

The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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DECEMBER MEETING – PRESENTED IN PERSON ONLY

"Annual Holiday Photo Program"

Presented by: Neil O'Hara, Master of Ceremonies

Tuesday, Dec. 12th at 7:00 pm

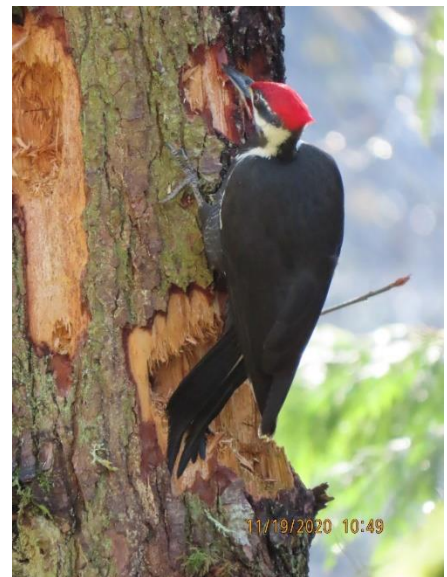
**7:00 pm Meeting
6:30-7:00 pm Social**

Please join us at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, 10441 Bayview-Edison Rd., Mt. Vernon, for our annual holiday photo program. Neil O'Hara will be the Master of Ceremonies, and this is not a competition but a celebration of the birds in our lives.

Meeting Logistics: The doors at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center will be open by 6:30 pm and the show will start at 7:00 pm. Neil will be doing all the narration so we will not be passing the microphone to the live audience.

Attendees may bring easily shareable holiday treats. Coffee and tea will be available, or feel free to bring a personal (non-alcoholic) beverage.

Photo credit: Pileated Woodpecker by Lisa Hopkins (2020 Holiday Photo Program)



SAVE THE DATE! Paul Bannick will be the presenter for our January 9, 2024 program. Details to follow in the January Skagit Flyer or visit our website for updates.

Monthly Meeting Update: In response to the COVID-19 virus, some of our general meetings are being held at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center while others will be available on Zoom only. Hybrid meetings are not currently offered. Please check the monthly program description for meeting details. As with our hikes and field trips, only vaccinated, symptom-free individuals should attend meetings in person. Please visit our website: www.skagitaudubon.org for updates.

ABOUT SKAGIT AUDUBON: Skagit Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. General membership meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 7 pm. Some meetings will be presented in-person at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, 10441 Bayview-Edison Rd., Mt. Vernon and other meetings will be available on Zoom only. Hybrid meetings are not currently offered. Check the monthly Flyer for upcoming meeting details. The board of directors meets on the first Tuesday of each month, September through June, at 7 pm. Skagit Audubon membership provides a local chapter affiliation and newsletter, the Skagit Flyer, for individuals who want all their funds to benefit their local chapter. The Skagit Flyer is produced monthly from September through June and full color issues are available at: www.skagitaudubon.org/newsletter. Unless noted, all images, drawings, clip art, etc. appearing in The Skagit Flyer are in the public domain. We reserve the right to edit.

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Other Volunteers

Newsletter Distribution: John Edison

NEW PHONE NUMBER FOR REPORTING SICK/INJURED/DEAD SWANS AND GEESE: WDFW has updated the hotline number for reporting sick/injured/dead swans and geese. Please call 360.466.0515 for assistance. WDFW continues to remind people not to handle sick, injured, or dead swans and geese.

Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count 2023

The 2023 Padilla Bay Christmas Bird Count (CBC) organized by Skagit Audubon will take place Saturday, December 30th.

The fifteen-mile diameter count circle is one of nearly 2,500 where volunteers will document the species and numbers of birds present late this year. Because the CBC is such a long-running project its data make an important contribution to avian science. Rather than a birding field trip, the CBC is an effort to collect the most complete and accurate data possible on the birds within the count circle. We particularly need the help of experienced birders. For information about participating in this all-day, rain or shine survey birders should contact Tim Manns (conservation@skagitaudubon.org or 360.333.8985).

Photo credit: Shorebirds by Mary Sinker



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – by John Day

Dear Members and Friends of Skagit Audubon Society,

While I don't necessarily look forward to the soggy, gray days we so often have here in the Skagit Valley at this time of year, there are some aspects of fall that always fill me with wonder, namely the return of thousands of Trumpeter Swans, Tundra Swans, and Snow Geese, as well as a multitude of other waterfowl. My first experience of this was in 1973, when I was visiting the area from my home in Olympia and learned that people were reporting a flock of Trumpeters on Francis Road near Clear Lake. I managed to find my way there and was amazed to see a group of, I think, 50 or so birds.

Along with the sight of these spectacular birds themselves, I felt as if I was witnessing a miracle. I had lived in Wyoming from the late 50's through the beginning of the 70's, and during that time, my family spent a month camping in Grand Teton National Park almost every summer. On one of our first visits to the park, we stopped at a pullout on the highway a little way north of the town of Jackson where several cars were already parked. The attraction turned out to be a pair of Trumpeter Swans nesting in a wetland adjacent to the pullout. An interpretive sign at the pullout informed us that the pair was part of a flock of perhaps a couple of dozen birds, the only remaining population of Trumpeters breeding in the continental US after they had been nearly extirpated by market hunting.

I learned just recently that in 1957, only a couple of years before my family and I saw the pair of swans in Jackson Hole, a handful of Trumpeters, the first to be seen in the Skagit for many decades, showed up at Barney Lake east of Mount Vernon. Now fast forward 64 years to 2021, when the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife reported a total of 10,730 wintering swans in Skagit County, at least two thirds of which were Trumpeters and the rest Tundras. One person to whom we owe a great deal of thanks for this remarkable recovery is Martha Jordan of the Northwest Swan Conservation Association (visit <https://nwswans.org/>) who we were privileged to have as our speaker at our November meeting.

So, I encourage everyone, whether you live nearby or elsewhere, to get out and experience this annual miracle. While you're at it, please be mindful of the ethics of birding in rural Skagit County, most of which is privately owned farmland. Be Bird Wise, a coalition of organizations, agencies, businesses, and local landowners including Skagit Audubon (ably represented by Jeff Osmundson), has created a Code of Conduct for people wishing to view swans, Snow Geese, and other wintering birds in and around the Skagit Valley. Please visit their website at www.bebirdwise.org for more information.

FIELD SIGHTINGS – by Ann Skinner

This column reports a summary of selected sightings. Rare sightings should be submitted with detailed written documentation and if possible, a photograph. A second person to verify rare sightings is encouraged. Do not hesitate to contact any observer to help document unusual sightings.

Please submit your sightings to birdsightings@skagitadubon.org. For recent updates on bird sightings, check out **ABA Tweeters** and **Skagit County Ebird List** on the SAS website (Birding menu, Bird Sightings submenu).

WATERFOWL

Trumpeter Swan (2 Ad. 3 Juv.) BBP, 11/7 (RH)
Snow Goose (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Surf Scoter (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
White-winged Scoter (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Long-tailed duck (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Bufflehead (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Barrow's Goldeneye (2) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Red-breasted Merganser (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Red-throated Loon (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

GREBES

Horned Grebe (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Red-necked Grebe (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

SHOREBIRDS

Wilson's Snipe (1) Lincoln Hill MV, 10/29 (TM)

GULLS, TERNS

Glaucous-winged Gull (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

CORMORANTS, PELICANS, HERONS

Brandt's Cormorant (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Double-crested Cormorant (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Great Blue Heron (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

RAPTORS

Bald Eagle (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Rough-legged Hawk (Dk morph) SF, 11/9 (AW)
Rough-legged Hawk (Lt morph) SF, 11/9 (AW)
Cooper's Hawk (1) SF, 11/9 (AW)
Sharp-shinned Hawk (1) SF, 11/9 (AW)

OWLS

Short-eared Owl W-90, 11/8 (MS/JS)

FALCONS

American Kestrel (1) E-90, 11/8 (MS/JS)
Peregrine Falcon (2) SF, 11/9 (AW)
Merlin (1) SF, 11/9 (AW)

SHRIKES

Northern Shrike (1) E-90, 11/8 (MS/JS)

CORVIDS

American Crow (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Common Raven (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

CHICKADEES

Chestnut-backed Chickadee (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

BUSHTITS, KINGLETS

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Golden-crowned Kinglet (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

NUTHATCHES & CREEPERS

Brown Creeper (1) SA, 11/4 (MS/JS)

THRUSHES

Hermit Thrush (1) WNPS garden, 10/29 (BC)

WRENS

Pacific Wren (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)

FINCHES, SPARROWS

Spotted Towhee (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Song Sparrow (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Dark-eyed Junco (1+) LSP, 11/11 (SAFT)
Lapland Longspur (1) FIFR, 11/5 (MS/JS)

BLACKBIRDS

Western Meadowlark (24) W-90, 11/8 (MS/JS)

(BBP) Big Beaver Pond-Anacortes Forest Lands;
(FIFR) Fir Island Farm Reserve; (LSP) Larrabee State
Park; (MV) Mount Vernon; (SF) Samish Flats; (SA)
Stanwood Area; (WP) Washington Park; (JS) Jeff
Sinkler; (MS) Mary Sinkler; (AW) Andrea Warner; (BC)
Brenda Cunningham; (SAFT) Skagit Audubon Field
Trip; (RH) Ramona Hammerly; (TM) Tim Manns

HIKING

Skagit Audubon is pleased to offer scheduled hikes. Please visit our website: www.skagitaudubon.org/activities/hikes for full details on the hikes. All hikers must have a current signed liability release form (available on the website) on file prior to participating in any Skagit Audubon hike. Please be prepared to follow current COVID pandemic safety protocols and all hikers must be fully vaccinated. Questions? Contact Tom Ozretich, tom.ozretich@gmail.com; 360.424.8466



The December hiking schedule was not available so please visit our website for updates.

FIELD TRIPS – by Colleen Shannon

Beginning birders and friends are always welcome on Skagit Audubon field trips. Please be prepared for the weather with suitable clothing and bring field guides, binoculars, and spotting scopes (if you have them). Please note specific COVID guidelines in each field trip description. Questions? Contact Colleen Shannon, fieldtrips@skagitaudubon.org.



SignUp Genius

Skagit Audubon subscribes to SignUp Genius. Most field trip leaders are using it to register for their field trips. It is quite easy to use. Just click on the link provided and follow all the prompts. You should receive an email confirmation within a couple of minutes if your registration was successful. If you have difficulty please let Colleen know at fieldtrips@skagitaudubon.org.

Saturday, December 9, 2023 – 8:30 am until Noon Padilla Bay & Samish Flats

Trip Leader: Libby Mills; libbymills@gmail.com

Wintering birds are returning to the Skagit Valley. Meet at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center parking lot. We will walk the upland trail and over to the shores of Padilla Bay. Afterwards, we will drive to various areas on the Samish Flats to seek raptors and waterfowl. Discover Pass required for some areas. Dress for the weather and bring binoculars and scopes if you have them. No pre-registration required and contact trip leader, Libby Mills, libbymills@gmail.com, with any questions. We will respect the spreadability of COVID and other seasonal health hazards at the time of the trip.

Saturday, December 16, 2023 - 9:00 am until Noon; Rosario Area Deception Pass State Park

Trip Leader: Colleen Shannon; fieldtrips@skagitaudubon.org or 425.239.1424

The varied habitats near Deception Pass, from old growth forest to the rocky islands and open waters off Rosario Head, attract diverse birdlife. Expect to see winter songbirds, waterfowl, gulls, alcids. Past trips have yielded Red Crossbills, Brandt's, Pelagic, and Double-crested Cormorants, Belted Kingfishers, several duck, gull, loon, and grebe species and more. Bring binoculars and spotting scope (optional). Dress for the weather. Anticipate wind on Rosario Head. Meet at the parking area for Rosario Beach, Deception Pass State Park. Discover Pass required. Accessibility: From the parking to the base of Rosario Head a smooth, hard-surfaced path crosses gently sloped terrain. The trail to the top of Rosario Head rises about 200 feet in elevation. Total walking distance for this field trip will be about a half mile. To indicate you plan to attend and to provide contact information in case trip plans change, please sign up at the following link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C094BA4AF28A4F4C16-45942985-rosario>

CONSERVATION – by Tim Manns

Sometime in the early afternoon of October 28th, a half mile from downtown Mount Vernon, a Wilson's Snipe dropped into our backyard for a meal. When darkness fell she, or he, still probed the wet ground near the rain garden, finding enough earthworms and other good things to stay a while. Encountering snipe around Skagit's wetlands and ditches isn't unusual, but before that day we had never caught sight of this fine bird on our city lot. Birders know the thrill when rare birds appear or more familiar ones turn up in unexpected places, especially in the backyard. One of the great gifts birding gives us is the habit of attention, of being open and alert to the other than human world all around us. Paying attention sets us up to be thrilled again and again. And birds, given our attention, remind us that the Earth is not ours alone.

It's no wonder that birding has moved so many towards conservation action. Habitat loss and climate



change are arguably the greatest threats to the well-being of birds and all wildlife. Addressing those huge problems benefits people too. Reluctant as many may be to accept the indisputable fact, we are not separate from the rest of the living world. When birds and other wildlife are in trouble we are too.

Among Audubon Washington's strategic initiatives is one titled, "Creating Bird-Friendly Communities" ([Bird-Friendly Communities | Audubon Washington](#)). This focus urges us to manage the places where we live, whether in town or the countryside, as habitat for birds as well as for ourselves. Recall John

Marzluff's Skagit Audubon presentation a few years ago about his recently published *Welcome to Subirdia: Sharing Our Neighborhoods with Wrens, Robins, Woodpeckers, and Other Wildlife*. Make your home friendly to birds and wonders can happen.

A recent conversation with Natalie Niblack about her terrific bird portraits on display at the Museum of Northwest Art brought to mind Henry Beston's words about wild creatures in *The Outermost House*:

"In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete, gifted with the extension of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings: they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth."

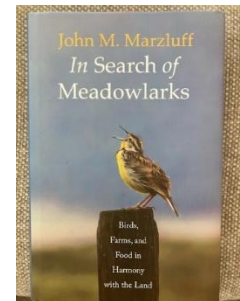
When environmental, political, personal problems loom, noticing birds takes us out of ourselves, reawakens us to the wonder of the world and reinvigorates our will to do whatever we're able to turn appreciation into action. Watch for snipe in your yard, read about the wonder of them ([Wilson's Snipe Overview, All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)), and be active in supporting the places birds and humans need for healthy and fulfilling lives.

For information on conservation issues and advocacy, see Conservation Notes on the Skagit Audubon website, www.skagitaudubon.org, under the Conservation tab.

Photo credit: Wilson's Snipe by Brenda Cunningham

Skagit Audubon Reads, by Colleen Shannon

This year your Program Committee is initiating a new program, Skagit Audubon Reads. The book chosen for our inaugural year is In Search of Meadowlarks by John Marzluff. We encourage you to read it and plan to have a discussion centered around the book prior to Dr. Marzluff's program for Skagit Audubon next February. We are also planning to host a field trip to one of the farms featured in the book. Please join us in reading Dr. Marzluff's exciting book about the impact of agriculture on birds and other creatures. Might be a good Christmas or Hannukah present!



Birds and Climate Change Exhibit at the Museum of Northwest Art: Through January 21st, the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner is showing "Surge: Mapping Transition, Displacement, and Agency in Times of Climate Change" ([Surge 2023 — Museum of Northwest Art \(monamuseum.org\)](https://monamuseum.org)). This exhibit includes Skagit artist Natalie Niblack's bird portraits inspired by National Audubon's 2019 report [Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink | Audubon](https://www.audubon.org/resources/survival-by-degrees). See a preview of Niblack's fine bird portraits and ornithologist Dr. John Bower's informative captions at [Paintings: 66 Birds/ 3 Degrees | natalie-niblack \(natalieniblack.com\)](https://natalie-niblack.com).

MEET THE NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) - by Jeff Sinker

Is that a woodpecker feeding on the ground? If it is a large brown woodpecker with a flash of red in the wings and white in the tail, then you have found the Northern Flicker. Northern Flickers feed primarily on the ground, probing



for ants and beetles, which are among their favorite foods. If you have bird feeders, especially suet feeders, these birds are often frequent guests. Northern Flickers are found in a variety of habitats, from forests and forest edges to open spaces bordering woods, city parks and neighborhood backyards. In addition to ants and beetles, they eat a wide variety of other insects, plus berries and seeds.

Northern Flickers breeding in northern climates like Alaska often migrate south for the winter, but some birds may remain on their breeding grounds year-round. When a pair bond has formed, both sexes select the nest site and excavate the nest cavity. They select a location that is typically 6-15 feet off the ground and only wood chips are used to line the bottom of the cavity. The female lays 5-8 eggs and incubation occurs over 11-13 days, followed by a nestling period of 24-27 days. A successful pair will raise one brood per season. Learn more at: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Flicker. Photo by Mary Sinker

HOLIDAYS ARE FOR THE BIRDS TOO! – by Mary Sinker

Holiday decorating and treats can be for the birds too – here are a few tips for success:

- Peanut butter makes a great mortar and can be used to cover plain straw or grapevine wreaths; then press the wreath into bird-friendly seeds, dried fruits or nuts and hang with a ribbon or wire hanger.
- Make or purchase wooden ornaments, cover with peanut butter, and add a hanger. Add bird-friendly seeds, nuts or fruits and hang from trees or branches. This can be a fun project to do with children.
- When choosing outdoor décor, try to avoid garlands or wreaths that feature artificial berries. Birds can mistake these for real berries and potentially ingest some of the plastic or Styrofoam used in their construction. Pinecones coated with peanut butter can be added to natural wreaths and garlands and restocked as needed during the holiday season. Happy holiday decorating for the birds!

**SKAGIT AUDUBON SOCIETY
PO BOX 1101
MOUNT VERNON, WA 98273**

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Skagit Audubon Society Membership Form

Membership: ____ \$20/one year **OR** ____ \$40/two years • ____ New **OR** ____ Renewal

Additionally, I wish to donate \$_____ to Skagit Audubon Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Please designate my donation to: ____ General ____ Education ____ Scholarship Fund.

Payment: (1) Pay online with a credit card or PayPal (see skagitaudubon.org for details) **OR** (2) Mail this form & your check to: Skagit Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1101, Mt. Vernon WA 98273-1101

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Email: _____

By providing your email address and those of any household members, you/they consent to SAS's use of electronic transmission, such as email and website postings, for notices about SAS business. You may revoke this consent at any time on written request to the Secretary of SAS.

Membership includes those members of your household whose names & emails you provide to us:

Name: _____ Email: _____

(If you have more than one additional member of your household who wishes to become a member of SAS, please provide their name(s) and email address(es) to membership@skagitaudubon.org)

I want to be involved in (check all that apply): Education ____ Conservation ____ Field Trips ____ Hiking ____ Other ____

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