

# The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society  
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

[www.skagitaudubon.org](http://www.skagitaudubon.org)

Vol. 30 No. 7

## SEPTEMBER FIELD TRIPS

By Libby Mills

### About the field trips

Beginning birders and their 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. 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](mailto:libbymills@gmail.com)

**If you plan to join a field trip some place other than the described starting point,** call the trip leader the day before to ensure a successful rendezvous. Trip plans may change.

### Saturday, September 3 Fall Fill: Montlake Fill & Magnuson Park 7:00 a.m. to Mid-afternoon

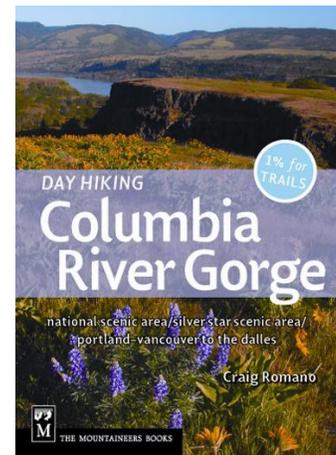
Join us as we bird Seattle's Montlake Fill with Connie Sidles, Seattle Audubon board member and author of "In My Nature: A Birder's Year at the Montlake Fill." The Fill is a lively place in early fall. We'll explore for migrants that might be coming through. The rare Ash-throated Flycatcher is a possibility, as are Dowitchers and Peeps. Rarities at this time of year have included Ruffs, Red-necked Phalaropes, and Stilt, Baird's,

**Fall Fill: and other Field Trips  
continued on page 6**

## SEPTEMBER MEETING AND PROGRAM

### Day Hiking Columbia River Gorge By Author Craig Romano

Tuesday, September 13, 2011  
7:00 Social; 7:30 Program  
Padilla Bay Interpretive Center  
10433 Bayview-Edison Road  
Mount Vernon, Washington



Craig Romano's latest book in the Mountaineers Books' Day Hiking series, "Day Hiking Columbia River Gorge" covers 100 hikes on both sides of the Columbia River. The book highlights the excellent trails and hiking opportunities within the Columbia River National Scenic Area, and within the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Area, the Silver Star Scenic Area, Trapper Creek Wilderness, and Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge.

As with his previous Day Hike titles, each featured hike is described in detail, and is accompanied by a map and icons denoting whether the hike is kid-friendly, hike-able year-round, and other information. The book includes hikes and trails not covered in other guidebooks and options to extend your trip.

Craig Romano has hiked 14,000 miles in Washington state, from Cape Flattery in the NW to Puffer Butte in the SE, Cape Disappointment in the SW to the Salmo-Priest Wilderness in the NE. One percent of proceeds of the Day Hiking Books are donated to the Washington Trail Association.



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**2 Female Rufous Hummingbirds**  
Photo by Joe Halton

**MEMBERSHIP/SUBSCRIPTIONS**

**General membership meetings of the Skagit Audubon Society** are held at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, 1043 Bayview-Edison Rd., Mt. Vernon, WA—7:00 PM Social/ 7:30 PM Program—on the second Tuesday of each month, September through June. The board of directors meets at the same location at 7:00 PM on the first Tuesday of each month.

**Skagit Audubon Society (SAS) membership** provides a local chapter affiliation and newsletter, **The Flyer**, for individuals who want all their funds to benefit their local chapter. Newsletters from additional chapters can be sought by contacting their websites and membership chairs from links at [www.audubon.org/states/wa/](http://www.audubon.org/states/wa/). **To join Skagit Audubon Society** please use the form below.

**National Audubon Society (NAS) membership is separate from SAS membership** and includes Audubon magazine. National Audubon membership does not provide Skagit Audubon membership; however, NAS will assign you an affiliation with a local chapter. To change your chapter assignment call 800-274-4201. **To join National Audubon Society** use the form below.

**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.

**Skagit Audubon Society Membership Form**

Annual membership in the Skagit Audubon Society includes 10 issues of our newsletter, *The Skagit Flyer*, available on our website . Membership includes all members of your household.

\$20 one (1) year                      \$40 two (2) years

I wish to donate \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to Skagit Audubon Society.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Clip form/Mail to/Payable to:**

Skagit Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 1101  
Mount Vernon, WA 98273-1101

Please do not share my personal information with National Audubon Society. (It is the policy of SAS not to share information with any other groups.)

Using the form below to initially join the **National Audubon Society** will ensure that the **Skagit Audubon** chapter receives a cost share to support local programs.

**National Audubon Society Membership Form**

Annual membership to the National Audubon Society includes a subscription to *Audubon* magazine. Membership includes all members of your household.

\$20 for one-year introductory membership with one chapter affiliation

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_

**Clip form/Mail to/Payable to:**

National Audubon Society  
Chapter Membership Data Center              Y21  
P.O. Box 422246-2246  
Palm Coast, FL 32142

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

*For members receiving a paper copy of The Skagit Flyer, the mailing label includes your membership expiration date in the upper right corner. If that date is highlighted in orange it is a reminder that your membership is about to or has expired. All other members will receive an email notice when their membership is about to expire. The Skagit Flyer is published monthly from September through June. Unsolicited material for the next month's Flyer should be sent to the editor by the third Saturday of the current month. For questions or problems about your Skagit Flyer subscription, contact membership chair: Sheila Pera, [skagitmembers@gmail.com](mailto:skagitmembers@gmail.com)*



Writing for the June *Skagit Flyer* to highlight the 2011 *State of the Birds Report* focusing on the importance of public lands as bird habitat, I hadn't anticipated spending part of the next few months seeing for myself. Last winter's deep snows and the wet spring delayed the start of the wilderness hiking season, but Brenda and I set out over the snow anyway, doing several backpacking trips to reach higher, open slopes in search of early-blooming plants. By August, east of the Cascades offered snow-free hiking. Along the way on these multi-day walks, I was often jotting down the birds seen or heard, doing what Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's eBird system calls "traveling counts," and around camp, "stationary" counts (ebird.org/content/ebird). These plant searches for the University of Washington's RareCare program and the eBird counts, contributing a bit more to the total sum of knowledge about natural history, add another purpose to what would otherwise be simply exercise in beautiful settings. I'm reminded that the *State of the Birds Report* relied heavily on data contributed to eBird by thousands of observers to reach its conclusions about bird populations and trends. These citizen science projects link the power of the technology so many of us now have to enable real contributions to knowledge of the natural world.

This summer's backcountry trips have also reminded me once again how fortunate we are to live in a place where huge tracts of wilderness are close-by, places to explore, to inspire us, and, yes, to distance ourselves for a time

from the things filling the news these days. As important as wilderness areas, national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges are for people, they are even more important as habitat for the vast diversity of living things with which we share the planet.

Still closer to home are other, smaller protected areas where we can contribute. Many Skagit Audubon members are active volunteers with local organizations that buy or restore habitat. These volunteers plant trees, count salmon, census birds, donate funds, talent, and time. For two years now Skagit Audubon members have regularly counted birds at sites where Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group has done restoration work and also at the big Hansen Creek restoration project in the county's Northern State Recreation Area. There we're also gathering data about an important Vaux's Swift migratory roost site. Through these counts we're establishing the importance of restoration projects to birds as well as fish, and at Northern State we're working to make it clear that the old, no longer used smokestack at the former hospital is important in the successful migration of Vaux's Swifts, a candidate species under the Washington State endangered species act. If you'd like to contribute some time and birding talent to these or other Skagit Audubon projects, please contact me. You'll have fun, get to know new places, and have the satisfaction of using your interests and skills to make a real contribution.

**SKAGIT AUDUBON HIKING SEPTEMBER 2011****By Joan Melcher**

Due to the unusual circumstances of slow snow melt and trailheads inaccessible due to snow and road closures, the September 2011 hiking schedule will, for the most part, be on a week-to-week basis. For those hikes listed below with a "**To be announced**" listing, contact JOAN MELCHER 360-424-0407 or email at [jdmelcher@comcast.net](mailto:jdmelcher@comcast.net)

Great fall hiking begins this month. However, weather conditions, forest fires and smoke, logging, construction, aggressive bears, or other unexpected circumstances may cause changes in the following hikes. All of the September hikes are on a Wednesday. The Forest Service work party is on a Monday. Dogs are discouraged on Audubon-sponsored hikes. If dogs are on a hike, they must be on a leash at all times.

**WEDNESDAY – SEPT. 7 To be announced****MONDAY – SEPT. 12****ADOPT-A-TRAIL WORK PARTY**

This Work Party, with Dan Rogers, is in the Okanogan National Forest. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the Sedro-Woolley

Food Pavilion parking lot. Work site to be announced.

**WEDNESDAY – SEPT. 14 To be announced****WEDNESDAY – SEPT. 21 CUTTHROAT PASS**

Do this hike on a portion of the Pacific Crest Trail as either a round trip, 10.0 miles, or as a one way to Cutthroat Lake trail head, 10.5 miles with shuttle cars. 1,900 ft. elevation gain. Keep in mind that one may not be able to access the entire trail if the snow has not melted. The Jim Futrelle family will also spread some of Jim's ashes on this hike. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Sedro-Woolley Food Pavilion parking lot. Northwest Forest Parking Permit required. 4 p.m. return to trailhead.

**WEDNESDAY – SEPT. 28 To be announced****WEDNESDAY – OCT. 5 To be announced**

This column reports submitted sightings. Any rare sightings should be accompanied by detailed written documentation and if possible a photograph. A second person to verify rare sightings is extremely helpful. Do not hesitate to call any observer to help document unusual sightings. Also do not hesitate to call if you need clarification on locations.

**Please submit your sightings to Pam Pritzl  
ppritzl@frontier.com or 360-387-7024.**

#### WATERFOWL

**Brant** 1 "gray-bellied" at March Point on 7/22 and 8/8/11 (RM)

**Blue-winged Teal** 2 at West 90 on 6/6/11 (GB)

**Greater Scaup** 2 off Bayview on 8/6/11 (GB)

**Surf Scoter** 1,200 in Padilla Bay on 7/27/11 (GB)

**White-winged Scoter** 2 March Point on 7/18/11 (GB)

**Long-tailed Duck** 1 at March Point 7/1-7/8/11 (RM)

**Common Merganser** 380 at Jensen Access on 8/14/11 (RM)

#### GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

**White-tailed Ptarmigan** 2 at Sahale Arm on 8/12/11 (RM)

#### LOONS, GREBES

**Horned Grebe** 2 at Bayview on 8/6/11 (GB)

**Red-necked Grebe** 1 at March Point on 7/27/11 (GB)

#### PELICANS, HERONS, IBIS

**American White Pelican** 8 flying over Swinomish Casino on 5/14/11 (DA, JP)

**Green Heron** 1 in Burlington on 6/18 and 8/1/11 (GB)

#### RAPTORS

**Northern Goshawk** 1 at Cascade River Rd on 8/12/11 (RM)

#### SHOREBIRDS

**Black-bellied Plover** 35 at Skagit Game Range on 6/3/11 (GB)

**Semipalmated Plover** 1 at Port Susan Bay on 7/1/11 (SAS); 20 near Bayview on 7/27/11 (GB)

**Wood Sandpiper** 1 at Samish Flats on 8/5/11 (RM)

**Solitary Sandpiper** 1 at Skagit Game Range on 8/6/11 (RM)

**Red Knot** 3 AT Skagit Game Range on 6/3/11 (GB)

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** few at Port Susan Bay on 7/1/11 (SAS); 5 at Samish Flats on 7/8/11 (RM); 22 at Port Susan Bay on 7/15/11 (RM); 1 at Padilla Bay on 7/18/11 (GB); 2 at Skagit Game Range on 7/29/11

**Western Sandpiper** few at Port Susan Bay on 7/1/11 (SAS); 7,500 at Jensen Access on 8/14/11 (RM)

**Least Sandpiper** few at Port Susan Bay on 7/1/11 (SAS)

**Baird's Sandpiper** 1 at La Conner on 8/8/11 (RM)

**Pectoral Sandpiper** 1 at Skagit Game Range on 8/6/11

(GB); 1 at La Conner on 8/8/11 & 8/9/11 (RM); 3 at Skagit Game Range on 8/9/11 (RM)

**Wilson's Phalarope** 1 at Skagit Game Range on 6/3/11, 2 at Samish Flats on 7/15/11 (RM)

#### JAEGERS, GULLS

**Bonaparte's Gull** 280 at Jensen Access on 8/14/11 (RM)

**Heermann's Gull** 2 off Green Point on 7/18/11 (GB)

**Ring-billed Gull** 2150 at Jensen Access on 8/14/11 (RM)

#### TERNs

**Caspian Tern** 10 at March Point 7/1/11 (RM)

#### ALCIDS

**Ancient Murrelet** 2 at Green Point on 8/15/11 (RM)

#### OWLS

**Western Screech-Owl** 1 at Illabot Creek on 5/27/11 (GB)

**Barred Owl** 1 in Camano Island yard 7/11-8/4/11 (PP)

#### HUMMINGBIRDS

**Calliope Hummingbird** 2 at Hardy Burn on 7/25/11 (GB); 1 at Cascade Pass on 8/12/11 (RM)

#### WOODPECKERS

**Lewis's Woodpecker** 1 at Martin Rd 5/27-29/11 (GB), several other individuals in Rockport-Marblemount area in May, 1 six miles west of Darrington on 6/9/11 (RM)

**American Three-toed Woodpecker** pair at a nest with chicks near milepost 156 on Highway 20 on 7/8/11 (RM)

#### FLYCATCHERS

**Willow Flycatcher** 17 at Corkindale on 6/24/11 (RM)

**Least Flycatcher** 1 at Corkindale from 5/29/11 & 7/8/11 (GB, RM)

**Gray Flycatcher** 1 at Corkindale on 5/28/11 (GB)

**Dusky Flycatcher** 1 at Corkindale on 5/28/11 (GB)

**Ash-throated Flycatcher** 1 at Corkindale on 6/5/11 (RM)

**Western Kingbird** 1 at Marblemount on 6/6/11, 2 at Corkindale on 6/4/11 & 6/19/11, 2 on Martin Rd on 6/9/11 (RM)

**Eastern Kingbird** 1 at Martin Ranch on 6/6/11 (RM); 1 on Skagit River near Burlington Blvd on 6/7/11 (JA); 2 at Barnaby Slough on 6/19/11 (RM); 2 at Van Horn on 7/4/11 (JP); 1 at Van Horn on 7/28/11 (GB); 1 at Skagit Game Range on 8/15/11 (RM)

#### VIREOS

**Cassin's Vireo** 1 at Camano Island home on 7/11/11 (PP)

Field Notes continued on page 5



**Field Notes continued from page 4**

**Hutton's Vireo** 1 at Camano Island home on 8/2/11 (PP)  
**Red-eyed Vireo** 1 near Lyman on 7/15/11 (GB)

**CORVIDS**

**Gray Jay** 2 at Hardy Burn on 7/25/11 (GB)  
**Clark's Nutcracker** 1 at Hardy Burn on 6/5/11 (GB)  
**Black-billed Magpie** 1 at Corkindale on 6/4/11 (found by IW, also seen by GB, JB, JE, RM, PP)

**LARKS, SWALLOWS**

**Purple Martin** 5 near Bayview on 7/27/11 (GB)  
**Bank Swallow** max of 70 at Corkindale on 7/8/11 (RM)

**WRENS**

**House Wren** 1 at Marblemount on 6/5/11 & 6/5/11 (RM); 1 at Rosario Head on 7/15/11 (RM); 1 at Hardy Burn on 7/25/11 (GB)

**DIPPER**

**American Dipper** 1 on Bacon Creek on 6/5/11 (GB)

**THRUSHES**

**Veery** 3 at Newhalem Ponds on 6/6/11 (RM)

**MOCKINGBIRDS, THRASHERS**

**Gray Catbird** 1 at Illabot Creek on 6/4/11 (GB, RM)  
**Northern Mockingbird** 1 at Corkindale on 6/4/11 (JB, JE, PP, IW)

**WARBLERS**

**Nashville Warbler** 1 near Bacon Creek 6/10-6/24/11 (RM); 1 at NP213 Rd on 7/22/11 (GB)  
**Black and White Warbler** 1 at Camano Island home on 8/15/11 (RP, SP)  
**American Redstart** 2 at Newhalem Ponds on 6/4/11 (JB, JE, PP, IW); 2 at Newhalem Ponds on 6/6/11 (RM)  
**Wilson's Warbler** 1 at Northern State Rec Area on 7/20/11 (GB)



**Wilson's Warbler**  
*Photo by Joe Halton*

**TANAGERS**

**Western Tanager** several at Camano Island home in July/Aug (RP, SP)



**Western Tanager**  
*Photo by Joe Halton*

**SPARROWS**

**Chipping Sparrow** 1 at Martin Rd on 5/21/11 (GB)  
**Lark Sparrow** 1 at Mt. Vernon home on 5/15/11 (JP)  
**Black-throated Sparrow** 1 at Milltown (MW, vide (GB)  
**Golden-crowned Sparrow** 1 at Corkindale on 5/28/11 (GB)  
**Lapland Longspur** 1 at Martin Rd on 5/21/11 (GB)  
**Lazuli Bunting** 1 in Anacortes yard on 5/29/11 (JBS); 11 at Corkindale on 6/5/11 (RM)

**BLACKBIRDS, ORIOLES**

**Yellow-headed Blackbird** 2 at Martin Rd on 6/4/11 (GB, RM); 2 at Samish Flats on 7/1/11 (RM)

**FINCHES, WEAVER FINCH**

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch** 12 on Sahale Arm on 8/12/11 (RM)  
**Cassin's Finch** 5 at Hardy Burn on 6/5/11 (GB); 11 at Hardy Burn on 7/8/11 (RM); 6 at Hardy Burn on 7/25/11 (GB)

(SAS) Skagit Audubon Society Field Trip;

(DA) Dick Abbott; (JA) Jean Ashby; (JB) Joan Bird; (GB) Gary Bletsch; (JE) John Edison; (RM) Ryan Merrill (LM) Libby Mills; (JP) Josh Parrott; (RP) Ron Pera; (SP) Sheila Pera; (PP) Pam Pritzl (JBS) J. B. Smith; (IW) Isa Werny; (MW) Michael Willison

**Bird-Friendly Chocolate - What's Not To Love?**

Audubon and Theo are pleased to announce the launch of their first co-branded chocolate bar.

Theo Chocolate is the first organic and fair trade certified bean-to-bar chocolate maker in the United States. Theo produces "origin" chocolates, which are identified by the cacao's growing region. Costa Rica was selected as the country of origin for Audubon chocolate because sustainable farming there protects Neotropical migratory bird habitat. Audubon's Licensing Department worked with our International Alliances Program in approving the farms from which our products are sourced. Theo proudly supports the mission of the National Audubon Society and its diligent work to conserve and restore natural ecosystems that benefit birds, other wildlife and their habitats. (Theo's RETAIL STORE is open 7 days a week from 10am-6pm, located at 3400 Phinney Ave. N. in the Fremont neighborhood of Seattle, Washington. <http://www.theochocolate.com/>)



## Fall Fill: and other Field Trips continued from page 1

Pectoral, and even Upland Sandpipers. Early sparrow migrants and buntings are also possible. For those who want a real challenge, we will take a close-up gander at our eclipsed ducks and try to figure out the differences between Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal, Mallards, and Gadwalls. After the Fill we'll make a brief visit to the ponds at nearby Magnuson Park. Bring binoculars, spotting scopes, and lunch. Meet at 7:00 a.m. to form carpools at the new Park & Ride along the frontage road west of I-5 and south of Anderson Road in Mount Vernon. Or join us at 8:30 a.m. in the west parking lot of the Center for Urban Horticulture in Seattle.

Leader: Connie Sidles. Questions? Contact Tim Manns: 360-336-8753 or [bctm@fidalgo.net](mailto:bctm@fidalgo.net)

*An added note:* Jim and Betsy Walker plan to attend this field trip, and will be on the lookout for dragonflies as well as birds – especially at Magnuson Park. With any luck we can have a nice "hybrid" field trip, enjoying both the birds and the dragonflies!

### Early September Dragonfly field trip

#### Date to be announced.

Jim and Betsy Walker led a successful field trip on a sunny day in early August. If activity levels and the weather work out, they hope to have another field trip in early September. The seasons are changing, and so are the dragonfly populations. Gone now are the California Darners, replaced with Paddle-tailed Darners (happy face) and Variable Darners. The Blue-eyed Darners and Common Green Darners are still very active. Mature Striped Meadowhawks are common now, as are Spotted Spreadwings, and a few Autumn Meadowhawks are beginning to appear. Last weekend Betsy and Jim got a chance to visit Magnuson Park in Seattle (the old Sand Point NAS). It's a wonderful area for birds and dragonflies alike, with several small ponds providing varied habitats. Dragonflies were just everywhere, showing off lots of interesting behavior. Here's the species list for that day:

Spotted Spreadwing  
Tule Bluet  
Northern/Boreal Bluet  
Pacific Forktail  
Paddle-tailed Darner  
Blue-eyed Darner  
Common Green Darner  
Common Whitetail  
Eight-spotted Skimmer  
Western Pondhawk  
Variegated Meadowhawk  
Cardinal Meadowhawk  
Saffron-winged Meadowhawk  
Black Saddlebags

It is best to be on the field trip reminder email and receive emails directly from the Walkers. Get on the Walker's notification list to hear about a spur of the moment field trip by emailing [JSWPhys@aol.com](mailto:JSWPhys@aol.com).

## Various Evenings from September 1 - 24

### Vaux's Swifts Coming Home to Roost Dusk to Dark

During the first three weeks of September, Skagit Audubon members will be counting Vaux's Swifts returning to roost for the night in the tall smokestack at the old Northern State Hospital. Counts last spring and fall showed this to be an important resting place during this species' migration. Communal roosts such as this one are priority areas for the Vaux's Swift, which is listed as a candidate species on Washington State's Priority Habitat and Species list. We'll be doing more counts to build the case for preserving this roost site. If you'd like to observe the hundreds to thousands of swifts coming home to roost at Northern State, contact Tim Manns: 360-336-8753 or [bctm@fidalgo.net](mailto:bctm@fidalgo.net) You're welcome to come along and either help count or just observe this phenomenon.

### Saturday, September 24 Birding High and Low in the North Cascades Two Field Trips this Day:

#### 8:30 AM to 10:30 AM and 10:30 AM to 3:30 PM

These two birding field trips (participate in one or both) will highlight the habitat diversity of the North Cascades. They are being offered along with other events this day to celebrate the North Cascades and support the proposed expansion of North Cascades National Park. Skagit Audubon Society is one of many organizations joining the North Cascades Conservation Council in furthering a plan to improve the protection of this magnificent area (see [www.americanalps.org/](http://www.americanalps.org/) for details on the American Alps Legacy Project and for the day's other events). On the first trip we'll visit the Ag Ponds vicinity (elevation 450 feet) just west of Newhalem between the North Cascades Highway and the Skagit River. This low elevation, primarily deciduous forest is home to a variety of migratory and year-round resident birds. For the second trip we'll carpool eastward to the Blue Lake Trailhead (elevation 5,200 feet, near milepost 161, one mile west of Washington Pass). We'll walk 4 miles round-trip on this scenic hike, gaining 1,000 feet of elevation, and have the chance to spot some of the Cascades' higher elevation bird species. For this second field trip you'll need a Northwest Forest Pass or other eligible pass to park at the trailhead.

Birders of every level of interest and skill are welcome on both field trips. Bring binoculars and your favorite field guide. Wear layers and bring a rain jacket just in case. If you plan to participate in the afternoon walk, wear hiking boots or other shoes suitable for trail-walking, and bring your lunch and water. For both trips, meet in the parking lot across Highway 20 from the General Store in Newhalem (near milepost 121) to arrange carpools: at 8:30 AM for the first field trip and 10:30 AM for the second. Leader: Tim Manns: 360-336-8753 or [bctm@fidalgo.net](mailto:bctm@fidalgo.net) Please contact Tim if you plan to attend.

### Samish Island Bird Walks with Howard Armstrong

As weather and time permit, Howard Armstrong leads bird walks on Samish Island for beginners and experts alike. To be contacted when these walks are scheduled, send a message to Howard ([godwits@wavecable.com](mailto:godwits@wavecable.com)) asking to be added to his e-mail notification list.



# NW Fishletter #290, June 23, 2011

## Tern Colony Collapses In Columbia Estuary

Bald eagles moved in on Caspian terns at their nesting grounds in the Columbia River estuary last month, wreaking havoc on the colony at East Sand Island, and targeting other birds as well. Cormorants, terns and pelicans--who normally consume millions of young salmonids each spring--were now being stalked themselves.

Over 10 days the entire tern colony was wiped out, said researchers in [weekly updates](#) from a cooperative project between Oregon State University, Real Time Research and the Oregon Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit.

The tern population peaked in early May, when more than 14,000 were counted on the island. But the number of active tern nests declined from around 5,000 to less than 500 in the last two weeks of May.

The same was true for cormorants nesting on the island. About 70 percent of their nests in some areas were abandoned. The cormorant count plunged from 1,150 to less than 100 in a week.

By June 1, researchers reported no remaining tern chicks or eggs on the island, but noted thousands of terns were still trying to re-nest. However, repeated nighttime disturbances by eagles had led to most new eggs being eaten by gulls within 30 minutes of laying. A ring-billed gull colony of about 1,000 nesting pairs was also located on the island.

By June 6, the eagles were still occasional visitors, as were peregrine falcons. Thousands of terns were still there, but the gulls were, too, and still depredated eggs within a few hours of being laid, according to the latest update from researchers.

Cormorants were also re-nesting. Researchers counted 1,855 individuals and 803 nests, most with eggs. Back in April, about 8,000 cormorants had been counted on the island.

The eagles had less effect on brown pelicans nesting on the island. Nearly 5,000 had been counted by June 6, nearly a thousand more than tallied the previous week.

The researchers noted it didn't take very many eagles to create chaos.

"Three bald eagles caused a large disturbance to thousands of roosting Caspian terns, hundreds of nesting double-crested cormorants, and hundreds of roosting California brown pelicans on the west end of East Sand Island," they said in their latest report, adding that "an adult cormorant and an adult tern were killed by eagles during this disturbance; a bald eagle was also observed feeding on a California brown pelican carcass, although it is unknown whether the eagle killed the pelican."

Last year, more than 8,000 pairs of terns nested on East Sand Island, and it was estimated young salmonids made up about 33 percent of their diet. Authorities significantly shrank the tern nesting area on the island to reduce predation, and four other tern nesting areas in interior Oregon had been built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to reduce estuary predation. But no terns at all showed up at three of the four sites last year.

In 2010, 12,400 breeding cormorant pairs were counted at East Sand. Another species of cormorant showed up as well--the Brandt's cormorant--and totaled nearly 1,000 breeding pairs. Researchers estimated the birds ate much more in 2010 than the 11 million smolts they were estimated to have consumed in 2009.

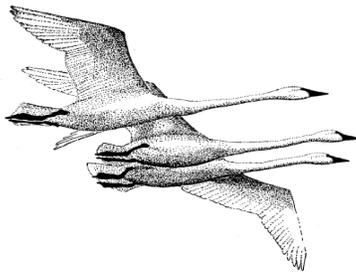
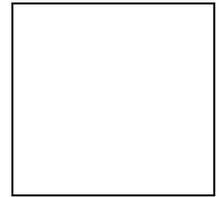
PIT-tag detections on East Sand Island have revealed minimum estimates of predation--3 percent of spring/summer chinook, 4 percent of fall chinook, 6 percent of coho, and 10 percent of all steelhead previously detected at Bonneville Dam.

The bird colonies seem to be giving young fall chinook released below Bonneville Dam an especially hard time. Last year, it was estimated cormorants and terns consumed at least 20 percent of those releases.

The bird researchers said it's likely the terns will be back next year to try again. *-B. R.*



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## September 2011 Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Aug. 28	Aug. 29	Aug. 30	Aug. 31 <b>Hiking:</b> Thunder Creek	1	2	3 <b>Field Trip:</b> Fall Fill: Montlake Fill & Magnuson Park
4	5	6 <b>SAS Board Meeting:</b> 7:00	7 <b>Hiking:</b> To be announced	8	9	10
11	12 <b>Adopt-A-Trail Work Party</b>	13 <b>General Meeting:</b> Social 7:00 PM/ Meeting 7:30 PM	14 <b>Hiking:</b> To be announced	15	16	17 <b>Deadline SAS</b> October Flyer
18	19	20	21 <b>Hiking:</b> Cutthroat Pass	22	23	24 <b>Field Trip:</b> Birding High and Low in the North Cascades
25	26	27	28 <b>Hiking:</b> To be announced	29	30	Oct. 1
Oct. 2	Oct. 3	Oct. 4 <b>SAS Board Meeting:</b> 7:00	Oct. 5 <b>Hiking:</b> To be announced	Oct. 6	Oct. 7	Oct. 8

Visit the Skagit Audubon Society Website at [www.skagitaudubon.org](http://www.skagitaudubon.org)

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