

The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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Volume 40, No. 3 www.skagitaudubon.org March 2021

MARCH MEETING – PRESENTED ON ZOOM

“Leque Island: A Restored Estuary for Fish, Birds and People”

Presented by Loren Brokaw

Tuesday, March 9, 7:00 PM

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Ducks Unlimited, and local contractor Strider Construction completed construction of the Leque Island Estuary Restoration Project in late 2019. After removing the dike surrounding the island in October 2019, the first high tide entered the 250-acre area of Leque Island for the first time in 135+ years, marking the beginning of the land transitioning back to an intertidal marsh. Leque Island is owned and managed by WDFW and is the area you see crossing the bridge to Camano Island. The project is designed to benefit species that rely on estuary habitat as part of their life cycle, including salmon, shorebirds, waterfowl, and other species. In addition, there is a new walking trail and boat launch. Skagit Audubon was a key participant in the advisory group providing input on project design.



Loren Brokaw is Restoration Projects Coordinator for WDFW in the North Puget Sound region, extending from the Washington/Canada border to south of Seattle. Loren manages habitat restoration projects on WDFW lands that involve restoration of natural processes to benefit fish, wildlife, and their habitats. His work involves partnering with local organizations, planning, and executing stakeholder outreach plans, and securing grant funding to achieve habitat restoration objectives. Loren’s family has lived in the Stanwood Camano area for five generations.

Please register for this Zoom event at: bit.ly/sasmarch. 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? Contact Carla Helm at carlajhelm@comcast.net.

If you missed the February 9th presentation about waterfowl by Biologist Kyle Spragens, or want to watch it again, a recording is now available for viewing at the following link: <https://youtu.be/FqMwQxr7EcQ>

Due to the continuing emergency response to the COVID-19 virus, our in-person member meetings, field trips and hikes, and most other activities have been cancelled until further notice. This includes the offer of personal field trips for future donations to Skagit Audubon Society of \$100 or more. Please visit our website for updates.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE -Greetings members and friends of Skagit Audubon,

Has COVID been good for birds and birding?

This week Colleen (I'll call her my sweetheart as I'm writing this on Valentine's Day) had yet another phone call with someone who was asking about birds, or bird feeding, or bird watching, or birding locations. Several of our friends and families have asked to be introduced to birds and locations, how to buy binoculars, what books to read and where to go. We are happy to be asked and have fun introducing people to the joys of birding.

Due to Covid-19 there is a boom in Zoom. We have been to very interesting meetings that took place all over the state of Washington and beyond. While we would rarely be able to attend other Audubon chapter meetings or Washington Ornithological Society meetings, we have been fortunate to attend fascinating presentations from across Washington State and beyond. We have been privileged to be able to see these programs without driving and from the comfort of our own homes and offices.

So, has Covid-19 been good for birding? Yes, I think so.

Among the many changes spurred on by the pandemic, we also saw a growing movement in support of racial equality and social justice. Many environmental organizations, including National Audubon Society, have taken steps over the past year to address racist practices and make the outdoors more inclusive to people of all backgrounds.

Then what should we do about using this as an opportunity to promote and provide for resources so that people might enjoy our type of outdoor recreation with respect for the birds, other wildlife, and public and private property? I believe it is time for our chapter to step up, as National Audubon has suggested. With that in mind, we have formed a new Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee that will be working on addressing these issues. If you would like to get involved or have opportunities in mind for making our organization more welcoming, please do not hesitate to reach out to our committee chair, Kim Nelson. *You can be part of this if you wish.*

We can look at Covid-19 as a terrible year of isolation or we can take this opportunity to build on a different way of doing things to enhance our Audubon Society and our mission. For those of you that have not reviewed our mission statement, here it is.

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.

Until next month, stay safe, wear a mask, and wash your hands. What's the best time to go bird watching? When you can!

Jeff Osmundson
President

WDFW SWAN HOTLINE ACTIVATED

From now through the end of March, 2021 anyone observing or finding a sick, injured, or dead Trumpeter or Tundra Swan should call the hotline number 24/7: 360.466.4345 ext. 266. Please be prepared to leave a short, detailed message, including your name, phone number, location, and condition of the swan(s). WDFW stresses the importance of not approaching or handling the swan(s).

CONSERVATION REPORT – by Tim Manns

On January 7th in the waning days of the previous federal administration, rulemaking to weaken the scope of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (MBTA) was to become final. Following inauguration of the new administration the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service quickly postponed the rule's taking effect until March 8th and opened a public comment period through March 1st. Skagit Audubon signed on a National Audubon group letter and also sent its own urging return to the long-time interpretation of the MBTA as applying not only to deliberate but also to accidental harm to birds. This is the single most important law protecting birds in North America, applying to virtually all native species and key to protecting such Skagit icons as the Trumpeter Swan.

Also, at the federal level, National Audubon is collaborating with many other conservation organizations plus businesses and outdoor activity organizations to support passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. This act would dedicate substantial annual funding to implementing the Wildlife Action Plans each state has written to be eligible for federal funding to protect wildlife, particularly non-hunted species. The available federal funds have always been far below the need. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) lists about 1,600 species in trouble, but collectively the states' Wildlife Action Plans describe almost 12,000 more that are in decline and without attention will become eligible for ESA listing in the future. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would greatly increase funding for protecting non-game



species and their habitat and would forestall the declines that result in ESA listing followed by very expensive recovery programs or by extinction. This bi-partisan bill had many co-sponsors in the last Congress but did not fare as well in the Senate. It will be reintroduced in the present Congress. While more information and action alerts will be forthcoming from National Audubon, you can read about this initiative now and how to help on this National Wildlife Federation page: <https://www.nwf.org/Our-Work/Wildlife-Conservation/Policy/Recovering-Americas-Wildlife-Act>.

At this writing, the Washington State legislative session is in its 6th of 13 weeks. The pace is fast, and each year many introduced bills do not survive. Audubon Washington's top priorities, such as passing a Clean Fuels Standard to address the huge contribution which transportation fuels make to greenhouse gas emissions, are still in play. Those priorities which focus on the operating or capital budgets (e.g., adequate funding for WA Department of Fish & Wildlife and for habitat restoration grants) will be addressed later in the session when the biennial budget is debated. You can find a one-page summary of Audubon Washington's priorities and the latest weekly legislative update by scrolling to the pdfs at the bottom of the following page: <http://wa.audubon.org/conservation/legislative-session-2020>. Audubon Washington will present a webinar March 10th to update us on which Audubon priority policies are still in play, how the state conservation budget is looking, and how you can help. To register: go to <https://wa.audubon.org/conservation/legislative-session-2020>, scroll down a few lines to "Legislative Tracker", open that document and scroll to the registration link.

For other ways to track the progress of legislation and contribute your voice, refer to the conservation report in last month's *Skagit Flyer*. Our legislators do want to hear from us. You can be sure they are hearing from those who oppose conservation legislation.

For more on issues Skagit Audubon is tracking, go to "Conservation" on the Skagit Audubon website (www.skagitaudubon.org) and click on "Conservation Notes".

FROM YOUR EDITOR – by Mary Sinker

During the recent snow, the two newest brush piles were teeming with birds, especially Spotted Towhees. At one point I counted thirty towhees (and I didn't think we had thirty towhees on the place)! These busy members of the sparrow family weren't wasting any time flitting back and forth between the feeders where they were snapping up pieces of suet and black oil sunflower in record time. When they weren't plotting their next trip to the feeders, they were hopping into and out of the brush piles.



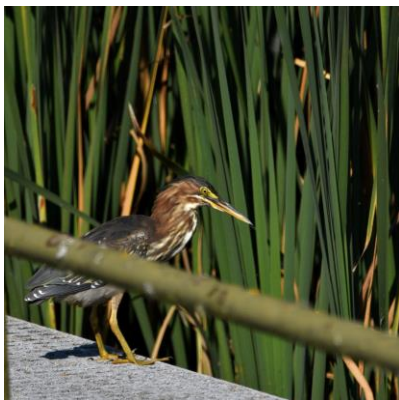
Male towhees are handsome guys sporting jet black heads and backs, flecked with white spots, and warm rufous undersides contrasted with bright white breasts. Towhees scratch through leaves and leaf litter in search of seeds, insects, grubs, and other tasty morsels.

Towhees can be rather secretive since they prefer weedy, overgrown, brushy undergrowth and their plumage blends in perfectly. One of the best times to get good views of them is during spring when males spend a majority of their day perched on a brush pile or low branch singing away to attract a mate.

Females are duller in color and once a suitable nest site has been selected, she builds a nest on the ground using stems, bark chips, rootlets, grasses, hair, and other similar materials. The nest is often tucked up against a clump of grass or a log. Towhees have 1-3 broods with clutch sizes of 2-6 eggs.

PUGET SOUND BIRD OBSERVATORY SECRET WETLAND BIRD SURVEY IS BACK!

We know the current challenges of COVID, social justice awareness, and economic trials have impacted all of us in some way, so whether you have a few hours to offer or would like to take a deep dive into surveying wetland birds this year, Puget Sound Bird Observatory (PSBO) project managers are eager to connect with you.



We've expanded our scope and there are approximately 200 wetlands that need surveyed this season, stretching from Whatcom County to south Puget Sound, Island and Kitsap Counties. Many of the survey sites are located within Skagit and Snohomish Counties. The three survey windows for this year's effort span from March 29, 2021 to June 13, 2021 with lots of opportunity to choose dates and locations that meet your availability and willingness to travel.

Visit our new(!) website for contact information and to see additional general information about the project at: www.pugetsoundbirds.org.

COVID-19 safety protocols have been developed, including delivering full training manuals and remote tutorials for all community science participants. *Not affiliated with or sponsored by Skagit Audubon Society. Photo of Green Heron at Wiley Slough by Mary Sinker*

FIELD SIGHTINGS - by Pam Pritzi

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

Tundra Swan 7 at SWAWS on 1-15 (NOH)
Canvasback 30 at Dugualla Bay on 2-7 (NOH)
Redhead 2 at Bingo Hall Lagoon on 2-9 (GB)
Harlequin Duck 8 at Rosario Head on 2-8 (NOH)
Black Scoter 1 at Clayton Beach, Larrabee State Park on 2-3 (TM)
Long-tailed Duck 5 at SHIP on 1-28 (NOH)

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

Ring-necked Pheasant 1 on Samish Flats on 2-3 (YH)

GREBES

Eared Grebe 1 at Cap Sante Marina on 1-29 (GB)

OYSTERCATCHERS

Black Oystercatcher 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 1-25 & 3 at Rosario Head on 2-8 (NOH)

PLOVERS

Black-bellied Plover 70 on Samish Flats on 2-1 (NOH)

SANDPIPERS and ALLIES

Black Turnstone 15 at Rocky Point, Camano Island on 1-28 (PP)
Surfbird 1 at Rosario Head on 1-18 (GB)
Dunlin 1000 on Samish Flats on 2-1 (NOH); 2000 at Leque Island (Eide Rd) on 2-12 (PP)
Spotted Sandpiper 1 at Rosario Head on 2-8 (NOH)

Greater Yellowlegs 5 at Penn Cove & 3 at Dugualla Bay on 2-7 (NOH)

ALCIDS

Marbled Murrelet 4 on Burrows Bay on 1-17 & 7 at Rosario Head on 2-8 (NOH)
Ancient Murrelet 2 at Green Point, WA Park, Anacortes on 1-25 (GB)

GULLS and TERNS

Herring Gull 1 at the West 90, Samish Flats on 1-27 & 2-7 (GB)
Iceland Gull 1 "Thayer's" on Butler Flats on 2-9 (GB)

LOONS

Red-throated Loon hundreds at Deception Pass SP on 1-22 (YH); 500 at Rosario Head on 2-8 (NOH)
Common Loon 1 on Burrows Bay on 2-8 (NOH)

HERONS and ALLIES

Great Egret 1 on Skagit Flats on 1-16 (YH); 1 on Fir Island on 2-9 (SRP)

HAWKS, EAGLES and ALLIES

Bald Eagle 14 on Fir Island & 5 at SWAWS on 1-15, 48 on Samish Flats on 1-17, 12 at SWAWS on 1-21, 7 at SWAWS on 1-23, 1 at Cranberry Lake, ACFL, 68 on Samish Flats on 2-1, 2 at Penn Cove on 2-7 & 2 at Rosario Head on 2-8 (NOH)

Northern Harrier 11 on Samish Flats on 1-17, 1 at SWAWS on 1-23, 8 on Samish Flats on 2-1 & 1 at Penn Cove on 2-7 (NOH)
Sharp-shinned Hawk 1 at Burrows Bay home on 2-5 (NOH); juvenile at east Fidalgo home on 2-5 & 2-13 (RW)

Cooper's Hawk 1 at SWAWS on 1-21 & 1-23 (NOH); adult at east Fidalgo home on 2-1 (RW); 1 on Samish Flats on 2-7 (YH)

Red-tailed Hawk 2 on Fir Island & 2 at SWAWS on 1-15, 13 on Samish Flats on 1-17, 1 at SWAWS on 1-21 & 1-23, 3 on Samish Flats on 2-1 & 1 at Penn Cove on 2-7 (NOH)

Rough-legged Hawk 4 on Samish Flats on 1-17 & 3 on Samish Flats on 2-1 (NOH); 1 at Iverson Spit, Camano Island on 2-12 (JS/MS)

OWLS

Great Horned Owl 3 at east Fidalgo home on 1-15 (RW); 2 at SWAWS on 1-15 & 1 at SWAWS on 1-23, 1 at Cranberry Lake, ACFL on 1-27 & 2 at Burrows Bay home on 2-5 (NOH); 2 at east Stanwood home throughout sighting period (JS/MS)
Barred Owl 1 at Cranberry Lake, ACFL on 1-27 (NOH)
Short-eared Owl 10 on Samish Flats on 1-17 & 5 on Samish Flats on 2-1 (NOH); 2 on Samish Flats on 2-3 (YH)

Sightings continued on pg. 6

Sightings continued from pg. 5

WOODPECKERS

Red-breasted Sapsucker 1 at east Fidalgo home on 2-6 & 2 on 2-14 (RW)

Hairy Woodpecker 2 at east Fidalgo home on 1-15 (RW)

Pileated Woodpecker 1 at WA Park, Anacortes on 1-25 & 1 at Cranberry Lake, ACFL on 1-27 (NOH)

FALCONS

American Kestrel 1 on Fir Island on 1-15 & 1 on Samish Flats on 2-1 (NOH)

Merlin 1 at Barnum Park, Camano Island on 1-28 (PP); 1 at Leque Island (Eide Rd) on 2-12 (MS)

Peregrine Falcon 1 on Fir Island on 1-15, 1 on Samish Flats on 1-21 & 1 at SWAWS on 1-23 (NOH); 1 at NSRA on 1-19 (TM)

Prairie Falcon 1 on Bay View-Edison Rd on 1-19 (PP); 1 at the West 90, Samish Flats on 1-29 (PP)

FLYCATCHERS

Black Phoebe 2 at SWAWS on 1-21 & 3 at SWAWS on 1-23 (NOH)

SHRIKES

Northern Shrike 1 at NSRA on 1-19 (TM)

VIREOS

Hutton's Vireo 1 at Illabot Creek Alluvial Fan on 1-20 (GB)

SWALLOWS

Barn Swallow 2 at Green Road Pond on 2-7 (GB)

WRENS

Pacific Wren 5 throughout sighting period at east Stanwood home (JS/MS)

THRUSHES

Townsend's Solitaire 1 in Oak Harbor on 2-3 (JH)
Varied Thrush 4 at east Fidalgo home on 1-17 (RW); 25 at Hillcrest Park, Mount Vernon on 1-19 (TM); 12 at east Stanwood home on 2-13 & 2-14 (JS/MS); 1 in Anacortes yard on 2-13 & 14 & 3 on 2-15 (YH)

SPARROWS and ALLIES

Fox Sparrow 2 at east Fidalgo home on 1-15 (RW); 1 at east Stanwood home 2-13 to 2-15 (JS/MS)

Harris's Sparrow 1 on Fir Island on 1-21 (GB)

BLACKBIRDS and ORIOLES

Western Meadowlark 1 on Samish Flats on 1-17 (NOH)
Red-winged Blackbird 235 at east Stanwood home on 2-14 (JS/MS)

WARBLERS

Townsend's Warbler 1 at Lincoln Hill home, Mount Vernon on 2-10 (TM)

MAMMALS

Coyote 1 on Samish Flats on 2-3 (YH)

Chipmunk 1 at east Fidalgo home on 1-31 (RW) **early**

(ACFL) Anacortes Community Forest Lands; **(GB)** Gary Bletsch; **(JH)** Joe Halton; **(NOH)**; Neil O'Hara; **(YH)** Yvonne Houppermans; **(NSRA)** Northern State Recreation Area; **(SHIP)** Ship Harbor Interpretive Preserve; **(TM)** Tim Manns; **(SRP)** Sheila and Ron Pera; **(PP)** Pam Pritzl; **(JS)** Jeff Sinker; **(MS)** Mary Sinker; **(SWAWS)** Skagit Wildlife Area Wylie Slough; **(RW)** Regan Weeks

NEWS FROM THE YOUTH EDUCATION PROGRAM



Skagit Audubon Youth Education Program has been awarded an Audubon Collaborative Grant in the amount of \$1,000. These funds will be applied to expand our on-going 'Family Birding' program which provides birding kits to local libraries to be checked out by kids and their families. These kits contain: two pairs of binoculars, field guides, activities, children's books, maps, and swag items. We'll also be providing Spanish-language materials to make the kits more inclusive.

In response to COVID restrictions, that have greatly reduced in-person programs and events we usually have, it is the aim of these kits to provide tools for kids and their families to go outdoors to enjoy birds and nature.

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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 Newsletter Distribution: John Edison
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FEATURED BIRD – BELTED KINGFISHER



Spend some time at Wiley Slough in the spring, and you may see several Belted Kingfishers noisily chasing each other as territories and mates are being established. Kingfishers utilize both salt and freshwater habitats and are as much at home in an estuary as they are in your backyard if you have a fishpond! Kingfishers depend on earthen banks for nesting and the burrows they dig can have tunnels 3-6 feet long. Both parents help prepare the nest site and raise 1-2 broods of 5-8 eggs each. How do you tell a male Kingfisher from a female Kingfisher? The female has a rusty band across her chest and the male does not. Photo by Joe Halton.

**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)