. Details will be in the May *Shorelines* and on the Whidbey Audubon website. Trip leader is **Carlos Andersen**.

Field trips have been a fun time the last couple months. Trips to Fir Island, Deer Lagoon, Fort Casey and Deception Pass have provided birders with a view of a variety of birds that inhabit western Washington.

Our field trip leaders Janet Hall, Joe Sheldon, Jay Adams, Dave Parent and Ruth Richards, Carlos Anderson and Steve

### Field Trip Checklist

- ✓ Field trips are free and open to anyone interested in birding or conservation. Bring your friends!
- ✓ Beginners are very welcome.
- ✓ Carpooling is encouraged and even required for some sites with limited parking.
- ✓ Dress for the weather and in layers.
- ✓ Very bad weather cancels a trip. Check with the trip leader.
- ✓ If you have them, bring binoculars, scope and field guides.
- ✓ If you might need them, bring a drink and snack.

We are always looking for new trip leaders and assistants. If you are interested, please contact Charlotte Ginn at [cginnsixbit@yahoo.com](mailto:cginnsixbit@yahoo.com).

Ellis have been great guides, providing participants with special knowledge and insight on our bird friends and their habitats. We really appreciate their contribution to our program.

As a bonus to the Whidbey Audubon Society field trips, we have partnered with Deception Pass State Park to lead field trips at the park twice a month. Participation has been great and we are reaching a number of first time and novice birders. They are full of enthusiasm, and hopefully, will be inspired to increase their relationship with birds and the environment.

All participants are welcome. Any suggestions for an area to explore or if someone would like to lead a trip, please contact me at [cginnsixbit@yahoo.com](mailto:cginnsixbit@yahoo.com) or 209-352-6534.

—Charlotte Ginn, Field Trip chair

## Birding in Neighborhoods South Finds Treasures

**February 24:** Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) South last time began as a raptor day, and although the weather dampened the birder/bird turnout a bit, it was certainly worth bundling up and coming out to Deer Lagoon. By the time we returned down the path, the snow had quickly melted away, and in between, we saw and/or heard at least 32 species.

**Meadowlarks** were flitting about the far south field, among the coyotes. A **Long-billed Dowitcher** was hanging around with the **Greater Yellowlegs**. A **Pied-billed Grebe** was hanging with the **Buffleheads** and **Northern Pintails**. A rewarding day and more springlike behavior than can be mentioned.

The following day was beautiful and Carlos Andersen led a field trip at Deer Lagoon. You really must make a point of watching male **Hooded Mergansers** this time of year. Floating along with their unimpressive bills raised up and an endearing growling sound emanated from the little gang. Thankfully they have impressive headdresses.

**March 10:** For a day at Deer Lagoon that didn't much stand out, we saw and/or heard at least 39 species for the morning! We did enjoy a long look at the most beautiful **Northern Shovelers**, shoveling away. (Hopefully they got a permit, and made an Environmental Impact Statement.) The **Buffleheads** were really close-in also and vocal, chattering away. Charming as heck.

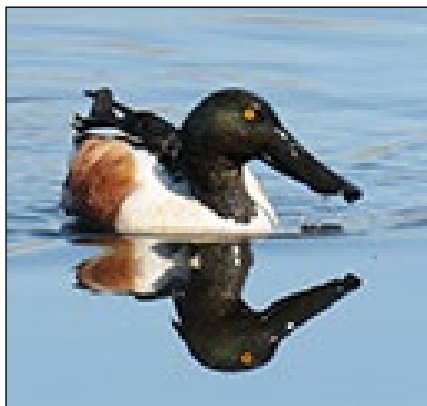


Photo by Craig Johnson

Northern Shoveler, male.

### Old Friend, from page 4

city may have some plans for the area, so it is in our best interest to lobby to keep it open space for birds and wildlife if the situation arises. One of the participants, Denise, led the walk this day. The group saw **Song**, **House** and **Golden-crowned Sparrows**, **Black-capped** and **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, **Spotted Towhees** and **House Finches**. **Marsh Wrens**, **Red-winged Blackbirds** and **Killdeer** were also spotted. A **Red-tailed Hawk**, **Bald Eagle**, and **Northern Harrier** soared over the open space. Water birds included **Mallards**, **Northern Pintails** and **Common Goldeneyes**. A **Northern Shrike**, less common than many of the other birds, was also spotted. In all, 21 species were seen or heard this chilly day.

— Marcia Lazoff

**Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) North** meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m. Contact **Marcia** to be added to the email list.

It was intriguing to study the **Ring-necked Ducks**, the **Lesser Scaup** and the **Buffleheads**, who mostly kept to their own groups, but which were all in a single large flotilla together. When an Eagle flew overhead, everyone lifted off not far, to water just a bit deeper — it was interesting to observe them leaving the shallows, to water that must have been just deep enough to escape a preying raptor. Safety in numbers, but also it doesn't hurt to be able to dive away.

And there was the single **Coot** hanging with the **Mallards**. And the **Yellowlegs** running around. And the **Dunlins**. Okay — there was a lot of standing-out after all.

**March 24:** Just when it seems that Deer Lagoon is getting old, you're surprised by some little thing — actually, *Every. Single. Time.* A personal favorite aspect of birding is the treasure hunt that it is, and the opportunities for puzzling out sightings. I know that some of you would agree. Thursday, though we were many, we were focused and rewarded with a pretty good look at a **Sora** foraging along the slough by the dike path entrance. It was the highlight of a really lovely morning.

As always, **Marsh Wrens** were loud and entertaining, a **Belted Kingfisher** was finally present, the lone, old **Coot** was still hanging with the **Mallards** (to be fair, it could be a young Coot). The requisite warbler-neck was produced while identifying a silhouette that became a particularly gorgeous **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. Not a raptor day (though later, there were a couple of **Turkey Vultures** soaring around the south end) — but there are swallows around now, mostly **Tree Swallows**. We did follow one for such a long time trying to figure out what it was — it's a bit early for **Cliff Swallows** and it looked like a young **Barn Swallow**, which doesn't make a lot of sense either. Always surprises. And always fun to share with everyone.

We saw and/or heard at least 41 species and we were barely getting started.

— Cathi Bower

**Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) South** meets every other Thursday morning. Time varies with the season. Contact **Cathi**.

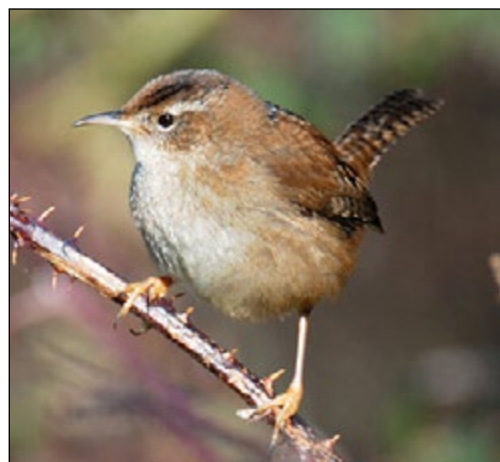


Photo by Craig Johnson

Marsh Wren

# The PGs Are Calling You (*not a Spam Risk*)

For those of us who are beside ourselves with anticipation for breeding season and fond beyond words for the Pigeon Guillemots (PG) of the Salish Sea, the PG monitoring call is ongoing.

Our wish is for everyone to answer the call, as well. If you are so moved, the summer 2022 monitoring season is just around the corner, and no one (that we know of) has ever regretted spending some summer hours on the beaches watching guillemots. I cannot express the satisfaction a seabird-lover experiences when participating in the Pigeon Guillemot Breeding Survey each year.

It's been great for me to have joined the Salish Sea Guillemot Network leadership team. As you may know, back in 2004 right here on Whidbey Island, the survey was established by two inquisitive Audubon members, Phyllis Kind and Frances Wood. Over these many years, the program has expanded to include more survey regions around the Sound and Frances has led its development every step of the way.

The work that began then has grown into a team effort, and has taken on a life of its own. What a team it is! Frances



Photo by Cathi Bower

A Pigeon Guillemot leaving its burrow.

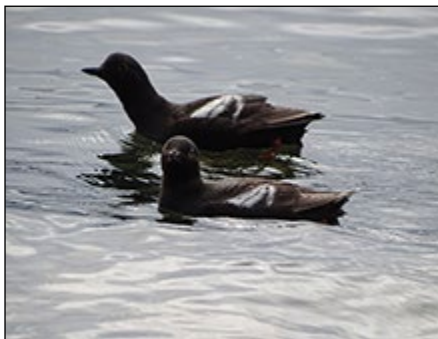
could just about sneak out and pursue some other interests and some time for herself, but we would likely notice the looming hole she would leave. Now that hole is developing into a whole coordinating team — as it will take a number of people to fill Frances' shoes.

Wait! Don't turn that page. Please check out the *Pigeon Guillemot Survey website* and see what contribution you can make, in the form of a few hours this summer. Although Frances' job description may seem daunting, through the team effort, accomplishing her part

makes it fun and easy and rewarding. If this is appealing, we would love to answer your questions and find a spot for you.

To sign up for training or to participate with the PG Survey leadership team or just to clarify some questions, contact *Frances Wood* or *Cathi Bower*. (Red text is hyperlinked to each email address, just click.)

— *Cathi Bower, Bird early – Bird often*



Pigeon Guillemot pair swimming.



Photos by Cathi Bower

A group of Pigeon Guillemots sunning on a rock

WHIDBEY WATERSHED STEWARDS

## Call for Volunteer Instructors at the Outdoor Classroom!

Passionate about ornithology and local bird species? Come share your passion and knowledge with students in grades K-5 as an Volunteer Instructor in our Spring Program: Birds in the Ecosystem!

**Upcoming Instructor Training Sessions:**  
 April 7th & April 12th  
 9:00am-2:00pm at the Outdoor Classroom

Attend a training to gather all the lesson plans for the season, and build the necessary skills to be an impactful instructor. Lunch is included too!

To RSVP for a training session, or get more information contact Shelby at [shelby.whidbeywatersheds@gmail.com](mailto:shelby.whidbeywatersheds@gmail.com)








Click the box above to email Shelby.

## Bird of the Month: Eastern Kingbird, *Tyrannus tyrannus*

As of this writing I am a few months into my eighth year on Whidbey Island. I don't really have a favorite island bird, but if I were to write about a single species, it would be a bird that I have yet to see here.

Using the Whidbey Audubon Society's *Birds of Whidbey Island Checklist*, there are five species I have not encountered: Solitary Sandpiper, Pomerine Jaeger, MacGillivray's Warbler, Nashville Warbler and Franklin's Gull. If instead I were to use the Washington Ornithological Society's much longer checklist for Island County (321 species) as my reference, there are 53 birds still missing from my "Whidbey" list. Of them, the bird I would most like to see locally is the Eastern Kingbird.

I cannot say exactly why, but as a long-time New England birder, Eastern Kingbird was always a favorite. Why? Maybe it was the bird's crisp black-and-white plumage pattern. Maybe it was the neat white tail tip. Maybe it was the way the bird flew on fluttering wingtips. Maybe it was the bird's *zeeb – zeeb – zeeb* vocalizations. Most likely it was a combination of all those features.

Despite its name, Eastern Kingbird breeding range includes all of the United States except for the Southwestern states, California and Oregon. Small local populations have occurred in the Puget Trough around the mouth of the Snohomish River. The species is migratory. Its primary non-breeding range includes much of Western Brazil. Some populations spend the winter in first one and then another South American locale.

Males and females are virtually identical. One is not likely to find a local species that could be the source of identification concern. The birds show a well-concealed red/orange/yellowish patch on the crown. Their molt strategy is highly complex.

Eastern Kingbirds feed mainly on insects of various kinds. Fruits are also eaten, especially on the wintering grounds. Fish and frogs are also known to have been taken. The foraging style is to perch and wait to sally out to take an insect on the wing. Birds usually return to the same perch. Eastern Kingbirds will kite in the absence of useable perches. Members of the species may also occupy spots in the tree canopy in bad weather, where they glean insects much as vireos do. Eastern Kingbirds generally take larger-sized insects, except when feeding young birds. The species is not known to drink water. Members cast pellets of undigested insect chitin.

Male Eastern Kingbirds sing to claim and defend territories



Eastern Kingbird

in the spring but not until the first females arrive. Males and females will call to remain in contact during the day. The male's dawn song is heard during the half hour more or less prior to sunrise. Eastern Kingbird vocalizations apparently are innate. There is no evidence of song teaching and learning. Although breeding pairs usually remain together during the season, even following nest failure, extra-pair mating behavior has been documented. Because the males have been shown to remain near the nest in the early morning hours, it is the females who are suspected of seeking mates outside of the pair bond. One brood is raised annually. Clutch size is from two to five eggs.

Nest site location is made by females and only the females incubate the eggs. The incubation period is either side of 15 days.

The species relies almost exclusively on flying for movement. Birds on the ground may hop. Walking takes place only occasionally.

Breeding bird survey data show Eastern Kingbird (EAKI) populations to include 26,000,000 individuals. Between 1970 and 2014, EAKI numbers declined by 38 percent. Most of the losses were in the Eastern part of the breeding range — where, of course, the majority of the birds are located. Mortality from human contact is often related to bird-auto collisions. But as is the case with so many avian species, it is the continuing loss/degradation of habitat that is responsible for declining population numbers. The species' winter ecology is barely known, yet one may assume that habitat loss is taking place, or is likely to take place, there, too.

So am I likely to run into an Eastern Kingbird one of these spring mornings on Whidbey Island? Matt Bartels of Washington Birder, [www.wabirder.com](http://www.wabirder.com), reports five known previous sightings of the bird in Island County, three of which occurred on Whidbey. The most recent was just about three years ago. More frequent posting of sightings of unusual birds — on the Whidbey Audubon Society website, via Tweeters and eBird, and even by phone to known local "chasers" — would help to make the presence of such birds more widely known and thus better documented — and perhaps better conserved.

This account draws heavily from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology *Birds of the World*, available online with a subscription, but at no charge via the Sno-Isle Library System.

— Jay Adams



**Fort Casey, from page 5**

As we moved into the woods the wind wasn't an issue and we saw a **Pacific Wren** flitting in the shrubs. We got a good look at a **Downy Woodpecker** and had a great discussion about the differences between the Downy and Hairy. Moving along, we observed **Northern Flickers** and **European Starlings** foraging in the grass. Walking back into the forest the **Chestnut-backed Chickadees**, a **Golden-crowned Kinglet** and a **Brown Creeper** flew in for a great closeup view.

The walk back to the parking lot was windy and cold but a hardy **Anna's Hummingbird** was hanging out on a branch.



Photo by Craig Johnson

Annas Hummingbird

A few brave souls stayed and we got the scope out to look toward the water. We observed **Pigeon Guillemot, Common Loon, Pelagic Cormorant** (in breeding plumage) and the surprise were four **Marbled Murrelets**. Overall, it was a fun day and we saw 19 species.

— *Janet Hall, Trip Leader*

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# Whidbey Audubon Society

Whidbey Audubon programs are 7 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month except December, July and August

Meetings may be conducted virtually using ZOOM and hybrid March, April, May and June 2022.

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## Hybrid Meeting

Thursday, April 14

Bayview Cash Store & Online  
5603 Bayview Road, Langley

**PREREGISTER to attend in person**

[whidbeyaudubonsociety.org](http://whidbeyaudubonsociety.org)

7 p.m. socialize and brief meeting.  
7:30 program begins.

**The Aerialists: One  
tough way to make  
a living  
with Steve and Martha Ellis**