



The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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DECEMBER MEETING – PRESENTED ON ZOOM

Skagit Audubon Holiday Member Photo Show

Presented by: YOU!

Tuesday, December 14, 7:00 PM

Although we are not able to meet in person, the program committee has been working hard to bring you the annual Skagit Audubon Holiday Member Photo Show!

Please join us from the comfort of your home to view beautiful photos of birds and nature. This is not a competition but an opportunity for us to share our photos with each other. Your photos are the stars of the show!

The December member meeting will precede the photo presentation.

Register for this Zoom event at: <https://bit.ly/dec14sas>

Preregistration is required and is limited to 100 attendees. Please only one registrant per household. After you register you will receive an email with the link to sign in at the time of the event. Questions? Please contact carlajhelm@comcast.net.



Due to the continuing emergency response to the COVID-19 virus, our in-person member meetings and many other activities have been cancelled until further notice. Hikes and field trips are being organized for vaccinated members who must comply with the activity leader's guidelines. Personal field trips for donations of \$100 or more are not now being offered. Please visit our website for updates.

HELLO READERS!

This is your newsletter – have an idea or contribution you want to make? Please email publications@skagitaudubon.org

2021 PADILLA BAY CHRISTMAS BIRD

COUNT will take place, under COVID protocols, on Sun., Dec. 26th. For info, please contact Tim Manns at conservation@skagitaudubon.org or 360.333.8985

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE -

I think it is fair to say that winter weather and winter birding have arrived. Snow geese and swans are back in the valley and the snow level has been up and down making the rivers do the same thing. The thousands of ducks in the valley bring out the hunters as well. As members and friends of Skagit Audubon I would encourage you to share the fields and trails with our friends in the hunting community. Many are conservation minded and they all have to buy a duck stamp. I would encourage our members to consider buying a duck stamp as well. Ninety-eight cents of every \$1 goes directly to buying habitat for ducks and other birds and the art is generally very high quality. We have lots of options for our winter birding and hopefully we can coexist with our local hunters until the end of January when waterfowl hunting ends.

We also should be mindful of the historic flooding in Skagit and Whatcom Counties recently. Jenny Baker with WDFW said that they had to add some material to an overtopped dike at the Wylie Boat Launch but were otherwise in pretty good shape. The Island Unit east of there had major dike damage and was generally flooded. That area has been slated for restoration within the next few years. The Samish area has had few reports but there seems to be little long term damage there. If you know someone who has been impacted please do what you can to lighten their load.

Lastly, I'd like to make a pitch for more field trips. Libby Mills has been our long-time field trip chair and this year she has enlisted Colleen Shannon as a helper. This dynamic duo will soon meet with the rest of the committee to plan future trips within Skagit County and beyond. We could use your help. If you could consider leading a field trip – even just one – please let any board member know. It's not hard and you don't have to be the best birder in the group. If you know where the bathrooms are and how to get back to the cars, you will have covered about 90% of what you need. Maybe you could try a field trip in your favorite birding patch that you know very well. We can keep the secret.

You are also invited to join the field trip committee. Many hands make light work, and we could certainly use fresh energy and ideas. We hope to see you with your binoculars out in the field very soon. Until then.....

Thanks, and happy birding. Be safe, wear your mask, get vaccinated.

Jeff Osmundson, President

FROM YOUR EDITOR - by Mary Sinker

Continuing the holiday decorating for birds theme from last month, pinecones, winter berries, and wreaths replace pumpkins as the stars of the show for our feathered friends. A great project to do with children is to gather cones (the large, more open cones work well), coat them with peanut butter, and then add assorted seeds, nuts, and fruits. Hang where you can easily see them, and the birds will give you hours of enjoyment as they extract all the goodies.

If you want to try making bird seed ornaments or wreaths, Google is your friend! Dozens of ideas and simple recipes await and once you've selected a recipe, you can adapt it to the food preferences of the birds in your yard. These homemade projects are fun to do with children and make excellent gifts for bird-loving friends or family. Happy holiday decorating for the birds! Spotted Towhee by Mary Sinker



MARK YOUR CALENDARS because Skagit Audubon Society is thrilled to partner with North Cascades Institute once again to welcome award-winning author and photographer Paul Bannick for a two-part online speaking event!



We hope you'll join us as Paul showcases the natural rhythms of the owl and the woodpecker, as well as the integral spirit of our wild places! Based on thousands of hours in the field photographing these fascinating and wily birds, Paul's work touches on all 41 North American species of owls and woodpeckers, across 11 key habitats.

Paul will combine his breathtaking images, first-hand accounts, video, sound, and science to help inspire conservation and education efforts as well as to help spread awareness about the threats facing these owls and what we can do to protect them. You will also be given a chance to ask Paul all of your burning owl questions after his presentation.

The first event will take place January 11 and be focused on The Owl and The Woodpecker. The second event will take place February 16 and be focused on Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls. Both events will be held virtually via Zoom at 7 PM and they are both only \$10 to attend. You can sign up for either class at the following link: <https://ncascades.org/signup/programs/classes>.

Meet the Black Oystercatcher - by Jeff Sinker

If you have ever been standing on a rocky shoreline, heard a loud ringing whistle, and then seen a large stocky dark bird with a striking reddish-orange bill fly by and land amongst the mussel-covered rocks, you've just seen a Black Oystercatcher!

Ranging from Alaska to Baja California, these shorebirds are never far from the rocky coastline of the Pacific Ocean. They prefer to feed on the rising and falling tides because the shells of mussels and other bivalves open more often, making it easier for the oystercatcher to pry the shell completely open to spear the meat inside. Oystercatchers also feed on crabs, which they smash, single-shelled mollusks like limpets, which they chisel off the rocks, and they probe for clams in the mud. Despite their name, they only occasionally eat oysters!



Oystercatchers place their nests on the ground well above the high-tide line on beaches that gently slope to the adjacent feeding area. The male makes several scrapes on the ground and the female selects one. A clutch of 1-4 eggs is laid and both parents share incubation duties for 24-29 days. The downy chicks are able to walk as soon as they are dry and both parents protect and feed their young for several months. It takes time for the youngsters to learn how to open the hard shells of mollusks and similar prey items.

Oystercatchers are sensitive to human disturbance at feeding and nesting sites, oil spills, and other marine pollutants. Most birds are permanent residents in their range, but some will wander away from breeding areas during spring and fall. Black Oystercatchers can be seen regularly along the rocky shorelines of Deception Pass State Park at West Beach and Rosario and also at Washington Park in Anacortes.

Sources: www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black_Oystercatcher and www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/black-oystercatcher. Photo by Mary Sinker

WELCOME BACK HIKING - by Joan Melcher

After more than a year, Skagit Audubon is pleased to announce the return of scheduled hikes. Please visit our website www.skagitaudubon.org/activities/hiking-info 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. Questions? Contact Joan Melcher at jdmelcher@comcast.net or 360.424.0407.



- Dec. 1: East Shore Lake Whatcom or Chanterelle Trail on Stewart Mountain**
- Dec. 8: Deception Pass Area**
- Dec. 15: Little Mountain**
- Dec. 22: Padilla Bay Shore Trail**
- Dec. 22: Dugualla State Park**
- Dec. 29: Northern State Recreation Area**
- Jan. 5: Interurban Trail**

WELCOME BACK FIELD TRIPS!

Saturday, December 11, 2021

Rosario Area of Deception Pass State Park

9:00 a.m. to Noon

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, and other seabirds. Past trips have yielded Red Crossbills, Brandt's, Pelagic, and Double-crested Cormorants, Belted Kingfishers, several duck, gull, loon, and grebe species and more. If time permits, we could then drive to Lake Erie below Mt. Erie to look for several species of ducks and waterfowl not seen at Rosario.



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. Following Skagit Audubon Covid precautions, this trip is limited to 12 participants. All must have completed Covid vaccination. We will wear masks when within 6 feet of each other. To reserve your spot, please contact trip leader Tim Manns (360-333-8985 or conservation@skagitaudubon.org).

The Big Sit Supports Skagit Audubon Society Scholarship Fund, by Denny Quirk

You may recall that a patient and alert team of Skagit Audubon Society members participated in the annual, international, Big Sit event on Saturday October 9 at the Skagit Wildlife Management Area (Wiley Slough). In addition to simply being a fun event during which we saw or heard 52 species during nine continuous hours of birding from one location, we raised \$900 in support of the Skagit Audubon Society Environmental Conservation Scholarship at Skagit Valley College! This annual scholarship, now entering its third year, directly supports local students and the future of environmental conservation right here in Skagit County. Thank you to the team participants and everyone that made a Big Sit contribution!



The count compilers (New Haven Bird Club) have yet to release overall results for this year, but our Big Sit species list of 60 for 2020 ranked our team FIRST among eight total Big Sit counts conducted in Washington. Visit thebigsit.org (Results tab is at the top right) to see the results for 2021. Yellow-rumped Warbler by Joe Halton.

CONSERVATION REPORT – by Tim Manns

Planting trees to sequester carbon

National Audubon research identifies climate change as the single greatest threat to birds as their habitat shifts and shrinks. We look to governments and corporations to address the climate crisis at the large-scale necessary, but we also want to do what we can do as individuals. If you own property, one positive and concrete action is to plant trees to keep carbon out of the atmosphere, the more and bigger the trees the better. To encourage tree planting, the Carbon Capture Foundation based in Longview, Washington makes trees available at no cost. Skagit Audubon is working with this small foundation to bring this opportunity to its members and their friends and neighbors.

At this point we are assessing the level of interest to see if it is sufficient to achieve an economy of scale and keep costs low. The list of trees below is based on what we believe available from nearby sources. It includes deciduous trees particularly good for birds and pollinators as well as conifers that will grow to large size and sequester more carbon. All trees the Carbon Capture Foundation provides will be bare root, rather than in pots, and will need to be planted soon after being received. Delivery could be as early as this January at a central location to be determined. There may be several pick-up dates depending on plant availability and to meet participants' convenience.

You've probably noticed that trees planted in large restoration projects in Skagit County usually have protectors around them, often blue tubes. These help deter voles, mice, rabbits, deer, and other creatures who would like to eat your plants. Survival of planted trees is much higher with protectors. The Carbon Capture Foundation will likely not be able to provide these. By ordering in bulk, we hope to offer protectors plus the bamboo stake used to hold each in place at around \$2.00 per tree. So, while the trees themselves will be free, it is possible participants in this program will need to pay \$2 per tree to protect them. You may have a site where protectors are not needed, but they're generally a good investment in ensuring the success of your planting efforts.

If you own property where you would plant more trees, please contact Tim Manns (conservation@skagitaudubon.org) with which species from the list below you would like and how many of each. If possible, please send your list by December 20.



Washington Native Plant Society has plant lists for different habitats and conditions which can help you select trees on this list that will work on your property: <https://www.wnps.org/native-gardening/resources#habitat>. Open the list best describing your spot and see which of the listed species below appear there.

Conifers:

Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*)-pictured above, Grand fir (*Abies grandis*)

Deciduous Trees: Big leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), Red alder (*Alnus rubra*), Black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera* ssp. *trichocarpa*), Pacific crabapple (*Malus fusca*), Cascara (*Rhamnus* [*Frangula*] *purshiana*)

Please tell your friends and neighbors about this opportunity if you think they may have a suitable place for planting trees. (Note: the intention is not to provide trees to replant harvested areas where replanting is required under Washington's Forest Practice Rules.)

Thank you for doing what you can to address the climate crisis and doing so in a way that also supports birds and pollinators. The Carbon Capture Foundation is a 501C3 charitable organization and can accept donations if you are so inclined (<https://www.thecarboncapturefoundation.org>)

Audubon Priorities for the 2022 Washington State Legislative Session

Read about Audubon's priorities for the coming legislative session (January 10 – March 10, 2022) at <https://wa.audubon.org/news/legislative-agenda-birds>. If you act quickly, you may be in time to participate in the December 7th virtual advocacy day when Audubon members statewide will speak with their state legislators about these priorities. Register at the website above.

For information on issues Skagit Audubon is tracking go to "Conservation Notes" under the "Conservation" tab on the chapter's website (www.skagitaudubon.org).

FIELD SIGHTINGS - by Pam Pritzl

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 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

Greater White-fronted Goose

6 on Samish Flats on 11-7 (NOH)

Cackling Goose 2 at FIFR on 11-10 (NOH)

Eurasian Wigeon 1 at FIFR on 11-3 (YH)

Canvasback 6 at FIFR on 11-3 (YH)

Common Merganser 19 at Skagit Bay on 11-14 (YH)

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

Ring-necked Pheasant

1 at SWAWS on 10-19 & 1 on Samish Flats on 11-17 (YH)

Ruffed Grouse 1 in Skagit Valley on 10-18 (YH)

GREBES

Eared Grebe 3 at Samish Island Public Beach on 10-30 (GB)

PIGEONS and DOVES

Mourning Dove 24 at Highway 20 on 10-18 (YH)

RAILS

Virginia Rail 1 at SWAWS on 10-31 (NOH)

STILTS and AVOCETS

Black-necked Stilt 1 at FIFR on 10-18 (GB) **rare on west side**

PLOVERS

Black-bellied Plover 1 on Samish Flats on 11-7 (NOH)

American Golden-Plover 1 at FIFR on 10-18 (GB)

SANDPIPERS and ALLIES

Surfbird 1 at Rosario Head on 11-9 (GB)

Sanderling 1 at FIFR on 10-17 (GB)

Long-billed Dowitcher 6 at FIFR on 11-10 (NOH)

Wilson's Snipe 1 at SWAWS on 10-31 (NOH)

GULLS and TERNs

Sabine's Gull 1 at March Point on 10-18 & 10-21 (GB) **rare**

IBIS

White-faced Ibis 1 at FIFR on 10-17 (GB) **rare**

HAWKS, EAGLES and ALLIES

Rough-legged Hawk 2 on Samish Flats on 11-7 & 11-12 (NOH); 1 on Samish Flats on 11-14 (MS/JS); 2 at East 90, Samish Flats on 11-17 (YH)

OWLS

Barn Owl 1 at SWAWS on 11-5 (GB)

Barred Owl 1 at east Stanwood yard on 10-29 (MS/JS); 1 at SWAWS on 11-5 (GB)

Short-eared Owl 1 at FIFR on 11-10 (NOH); 2 at East 90, Samish Flats on 11-14 (MS/JS)

WOODPECKERS

Red-breasted Sapsucker 2 at Camano Island yard on 10-18 (PP); 3 at east Fidalgo yard on 10-26 (RW); 1 at Anacortes yard on 11-16 (JB)

FALCONS

American Kestrel 1 on Samish Flats on 11-7 (NOH)

Merlin 1 at FIFR on 11-3 (YH)

Peregrine Falcon 1 at FIFR on 10-19 (YH); 1 on SWAWS on

10-31, 1 on Samish Flats on 11-7 & 1 at FIFR on 11-10 (NOH)

FLYCATCHERS

Black Phoebe 1 at SWAWS on 10-31 (NOH)

VIREOS

Hutton's Vireo 1 at east Fidalgo yard on 11-19 (RW)

SWALLOWS

Barn Swallow 1 at Jensen Access on 10-15 (GB)

WRENS

Bewick's Wren 1 at Anacortes yard on 11-16 (JB)

DIPPERS

American Dipper 3 in Skagit Valley on 10-18 (YH)

THRUSHES

Varied Thrush 1 at east Stanwood yard on 11-6 (MS)

LONGSPURS and BUNTINGS

Lapland Longspur 1 at the West 90, Samish Flats on 11-7 (GB)

SPARROWS and ALLIES

American Tree Sparrow 2 at FIFR on 11-2 & 1 on 11-5 & 11-7 (GB); 1 at FIFR on 11-3 (YH)

White-throated Sparrow 1 at Camano Island yard on 10-27 & 10-28 (PP); 2 at Samish Island yard on 11-13 (HA)

Field sightings cont'd on Pg. 7

Field sightings cont. from Pg. 6

BLACKBIRDS and ORIOLES

Western Meadowlark 6 at West 90, Samish Flats on 11-17 (YH)

Rusty Blackbird 1 north of Conway on 10-17 (GB)

(HA) Howard Armstrong; (GB) Gary Bletsch; (JB) Jane Brandt; (FIFR) Fir Island Farm Reserve aka Hayton Reserve; (NOH);

Neil O'Hara; (YH) Yvonne Houppermans; (PP) Pam Pritzl; (JS) Jeff Sinker; (MS) Mary Sinker; (SWAWS) Skagit Wildlife Area Wylie Slough; (RW) Regan Weeks

ABOUT SKAGIT AUDUBON

— Skagit Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. General membership meetings are held at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, 10441 Bayview- Rd., Mt. Vernon on the second Tuesday of each month, September through June. Social/7:00 pm and Program/7:30 pm. The board of directors meets at the same location the first Tuesday of each month, September through June, at 7:00 pm. Skagit Audubon membership provides a local chapter affiliation and newsletter, *The Skagit Flyer*, for individuals who want all their funds to benefit their local chapter. *The Skagit Flyer* is produced monthly from September through June and full color issues are available at: www.skagitaudubon.org/newsletter. Unless noted, all images, drawings, clip art, etc. appearing in *The Skagit Flyer* are in the public domain. We reserve the right to edit.

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Representative: Katherine O'Hara.....katherineoh@skagitaudubon.org

Other Volunteers

Bird Sightings: Pam Pritzl.....bird sightings@skagitaudubon.org.....360-387-7024
Hospitality: Pamela Maxwell
Newsletter Distribution: John Edison
Webmaster: Ron Pera.....skagitaudubon@gmail.com

WHO TO CALL FOR SICK OR INJURED BIRDS OR WILDLIFE

San Juan/Skagit/Northern Whidbey Island: Wolf Hollow Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
360.378.5000; www.wolfhollowwildlife.org

Snohomish County: Sarvey Wildlife Center 360.435.4817; www.sarveywildlife.org and PAWS
425.412.4040; www.paws.org

**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

Mail form and payment to: **Skagit Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1101, Mt. Vernon WA 98273-1101**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/: _____

ZIP: _____ Phone: _____

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)