

The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society

A Chapter of National Audubon Society

Vol. 31 No. 1

JANUARY FIELD TRIPS By Libby Mills

The Discover Pass

Field trip attendees and all other Washington recreationists need to inform themselves about the new **Discover Pass**, issued by the state for parking on State Lands including State Parks, (Deception Pass, Bay View, Larrabee, Birch Bay) Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife lands like the Skagit Wildlife Area and the West 90, as well as Dept. of Natural Resources lands. (Chuckanuts, Blanchard Mountain).

http://discoverpass.wa.gov/

The passes are issued specifically to a single car and can be purchased for a single day (\$10) or as an annual pass (\$30 -\$35) good for 365 days from day of issue. The new pass has become an essential fee in funding our State Parks for our day use, as well as other state lands. Please remember when you share a ride that sharing in the parking fee and gas costs are always welcome donations to the driver.

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 late changes and/or additions to the field

Field Trips continued on page 5

JANUARY MEETING AND PROGRAM

Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network
By Ruth Milner
Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Biologist

Tuesday, January 10, 2012 7:00 Social; 7:30 Program Padilla Bay Interpretive Center 10441 Bayview-Edison Road Mount Vernon, Washington



Flock of Dunlins on Skagit Flats
Photo by Jim Powell

Shorebird migrations are the endurance marathons of the natural world. For species which breed in the Arctic and winter at the southern tip of South America, migrations span 20,000 miles a year. Numbers of shorebirds are dropping quickly, and Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network's (WHSRN) mission is to conserve shorebirds and their habitats through a network of key sites across the Americas.

The Network currently has 85 sites in 13 countries, from Alaska in the north to Tierra del Fuego in southern South America. Sites/Landscapes of Hemispheric Importance host at least 500,000 shorebirds annually, or at least 30% of the biogeographic population for a species; Sites of International Importance at least 100,000 shorebirds annually, or at least 10% of the biogeographic population for a species; and Sites of Regional Importance at least 20,000 shorebirds annually, or at least 1% of the biogeographic population for a species.

Ruth Milner, Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife District Wildlife Biologist, will focus on Dunlins while discussing bird studies and the nomination of Skagit and Port Susan Bays to the WHSRN program as a Regionally Important Site



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Bonaparte's Gull 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/ .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, <i>The Skagit Flyer</i> , 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/StateZip					
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 <u>form below</u> to initially joint Skagit Audubon chapter receives		-
National Audubon Society Members	ship Form	
Annual membership to the National At Membership includes all members of y		iption to <i>Audubon</i> magazine.
\$20 for one-year introductory member	ship with one chapter affiliation	
Name		
Address		
City/State	Zip	
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Clip form/Mail to/Payable to:		
National Audubon Society Chapter Membership Data Center P.O. Box 422246-2246 Palm Coast, FL 32142 www.audubon.org	Y21	

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 Skaqit Flver is published monthly from September through June. Unsolicited material for the next month's Flyer should be sent to the editorby 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



Across the U.S. in addition to watching birds Audubon members advocate for public policies that protect wildlife and habitat. As I described last month, among the themes of National Audubon's new approach to conservation are these:

- Supporting a healthy climate for birds and people (i.e. addressing pollution and global warming)
- Making communities and cities safe and healthy for birds and people

Behind these is the premise that what benefits birds is good for people too, which brings us to the Environmental Priorities Coalition issues for 2012. Audubon Washington, comprised of the state's 26 chapters, has since 2003 joined 24 other environmental groups in advocating for its priorities in Olympia. The Coalition's common ground is the focus these groups share on protecting public health and welfare, which we Auduboners believe is also good for birds and other wildlife.

You can read about the three 2012 priorities at <u>environmental priorities.org/</u> but here's my quick summary with the Coalition's snappy titles:

- **1. Toxic-Free Kids**. Earlier legislation stopped manufacturers of items for young children from using PBDEs, toxic flame retardants. Unfortunately, the replacement chemicals are also cancercausing with an unknown range of environmental impacts. This priority's goal is to help businesses switch to safer chemicals that won't harm health or the environment.
- 2. Fulfill Our Clean Energy Initiative. At least 20 states require that a certain percentage of electrical power be from sustainable sources. In November 2006, we passed I-937 requiring that by 2020 clean, renewable energy from new sources (e.g. solar, wind, energy conservation) comprise 15% of Washington's power production by large utilities. January 1, 2012, is the 3% deadline towards the 15% goal. This law has already led to investment of \$7 billion in renewable energy, which means jobs and economic development in rural areas, less dependence on fossil fuels, and reduction in emission of climate-warming gases. We want to keep the plan on track. At this writing, discussions are underway on improving the act without weakening it.
- 3. Pollution-Free Prosperity. As last year, the current legislative session will emphasize cuts, and, as last year, the third Coalition priority is to "Prevent attempts to weaken, delay, or roll back state environmental laws and programs ... critical for clean air, clean water, and healthy communities." One belief unifying the Coalition is that economic prosperity and a healthy environment are interdependent. Hard economic times should not be used as an excuse to undo environmental regulations. The Coalition says, and we agree, "From fishing to farming to tourism, a clean and healthy environment is essential to Washington's prosperity."

What can you do? Sign up at <u>environmental priorities.org/</u> to receive alerts. There will be calls for contacting legislators at key moments. To learn about the priorities in detail, register to attend the January 7th legislative workshop. Environmental Lobby Day is January 25th. That day 500 or more members of the Coalition groups (including many from Audubon) will converge on Olympia for workshops and meetings with our legislators. Register at pugetsound.org/lobby-day. It's always an interesting and informative time and can make a real difference for the things we care about deeply. I hope you'll join those of us already planning to participate.



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 for the February Flyer to: Pam Pritzl, ppritzl@frontier.com or 360-387-7024.

WATERFOWL

Greater White-fronted Goose 1 with large Cackling Goose flock, SR20 and Gardner Rd on 11-26 (GB) Cackling Goose 280 at SR 20 and Gardner Rd on 11-24 and 11-26 (GB)

Wood Duck 1 at Skagit Game Range on 12-11 (GB) Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser 1 adult male Snee Oosh on 11-25 (RM)

Common Merganser 610 on Lake Campbell on 11-20 **(RM)**

LOONS, GREBES

Red-throated Loon 400 at Rosario head on 12-3 (**GB**) **Eared Grebe** 1 at Samish Island Public Beach on 12-11 (**GB**)

HERONS, IBIS

Black-crowned Night-Heron 1 at Warm Beach on 12-2 **(RM)**

RAPTORS

Red-tailed Hawk 1 dark morph "Harlans Hawk" on 11-20, 1 light morph Skagit Game Range 12-2 (**RM**)

SHOREBIRDS

Spotted Sandpiper 1 at Rockport on 12-1 (RM) Surfbird 10 at Snee Oosh on 11-25 (RM) Sanderling 3 at March Point on 12-3 (GB) Pectoral Sandpiper 1 late bird at Skagit Game Range on 11-20 (RM)

JAEGERS, GULLS

Western Gull 1 at Lions Park on 12-3 (GB)

ALCIDS

Pigeon Guillemot 280 at Green Point on 11-15 (**RM**) **Ancient Murrelet** 271 at Green Point on 11-15 (**RM**); 6 at Rosario Head on 12-3 (**GB**)

OWLS

Snowy Owl 1 at Jensen Access on 11-20, 1 at Skagit Game Range on 12-2 (**RM**)

Northern Pygmy-Owl 1 at Rasar State on 12-11 (GB)

HUMMINGBIRDS

Anna's Hummingbird 2 in Anacortes yard 11/27 (JaB)

WOODPECKERS

Red-breasted Sapsucker 1 at Camano Island home on 12-1 (**PP**)

Northern Flicker 1 "yellow-shafted" at Skagit Game Range on 11-20 (RM); 1 "yellow-shafted" at March Point on 12-4 (GB)

FLYCATCHERS

Black Phoebe 1 at Stanwood on 11-20 (RM)

DIPPER

American Dipper 2 at Rasar State Park on12-11 (GB)

THRUSHES

Townsend's Solitaire 1 at Washington Park on 12-9 (**J&BW**)

WARBLERS

Orange-crowned Warbler 1 at Skagit Game Range on 12-10 **(GB)**

Yellow-rumped Warbler 1 "Myrtle" near Corkindale on 12-1 (RM)

Northern Waterthrush 1 at Skagit Game Range on 11-20 and 11-22 (RM)

Common Yellowthroat 1 at the Skagit Game Range on 11-20 and 11-22 (**RM**)

SPARROWS

Savannah Sparrow 4 at the West Ninety on 12-11 (GB)

Fox Sparrow 1 "Red" Fox Sparrow on Fir Island White-throated Sparrow 2 in Burlington yard feeding daily (P&LE); 1 near Cockreham Island on 12-12 (GB)



Snow Bunting Photo by Joe Holton

Snow Bunting 5 at March Point (found by Joe Halton) on 12-4 (**GB**)

BLACKBIRDS, ORIOLES
Western Meadowlark 1 on
Lafayette Rd east of
Burlington on 11-16
(P&LE)

Rusty Blackbird 1 at Thomas Rd on Samish Flats on 11-19 (GB)

FINCHES, WEAVER FINCH

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch 1 at Northern State Recreation Area on 11-19 (**GB**)

Cassin's Finch 1 near Cockreham Island on 11-19 (GB)

Common Redpoll 1 near Cockreham Island on 11-19 (**GB**)

American Goldfinch 30 west of Hamilton on 11-25 **(GB)**

(GB) Gary Bletsch; (JaB) Jackie Boss; (P&LE) Pat & Larry Edwards; (RM) Ryan Merrill; (PP) Pam Pritzl; (J&BW) Jim & Betsy Walker



Field Trips continued from page 1

trip schedule. To be added to the email distribution list contact Libby Mills: 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!

Monday, January 2 Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count All day, followed by a Potluck Dinner

The annual Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count takes place this year on Monday, January 2. Volunteers are needed to help with this valuable – and fun – endeavor, so plan ahead. Some teams start before dawn to count owls, while others brave the elements from first light to dusk. The data collected by our "citizen scientists" is used to document bird population trends over time. Plan to spend the day birding, and then – as a bonus – enjoy a potluck dinner and good company at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center. After dinner the day's observations are tallied, and fun stories (some of which are true!) are swapped.

For details regarding times, places, and area assignments, Please contact:

Leader/Coordinator: Bob Barry at dabarrybest@frontier.com, 360-299-8443; or Assist. Leader/Coordinator: Alice Turner at alicet2@msn.com, 360-387-1781

Saturday, January 21 Skagit Flats 8:30 a.m. to Early Afternoon

Back by popular demand! This is a mostly driveand-bird field trip across the waterfowl-and-raptorrich Skagit Flats and surrounding area. Though justly famous for its raptors, the flats also provide numerous opportunities to spot shorebirds, ducks, and songbirds. Bring a lunch if you plan to continue birding into the afternoon. Meet in the parking lot of Snow Goose Produce on the Fir Island road, just south of the North Fork Bridge of the North Fork of the Skagit River to arrange carpools. Please **bring your Discovery Pass**, if you have one for parking at Skagit Wildlife area lots. We'll look out Rawlins Road, Jensen, and Hayton Accesses over the dike and Wiley Slough.

Leader: Libby Mills, cell 360-708-6975, or libbymills@gmail.com

Saturday, January 28
Northern State Recreation Area,
East of Sedro-Woolley
8:30 a.m. to Early Afternoon, if weather permits!
Let's meet at the parking area on Helmick Road,
just east of Fruitdale Road off SR 20. We'll wander
around and look for some winter birds! Just
this November, a Grey-crowned Rosy Finch
showed up here. There's no telling what birds might
be attracted to this varied habitat! Wear waterproof
walking shoes, and be prepared for wet and cold.
We can eat lunch at one of the various picnic sites
here, depending on whether or not there's weather.

Leader: Gary Bletsch, (360) 826-3750 garybletsch@yahoo.com



Snow Buntings on March Point

Photo and Text by Joe Halton

I've spent about ten hours spread over 6+ days attempting to see and then photograph the Snow Bunting that was reported on March Point a couple of weeks ago. I didn't find the bird myself but was alerted to it's presence by emails from other birders. By yesterday had given up but was at March Point searching for gulls, waterfowl and shorebirds to photograph when I flushed the buntings. It was a complete surprise. The original report was for one bunting and I found a flock of five! I returned this morning just after breakfast and waited for over an hour for the birds to show again.I was frustrated but patient. I watched a pair of Bald Eagles work to successfully capture a waterfowl in the water and was watching the only one of the eagles I could see when I became aware of some movement on top of the berm. Closer examination with binoculars revealed the flock of Snow buntings.



Four hikes are scheduled for the first month of the New Year. Unexpected circumstances such as weather washouts, closed trails, logging, construction, or road conditions may cause cancellations or changes in the following hikes. A hike will be canceled if there are high wind warnings, flooding conditions, or snowy or icy road conditions. Call if you have questions on any of the following, call JOAN MELCHER, 360-424-0407, or email at jdmelcher@comcast.net anytime up until 7:45 the morning of the hike. Bringing dogs is discouraged on Audubon sponsored hikes. If dogs are on a hike, they must be on a leash at all times.

NOTE: THE NEW WASHINGTON STATE <u>DISCOVER PASS</u> IS REQUIRED TO PARK ON STATE PARK PROPERTY.

JANUARY 4, 2012 INTERURBAN TRAIL

Walk off some of those holiday pounds on the Interurban Trail. There are several options available. One is up to 14 or more miles and a slight elevation gain. Meet at 9 a.m. at the Clayton Beach Parking lot at the south end of Larrabee State Park on Chuckanut Drive. Return time depends on hike option you select. A **Washington State Discover Pass** is required for your car.

JANUARY 11, 2012 FRAGRANCE LAKE

Hike to a lovely mirror lake above Larrabee State Park in a 7.3 mile loop with a 1,000 ft. elevation gain. Meet at 9 a.m. at 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. A **Washington State Discover Pass** is required for your vehicle.

JANUARY 18, 2012 WHATCOM FALLS & CREEK, BIG ROCK LOOP, AND THE STIMPSON FAMILY NATURE PRESERVE

I.Whatcom Falls & Creek: Hike along Whatcom Creek from Whatcom Falls Park to the I-5 Freeway bridge and back. It is a 4 mile round trip with a slight elevation gain.

- **II. Big Rock Loop:** Instead of or in addition to the Whatcom Falls & Creek hike, you can do this hike, which is a 6 mile loop that begins and ends at Whatcom Falls Park. This loop takes the hiker north; some ups and downs; a few short, steep sections; mostly trail with some sidewalk/road walking.
- **III. Stimpson Family Nature Preserve:** If you wish to do this hike after **I, II,** or **both above**, then drive to the Stimpson Family Nature Preserve and hike up to 4 miles there, with about a 400 ft. elevation gain. For all of the above, meet at 8:30 a.m. at the I-5/Chuckanut Drive Park-n-Ride near exit 231 from I-5 **OR** meet at 9 a.m. at the Whatcom Falls Park parking lot on Arbor Street off of Electric Avenue. Ride with those who plan to do the hike(s) you wish to do. When all return to your car, you may leave.

JANUARY 25, 2012 SUGAR LOAF & Mt. Erie

Hike in the popular Anacortes Forest Lands. Terry Slotemaker, 360-293-6514, or his designee, will lead us on a 5 mile hike with a 1,400 ft. total elevation gain. Meet at 9 a.m.at the Mt. Erie parking lot off the Heart Lake Road south of Anacortes. Most are back to the trailhead by 1 p.m.. You may leave when you return to the trailhead.

FEBRUARY 1, 2012 LUMMI ISLAND

Walk a 7 mile loop on the north end of Lummi Island. There are Island, sea, and mountain views. Required is \$7 for foot-passenger ferry fare. Mostly the walking is level. Walking shoes are recommended. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the I-5/Chuckanut Drive Park-n-Ride. There is no specified return time, although most will take the 1 p.m. ferry back.



For the Birds: Snowy Owl Facts and Precautions: Interview with Nature and Bird photographer Paul Bannick

Taken from: Shoreline Area News, an online newspaper, Shoreline Area News.com Tues, Nov.22, 2011:

Phone interview by Christine Southwick, 11/17/2011, with P. Bannick, Author/Photographer of The Owl and The Woodpecker.

Christine Southwick's column, "For the Birds", can be found by searching her name on the online Shoreline Area News.

With the reports of sighting along the Washington coast, this year appears to be an irruptive year for the Snowy Owl.



"Snowy Owl Singing in Fog Photo: <u>paulbannick.com</u>, reprinted with permission

Paul, WHERE ARE THESE OWLS COMING FROM AND WHY ARE THEY HERE?

Snowy Owls breed on the Arctic Tundra, but the young disperse widely, so we don't know if these owls are from Alaska, Canada, or Asia. We do know that they are here in search of food. The most common explanation is that the birds are responding to a fall in lemming populations to the north. The success of the prior year's breeding owls likely plays a role as well, with many more birds putting pressure on whatever lemming populations remain.

These owls are hungry. The only reason that they fly this far south is to get enough food to survive. They need all the energy and fat that they can acquire. It is important that people, in their enthusiasm to see these magnificent owls, don't crowd them and cause them to waste valuable calories. Expending energy unproductively can be the margin between surviving or starving.

IS THERE A SPECIFIC AGE OR SEX OF THE SNOWY OWLS THAT FLY SOUTHWARD TO FIND FOOD?

There is a hierarchy in Snowy Owls, with the adult females initially retaining breeding territories, while males and juveniles move south with juvenile males traveling the furthest. Therefore, most of the Snowy Owls who travel down into Washington are juveniles, and the majorities of these are males.

WHAT KINDS OF FOOD ARE THESE OWLS EATING WHILE THEY ARE HERE IN WASHINGTON?

They are eating mostly rodents, and opportune birds. Rodents mostly move at night or dusk, so while the Snowy Owls are in Washington, most are hunting dusk through dawn. Having found an area that sustains it, a Snowy Owl may stay in the area for a while.

HOW WOULD I KNOW IF I AM TOO CLOSE AND CAUSING A SNOWY TO WASTE ENERGY?

These owls live on or near the ground. They need much more distance than other owls because of their exposure. If you are closer than 100 yards (length of a full football field), you may be too close! Half a mile is more ideal. If you see the owl opening its eyes during full daylight, defecating, climbing to a higher perch, or especially flying away from you, you are probably TOO CLOSE. You are causing an owl harm every time it has to launch itself for reasons other than feeding.

WHAT SUGGESTIONS WOULD YOU OFFER PEOPLE TO BE ABLE TO SEE THESE OWLS IN WAYS THAT ARE HEALTHY FOR THE OWLS AND SATISFYING FOR THE VIEWERS?

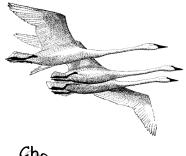
First and foremost, keep your distance. That means use a scope if at all possible. If you are taking pictures, take advantage of high-powered lenses and tripods and/or digi-scoping. Be prepared to stay in one place for a while.

It is recommended that people wait for a few weeks when they hear about a Snowy Owl in a new location. By late December or January, many of these owls will be in place and settled, and less likely to require that half mile. It may even be able to tolerate a closer approach, especially if you use your car as a blind. Watch for those signs of nervousness, and back away if you are bothering the owl.

SKAGIT AUDUBON SOCIETY



P.O. BOX 1101 MOUNT VERNON WA 98273





<u>Christmas Bird Count</u> <u>Skagit Padilla Bay</u>

Monday, Jan., 2 2012
Bob Barry; 360-299-8443
dabarrybest@frontier.com
Alice Turner 360-387-1781

alicet2@msn.com

January 2012 Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
1 New Year's Day	2 Padilla Bay Xmas Bird Count	3 SAS Board Meeting: 7:00	4 Hike : Interurban Trail	5	6	7
8	9	10 General Meeting: Social 7:00 PM/ Meeting 7:30 PM	11 Hike: Fragrance Lake	12	13	14
15	16	17	18 Hike: Whatcom Falls & Creek, Big Rock Loop, Stimson Family Preserve	19	20	21 Field Trip: Skagit Flats Deadline SAS January Flyer
22	23	24	25 Hike: Sugar Loaf & Mt. Erie	26	27 Deadline SAS January Flyer	28 Field Trip: Northern State
29	30	31	Feb 1 Hike: Lummis Island	Feb 2	Feb 3	Feb 4

Visit the Skagit Audubon Society Website at www.skagitaudubon.org

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