

The Skagit Flyer

Skagit Audubon Society
A Chapter of National Audubon Society

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ALL SKAGIT AUDUBON SOCIETY EVENTS (MEETINGS, FIELD TRIPS, HIKES AND EDUCATION EVENTS) ARE CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE DUE TO THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEW CORONAVIRUS. WE WILL UPDATE THIS NOTICE AND RESUME ACTIVITIES WHEN THE GOVERNMENT HEALTH AUTHORITIES SAY THAT IT IS SAFE TO DO SO.



WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY – “Birds Connect Our World” is this year’s theme focusing on the technologies used to track migratory birds on their migration routes around the globe. Learn how you can participate from your home or wherever you happen to be in the world. For more information, please visit: migratorybirdday.org.

GO NATIVE WITH SPRING PLANTING – One of the initiatives set forth by National Audubon a couple of years ago is to increase the number and variety of native plants in yards and landscapes across the country. Native plants provide valuable habitat, nesting places, and food for birds and they are easier to maintain for gardeners because they are adapted to local soils and weather conditions. Once established they will use fewer resources to stay healthy. The Salal Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society is an excellent local resource for how to select native plants for your yard. Their annual spring plant sale has been a highly anticipated event for local gardeners for many years. However, due to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 virus outbreak, plans for this year’s sale are uncertain. For updates email Brenda Cunningham at nativegarden@fidalgo.net. To learn more about gardening with native plants, please visit the Salal Chapter’s website at wnps.org/salal.



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A BIG THANK YOU to Barbara Craner who took care of the duties to mail and locally distribute *The Skagit Flyer* for many, many years. **Welcome to John Edison** who has volunteered to assume the duties for mailing and distributing *The Flyer*.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, from Jeff Osmundson

Greetings Skagit Audubon Members and Friends,

Well, this is different! I expected to be writing about spring migration, the changing seasons, spring field trips or some other exciting topic. Instead we are canceling meetings and trips and hunkering down with family and only close friends – at a distance of at least six feet.

While we know this coronavirus, or COVID-19, will pass eventually, we need to have patience and tolerance for a while yet. Difficult situations may often bring out qualities in us that otherwise might not have risen to the surface. We need to care enough about the at risk people in our lives to avoid exposing them to risk, but at the same time making sure they are safe. We can call our neighbors or friends to say hi, offer to shop for those that cannot, offer to do some chores around town or in the yard, and simply offer support.

While some are hoarding toilet paper and grabbing the last chicken in the cooler we can take a deep breath, realize this will last a little while and tackle this problem with dignity and grace.

- Think of others; even if you are not at risk. Don't be so cavalier that you put others in jeopardy.
- Get outside and go hiking or birding. This pastime that has brought us together can also be a wonderful diversion and a mental health boost.
- Practice patience!

With any luck we will soon be back at our membership meetings and enjoying wonderful presentations. We will get out to field trips and enjoy the company of others while we enjoy the natural beauty around us.

Until then, be safe and healthy.

BACKYARD BIRDS, by Mary Sinker

Like most wrens, the Bewick's Wren is industrious, curious, and tolerant of human activities in its nesting territory. They reside year-round in our area and are easily attracted to yards, especially if native plants are present. They



have a varied diet that includes the eggs, larvae and pupae of insects; bugs; beetles; caterpillars; crickets, and the like. In winter they also eat seeds, fruits and plant matter. Nest sites include brush piles, abandoned automobiles and nest boxes. Nest materials include sticks, grass, moss, spider egg cases, feathers and snakeskin! They have 1-3 broods; lay 3-8 eggs; incubation 14-16 days and nestlings spend 14-16 days in the nest. Native plants like elderberry and willow, along with a brush pile or two will help attract these energetic, feisty and acrobatic birds to your yard. Photo of Bewick's Wren with nesting material, by Mary Sinker.

GLOBAL BIG DAY AND NEST WATCH are just around the corner

Global Big Day (May 9th) - learn how to participate and more info: ebird.org

Nest Watch (ongoing) – learn how to participate and more info: nestwatch.org

FROM YOUR EDITOR, by Mary Sinker

As I write this, America is shutting down amid fear and uncertainty as the new coronavirus sweeps across the country, and most of the globe. Baseball stadiums are dark and many non-essential businesses have shuttered their doors to customers to comply with public health recommendations that people remain at home unless they must go to work or shop for essential services.

Despite the radical changes in our daily routines, one thing is not changing. The birds are coming! Spring migration is underway and even though treasured spring birding festivals and field trips have been cancelled due to concerns surrounding spreading of the virus, the birds are still coming! Soon our marshes, shorelines and fields will be hosting thousands of migratory birds making their way along the Pacific Flyway to nesting areas in Canada, Alaska, the Arctic and beyond. Sandpipers, Yellowlegs, Whimbrel, and many more shorebirds will stop to refuel along our coastlines and in our fields on their long journey north. As they arrive, our beloved Snow Geese will begin to depart for Wrangel Island, Russia. Our iconic Tundra and Trumpeter Swans will leave for nesting grounds in northern Canada, Alaska and the Arctic. Osprey will arrive and set up housekeeping around Puget Sound. Swallows and Warblers will grace our meadows and woodlands.

Scientists still don't understand all of the moving pieces that make migration possible, and perhaps that adds to our excitement and anticipation as we await the first report of a Willet, Whimbrel or Sandpiper. While it remains critical to follow the recommendations of public health officials, birding is typically an activity that can take place individually or with a very small group of people in a very large area where social distancing is easy to maintain. The birds are coming and with appropriate safeguards, birders can still experience the excitement of spring migration. To get the best "shorebird bang for your tidal buck" see Neil O'Hara's article below on birding at Hayton Reserve just outside of Conway.

If you are homebound, there are many online resources for birders: American Birding Association at aba.org; National Audubon Society at audubon.org; Cornell Lab of Ornithology at birds.cornell.edu and Audubon Washington at wa.audubon.org offer articles, photo galleries, virtual birding tours, webcams and more.

BEST BIRDING AT HAYTON, by Neil O'Hara

Hayton Reserve, part of the Skagit Wildlife Management Area, used to be a prime location for viewing snow geese. The dike was breached a few years ago, however, and the erstwhile field is now a tidal basin that attracts huge numbers of waterfowl and dunlin in winter as well as numerous shorebird species during migration. To the bald eagles, falcons, hawks and harriers that prey on these birds, Hayton has become a smorgasbord.

A birders' paradise? Only at the right time—or, in truth, the right tide. Local tides feature one high high, one low low, one low high and one high low each day, and the time at which those occur fluctuates over the lunar cycle and the seasons. For example, in December the low low occurs in darkness, but in April and August during shorebird migration it's in broad daylight. Shorebirds are picky eaters that forage on tidal mudflats close to the water's edge. Go to Hayton around a low low tide and you will be disappointed: no water, no birds. Around a high high, you may see ducks but the water is too deep for shorebirds.

The basin begins to fill up on an incoming tide when the Swinomish Channel tide marker exceeds 5 feet, but by the time it reaches 8 feet most shorebirds have left until the water recedes. Suppose you want to visit Hayton on April 15 (a treat after filing your taxes). The water level will be good all morning, but after a 7.4 ft. high tide at 11:34 a.m. the basin starts to drain toward a 0.8 ft. low tide at 6:42 p.m. By 2:30 p.m., the water is gone so birds will be few in number and much further away. To plan your visit, check this web site for Swinomish Channel tides:

<https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/noaatidepredictions.html?id=9448558&legacy=1>

Scroll down to change both dates to the day you wish to visit and click the blue Plot Daily button. The sweet spot is probably 6 ft. to 7.5 ft. water at the tide marker, so pick your arrival time with that in mind. One final tip: the higher the water the closer the birds are likely to be, but a scope always helps at Hayton. Happy birding!

Note: Wash. State Discover Pass required to park. For more information and directions (includes closures due to COVID-19), please visit: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/places-to-go/wildlife-areas/fir-island-farm-reserve-wildlife-area-unit>.

APRIL FIELD TRIPS, by Libby Mills

How to take yourself on a field trip, Part 1.

Seeking resident nesting birds and watching winter birds before they depart for the north



1. Wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds. At the same sink, look at your binoculars and note if they are waterproof. If they are, give them a bath too. Twenty seconds sounds about right. Dry the lenses carefully, mindful that if you scratch the coatings that's it. You can't re-coat them. If your bins are not waterproof, clean the lenses only, with proper lens fluid. Don't soak them in running water.
2. Grab a ball cap for the sun and find a place where you can put the sun at your back so that you get great light on the bushes where you want to see birds.
3. Be still for five minutes as you look and listen attentively. Bird song is most noticeable before 10 am, but now that spring is coming on strong, the birds are preparing to breed. That means they are singing on territories to tell other birds they have claimed this area. Always look at or listen to the bird as long as you can before turning away to look up either its looks or song. If you look down at a book or an app on your phone that may be the last contact with that bird for a while. If you are using binoculars, try to see the bird singing. Where does it like to sing? From a high perch? Or deep in a hidden place. If you are seeing an old familiar bird, watch its activities and see if you can see it do something new.
4. If you can't find the bird with your binoculars, look with the unaided eye to get a broader field of view. Listen carefully. This shouldn't be too hard if you are on a walk alone. When I lead groups of fifteen learners, I often think how much more they might find, being quiet and alone.
5. If you are home from work or school for a long time, this is a perfect time to start recording notes in a field journal. Take out that notebook you've been saving. You have been saving it for now. Be thoughtful, be brave, take notes, and make visual notes too. You can trace the path a swallow makes in the air. You can make an alphabet down the side of the page and try to find something that goes with each letter, in your surroundings. You can turn the page and start over in a different habitat. There are a thousand directions for any of us to go on the page.
6. Make a list of every plant you see hummingbirds visit. Or make a list of every plant that's in bloom. Or find pussy willows and note which birds and insects are visiting it! Try making a drawing, in ANY style, to remember the moment, the day, the time that you are living in. A journal is filled with your own ideas and reflections as well as your observations. I will try to keep part of my book just about nature. One page at a time. One moment at a time. Take this opportunity to go deep into attentiveness and "enjoy the peace of wild things".

When I want to know more about a bird and I'm near a computer I look up birdweb.org from Seattle Audubon. I always have bird apps on my phone, or a field guide tucked in a big pocket. Back indoors, look up skagitaudubon.org and touch the pull down tabs for Birding, which will suggest many places to go birding near home, as well as Resources, that will help you find many learning resources on line. Use some of your time at home to look at our conservation notes and be active to protect the birds and wild places we love. Skagit Audubon is here to help you learn about and love birds. Together we will protect what we care about, even if we aren't closer than six feet, or more apart.

DID YOU KNOW that you can support Skagit Audubon Society whenever you shop through Amazon? We participate in Amazon Smile, a program whereby 0.5% of every purchase you make supports a charity you choose. It costs you nothing – prices on Amazon Smile are the same as on the regular Amazon site. Just go to Smile.Amazon.com and log in using your regular Amazon user name and password. When prompted to choose a charity, type "Skagit Audubon Society" in the dialog box, make sure the search calls up our name, then click on Select. As long as you remember to use Smile.Amazon.com for your purchases, we will receive the benefit.

CONSERVATION, by Tim Manns

At this writing in the third week of March, the spread of COVID-19 and the world's struggles to deal with it have crowded out almost all other news. Nonetheless, let's briefly look at the outcome of the Washington State legislative session that ended March 12th. Audubon's priorities met both success and disappointment. Successes included:

- The Sustainable Farms and Fields measure ([Senate Bill 5947](#)) with financial incentives for farmers to reduce use of fossil fuels and enhance soil's ability to hold carbon.
- A Zero Emissions Vehicles mandate ([Senate Bill 5811](#)) to make more electric vehicles available in Washington.
- Funds to map the best places in the Columbia Basin to site large scale solar energy facilities with least impact to agriculture and the environment.
- Restoration of Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife funding for basic operations which it lost in 2008 and has never recovered.
- Statewide ban on most single-use, thin plastic bags in retail stores.
- Funding to explore how to implement the principle of "net ecological gain" (in place of "no net loss") in shoreline project development so that salmon habitat is recovered and Southern Resident Orcas aren't starved into extinction.

Though the Legislature failed to authorize the Department of Ecology to regulate indirect greenhouse gas emissions attributable to oil and gas distributors, it did accelerate the schedule for getting the state as a whole to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions (House Bill 2311). This bill also made it policy to look to forests and farms to sequester carbon. The bill sets ambitious targets to cut emissions but creates no specific path to meet them. Forty-five percent of Washington's greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation. To reduce emissions it's essential to face this reality and act. Yet, for the second time in two years, the Clean Fuel Standard (House Bill 1110) passed the House but died in the Senate Transportation Committee. The Chairman would not allow a committee vote, and so the bill never made it to the Senate floor where it might well have passed. As already in California and Oregon, a Clean Fuel Standard would reduce the carbon content of fuels and create incentives to transition away from fossil fuels in the transportation sector. That it should fail because of a possible increase in per gallon fuel costs speaks to the failure of key political figures to take the climate crisis seriously. We will not meet the monumental challenge of climate change without cost, and the longer we wait the higher that cost will be in dollars, in human suffering, and in degradation of the natural world Audubon members value. Lacking the suddenness and immediacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing the climate crisis at an adequate scale is too easily put off to another day.

For Audubon Washington's overview of the legislative session: <https://wa.audubon.org/news/2020-legislative-session-wraps-mixed-results>. For other issues Skagit Audubon is tracking go to Conservation Notes on the Skagit Audubon website (<https://www.skagitaudubon.org/>).



ON BEHALF OF SKAGIT AUDUBON, a great big **THANK YOU** goes out to the following SAS members who volunteered to represent SAS at the 2020 Stanwood/Camano Snow Goose & Birding Festival on Feb. 22-23rd:

SAS Table: Scott Petersen, Regan Weeks, Carla Helm, Don Jonasson, Jane Brandt and Mary Sinker

SAS Table (set-up and taken down): Sheila & Ron Pera and Jane Brandt

Snow Goose Planning Committee: Cathy Wooten

Port Susan Field Trip Guides: Ron Pera, Alice Turner, Jeff Osmundson, Colleen Shannon, Peter Gurney (Seattle Audubon), and Michael Wooten

Skagit Audubon Field Notes by Pam Pritzl

This column reports submitted sightings. For help with rare sightings or locations, please contact birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org. For recent updates, check out **ABA Tweeters** and **Skagit County Ebird List** on the SAS website (Birding Menu, Bird Sightings submenu). Please submit your sightings to birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org

WATERFOWL

Greater White-fronted Goose 5 at SWAHR on 3-10 (GB); 6 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Cackling Goose 2 at SWAWS on 2-21 (NOH); 1 at SWAWS on 3-8 (NOH)

Wood Duck 2 at Lafayette Road on 1-18 & 1-23, 4 on 2-6 (GB)

Northern Shoveler 1 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Eurasian Wigeon 1 at East 90, Samish Flats on 2-26 (YH); 1 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH); 1 at Bay View-Edison Road on 3-19 (YH)

Green-winged Teal 1 intergrade w/ Eurasian Green-winged Teal at Padilla Bay Dike Trail on 2-25 (YH)

Greater Scaup 1 at SWAHR on 2-21 (NOH); 1 at SWAWS on 3-8 (NOH); 4 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Barrow's Goldeneye 3 near Marblemount on 1-26 (YH)

Hooded Merganser 3 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Common Merganser 1 at SWAWS on 3-8 (NOH)

Red-breasted Merganser 1 at SWAHR on 2-21 (NOH); 1 at SWAWS on 2-21 (NOH)

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

California Quail 4 at east Fidalgo home on 3-19 (RW)

Ring-necked Pheasant 1 on Bay View-Edison Road on 1-24 (YH)

GREBES

Pied-billed Grebe 1 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH); 1 at SWAWS on 3-18 & 3-19 (YH)

Horned Grebe 1 at SHIP on 3-12 (NOH)

Red-necked Grebe 1 at SHIP on 3-12 (NOH)

Eared Grebe 1 at March Point on 2-16, 2-19 & 3-8 (GB)

HUMMINGBIRDS

Rufous Hummingbird 1 male (flew through) at east Fidalgo home on 2-20 (RW); 1 male (resident) at east Fidalgo home on 2-27 (RW); 1 male on 3-4 and 1 female on 3-5 at Cap Sante, Anacortes home (JH); 1 at SHIP on 3-12 (NOH)

RAILS and COOTS

American Coot 2 at SWAWS on 3-8 (NOH)

OYSTERCATCHERS

Black Oystercatcher 2 at SHIP on 3-12 (NOH)

PLOVERS

Black-bellied Plover 45 at SWAHR on 2-21 (NOH); 45 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Pacific Golden-Plover 1 at SWAHR on 3-8 (GB)

SANDPIPERS and ALLIES

Black Turnstone 5 at March Point on 1-20 (JH)

Surfbird 6 at Rosario Head on 2-23 (GB)

Lesser Yellowlegs 1 at SWAWS on 2-21, 2-25 & 3-14 (GB) **RARE IN WINTER**

LOONS

Common Loon 1 at SHIP on 3-12 (NOH)

VULTURES

Turkey Vulture 1 in Port Townsend on 3-5 (RW & others); 1 at east Stanwood home on 3-7 (MS); 1 seen at east Fidalgo home on 3-14 (RW)

HAWKS, EAGLES and ALLIES

Bald Eagle 12 at SWAWS on 2-19 (NOH); 9 at SWAHR on 2-21 (NOH); 2 at SWAWS on 2-21 (NOH); 3 at SWAHR on 3-8 (NOH); 3 at SWAWS on 3-8 (NOH); 2 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Northern Harrier 4 at SWAHR on 2-21 (NOH); 3 at SWAHR on 3-8 (NOH); 3 at SWAWS on 3-8 (NOH); 2 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Cooper's Hawk 1 at Field Road on 2-3 (YH); 1 at SWAWS on 2-19 (NOH); 1 at east Stanwood home on 3-15 (MS); 1 at east Fidalgo home on 3-18 (RW)

Red-tailed Hawk 1 near Viva Farms, Highway 20 on 2-21 (TK); 1 at SWAHR on 2-21 (NOH); 1 at SWAHR on 3-8 (NOH); 3 at SWAWS on 3-8 (NOH); 1 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Golden Eagle 1 at Josh Wilson/Avon Allen Road on 1-19, 1-30 & 3-10 (GB); 1 at Josh Wilson Road on 1-30, 2-10 & 2-14 (YH) **RARE IN WINTER**

Field Sightings continued on Pg. 7

Field Sightings continued from Pg. 6

OWLS

Great Horned Owl pair hooting at Bay View State Park on 3-19 (JS)

Northern Pygmy-Owl 1 at Everett Lake on 1-25 (GB)

Short-eared Owl 1 at the East 90, Samish Flats on 2-3 and 2-26 (YH); 7 at the East 90, Samish Flats on 3-9 (MS/JS); 4 at the East 90, Samish Flats on 3-14 (MS/JS)

Northern Saw-whet Owl 1 at Harry Osborne State Forest on 2-22 (GB); heard at east Fidalgo home on 2-28 (RW)

WOODPECKERS

Red-breasted Sapsucker 1 at east Fidalgo home on 3-17 (RW); 1 at east Stanwood home on 3-18 (JS)

Downy Woodpecker 1 at Anacortes home on 3-10 (TK)

Hairy Woodpecker 1 at Anacortes home on 3-10 (TK)

FALCONS

American Kestrel 1 at SWAWS on 2-21 (NOH)

Merlin 1 at SWAHR on 2-21 (NOH); 1 at Cap Sante, Anacortes yard on 3-16 (JH)

Gyr Falcon 1 at SWAHR on 2-4 & 2-21 (GB); 1 at Moore Road on 2-17 (GB)

Peregrine Falcon 1 on Fir Island on 2-2 (YH); 1 at SWAHR on 3-10 (NOH)

Prairie Falcon 1 on Samish Flats on 1-27 (GB)

FLYCATCHERS

Black Phoebe 1 at SWAWS on 2-19 & 3-8 (NOH); 1 at SWAWS on 3-8 (MS)

CORVIDS

California Scrub-Jay 1 at Gear Road on 2-11 (GB)

SWALLOWS

Tree Swallow 1 at SWAWS on 2-25 (GB)

Violet-green Swallow 7 at Lake Campbell on 2-23 (GB)

Barn Swallow 6 on Samish Flats on 1-26 (GB)

CHICKADEES

Mountain Chickadee 1 at Anacortes home on 2-24 (TK)

Chestnut-backed Chickadee 1 at Anacortes home on 2-28 (TK)

WRENS

Marsh Wren 4 at SWAHR on 3-16 (JS); 1 at SWAWS on 3-19 (YH)

Bewick's Wren 1 in Anacortes yard on 1-27 (YH); 1 at SWAWS on 2-19 & 3-8 (NOH); 1 at SHIP on 3-12 (NOH)

DIPPERS

American Dipper 2 near Marblemount on 1-26 (YH)

THRUSHES

Hermit Thrush 1 bathing at east Fidalgo yard on 3-19 (RW)

Varied Thrush 1 at Anacortes home on 2-25 (TK); 1 at east Fidalgo home on 3-19 (RW)

FINCHES and ALLIES

Pine Siskin 9 at Anacortes home on 3-15 (TK)

SPARROWS and ALLIES

Savannah Sparrow 2 at Bay View-Edison Road on 1-24 (YH)

Fox Sparrow 1 at east Fidalgo home on 3-19 (RW)

Swamp Sparrow 1 at Clear Lake Boat Launch on 1-29 & 2-17 (GB)

White-throated Sparrow 1 at DeBay Slough on 1-29 & 2-12 (GB)

BLACKBIRDS and ORIOLES

Brown-headed Cowbird 1 on Minkler Flats on 1-14 (GB)

WARBLERS

Northern Waterthrush 1 at SWAWS on 2-26 (JH)

MAMMALS

Beaver 1 at SWAWS on 2-9 (JB)

Coyote 1 observed (hear them often) at east Fidalgo home on 3-3 (RW)

(GB) Gary Bletsch; (JB) Joan Bird; (JH) Joe Halton; (NOH) Neil O'Hara; (YH) Yvonne Houppermans; (TK) Trevor Kyle; (JS) Jeff Sinker; (MS) Mary Sinker; (SHIP) Ship Harbor Interpretive Preserve; (SWAHR) Skagit Wildlife Area Hayton Reserve; (SWAWS) Skagit Wildlife Area Wylie Slough; (RW) Regan Weeks

HIKES by Joan Melcher Due to the rapidly evolving situation with the COVID-19 virus, the hiking section will return when government and public health officials have determined that group activities are safe to resume.



The Resplendent Quetzal in Costa Rica, story and photo by Rosi Jansen

The Resplendent Quetzal with its vibrant colors is one of the most beautiful birds.

They are part of the Trogon family and live in the mountainous forests of Central America. With their iridescent green-gold to blue-violet feathers and a red breast, they camouflage well in the deciduous trees.



Their size is 14- 16" and the male has tail feathers up to 26" long. He has a helmet-like crest, and the female has bars on the tail feathers. We wouldn't have seen them without the guide, who knew where they were.

When I asked the guide if the birds might be bothered by us bird watchers, he said "No, if you're quiet and keep your distance they're okay. They have been around people since the ancient Aztecs and play a significant part in Mesoamerican mythology". I am not surprised.

The birds feed on fruit, insects and small amphibians. Their favorite is the wild avocado, which is much smaller than what we buy in the grocery store. It has little flesh around the seed, I read that they swallow it whole and regurgitate the pits!

They nest in rotten tree trunks and often use Woodpecker holes. Their failure rate is 70%, and their conservation status is threatened. Habitat loss is one of the major reasons, due to deforestation to make space for agriculture, often coffee plantations.

In Guatemala the Quetzal is the national bird, but we heard that they are not very protected in that country. Our guide told us that in Costa Rica there is more of an effort to help the birds. On the private property where we saw them, there were nesting boxes and avocado trees.

Maybe tourism and all the bird watchers coming to this country are helping the Quetzal and other birds to sustain.

HARRY THE HUMMINGBIRD - or a brief history of the Rufous Hummingbird, a long-distance migrant who is not shy about his arrival on breeding grounds stretching to Alaska. Feisty and noisy, he will defend his flower patch from all comers, including much larger birds. He flies as high as 12,600 feet during migration and once he arrives on his breeding grounds, he will mate with several females. This is the end of his responsibility for his offspring because the females build the nest, incubate the eggs, and raise the young entirely on their own. Favorite flowers include: apple blossoms, columbine, currant, lilac, bee balm, fuchsia, foxglove, honeysuckle, penstemon, petunia, scarlet runner bean, balsam, cardinal flower, hollyhock, nasturtium, phlox, salvia and zinnia. To learn more, visit: allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rufous_Hummingbird.

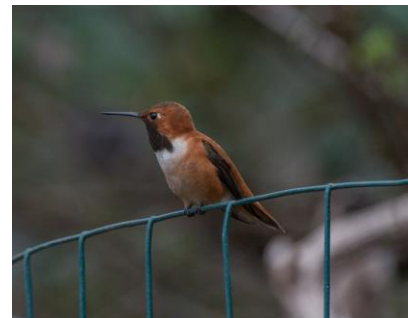


Photo by Joe Halton

Harlequin Ducks

The male Harlequin Duck, in his breeding plumage, is one of the most colorful ducks in this area.

Harlequins are small ducks, about 16-17", with a steep forehead and a short bill. The male is slate-blue and brown, with white mixed in, while the female is all brown with white patches on the head.

They are common during the winter on rocky coasts, riding the waves and diving for mollusks and other marine organisms.

We see them in this area around Deception Pass at Rosario Beach and Bowman Bay, also in Washington Park. Going further north during this time, we watch them on the beaches of Semiahmoo and Birch Bay. In this area we also see Surf, White-winged and Black Scoters, Northern Pintail Ducks, Mergansers, Loons and Long-tailed Ducks.



The Harlequins' courtship starts in winter when they form pairs and fly into the mountains. They nest along rivers and lay 6-7 eggs into a down-lined grass nest under a tree or around boulders. Their diet consists mostly of insects in those areas.

It is more difficult to find them in that area, but we've seen them along the North Fork Nooksack River on the way to the Heather Meadows.

We enjoy them while they're here, on stormy beaches, with their beautiful and funny look!

Text and Photo, Rosi Jansen

Not So Mundane, by Thomas Bancroft

A movement caught my eye on the chilly January day. The glimpse had come from under the leafless branches of some willows and cottonwoods. A small pond was tucked in this thicket at Magnuson Park. I froze but could see nothing until I slowly crouched down. There, floating on the water was a football-sized mass of feathers, tan along the waterline and blacker above. It had two black eyes that glared at me from a smallish head, probably pondering if I was friend or foe. A tiny Pied-billed Grebe drifted less than 20 feet from me.



Typically, they slink away, so I decided to settle here and see what it would do. These grebes are permanent residents in the Puget Trough, but over much of the United States, they are migratory. People seldom see them flying because they travel at night and rarely fly to escape a disturbance. Usually, Pied-bills dive and swim away, often undetected. People on birding outings will often comment, “Oh, it’s just a grebe,” wanting I presume to see something more colorful, bigger, less mundane.

Their distribution is fascinating with breeding populations in both North and South America. Although a few are in Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Central America, generally, a big geographic gap exists between those groups on each continent.

For North America, the animation of [weekly abundance data](#) from eBird showed that in January, Pied-bills were concentrated in Florida and along the Southeast coastal plains and across into Texas and Northeastern Mexico. Lots were also in the central valley of California and then a few here in Puget Sound. Some were scattered elsewhere, especially Central Mexico and near the Gulf of California. By March, birds had moved into the Great Plains and by late April had extended into the Canadian prairies, Central Washington, and British Columbia. Their numbers in the Southeast had plummeted by April, but those in central California remained pretty constant.

In South America, the migration was in the opposite direction. In late January, lots were in Northeastern Brazil and then scattered to northern Argentina. As the year progressed, they migrated south to breed from Southern Brazil into Central Argentina. A few were also in Chile, Equator, and Columbia. Of all the grebe species in the Western Hemisphere, Pied-bills have the most extensive distribution.

The one in Magnuson Park slowly turned a complete circle while keeping one eye on me. Water droplets were beaded on its back and sides. The feathers seemed slicked down but waterproof. The bill still had the black ring mid-way out and the bluish-white base. Usually, they lose that band, and the bill becomes more yellowish-brown in the non-breeding season. Perhaps, its breeding hormones were still flowing here in January.

It radiated a sense of pride, confidence. In Celtic mythology, the grebe guards the spirit world and helps humans find beauty where they otherwise might not. The contours of its body, the S-shape of its neck, tautness of its muscles all projected splendor. Suddenly, the grebe just sank out of sight, hardly making a ripple. No dive, it just dropped as if it was a rock gently placed on the surface. The bird must have compressed its body feathers, squeezing out the trapped air, and tightened its chest muscles to make its air sacks smaller, decreasing its buoyancy. I shook my head as I got back to my feet. Birds are so marvelous.

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 Edison 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.

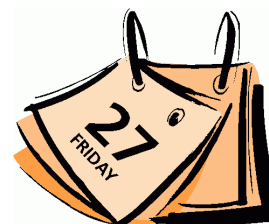
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Education:	Sheila Pera.....skagiteducation2@gmail.com
	Kim Nelson....kimn@skagitaudubon.org
Finance:	Phil Wright.....phil@skagitaudubon.org.....360-299-8212
Field Trips:	Libby Mills.....libbymills@gmail.com.....360-757-4139
Hikes:	Joan Melcher.....jdmelcher@comcast.net.....360-424-0407
Bird Sightings:	Pam Pritzl.....birdsightings@skagitaudubon.org.....360-387-7024
Membership:	Pam Pritzl.....membership@skagitaudubon.org
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Representative:	Kim Nelson.....kimn@skagitaudubon.org
Representative:	Katherine O'Hara.....katherineoh@skagitaudubon.org
Representative:	Denny Quirk.....denny@skagitaudubon.org
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Representative:	Wes Jansen.....jansenwes7@gmail.com
Newsletter Distribution:	John Edison
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MARK YOUR CALENDAR: Due to the rapidly evolving COVID-19 virus response, there will be no scheduled Skagit Audubon meetings, hikes, or field trips in April. For the latest updates on Skagit Audubon activities, please visit our website: skagitaudubon.org.



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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Skagit Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual membership in the Skagit Audubon Society includes 10 issues of our newsletter, *The Skagit Flyer*, available in color at <http://www.skagitaudubon.org/newsletter>. Membership includes all members of your household.

Check one: _____ \$20/one year _____ \$40/two years _____ New _____ Renewal

Additionally, I wish to donate to Skagit Audubon Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, in the amount of \$_____. **I wish to designate my donation to:** _____ **General** _____ **Education** _____ **Scholarship Fund.** **Donors of \$100 or more** receive a personal field trip by a Skagit Audubon field trip leader.

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