



Shorelines

Newsletter of the Whidbey Audubon Society
October 2019

Whidbey Audubon Society is dedicated to the understanding, appreciation and conservation of birds, other wildlife and their habitats on Whidbey Island and in surrounding waters.

Whidbey Audubon Society Meets Thursday, October 10 in Coupeville

The Spotted Owl in Washington State

Join Us!

Thursday evening
October 10
Coupeville
Recreation Hall
901 NW Alexander Street

7:00 socializing
(donations for snacks welcome)

7:15 brief meeting

7:30 program begins

The northern subspecies of the Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis*) resides precariously in Washington state. Often confused with the slightly larger and more common Barred Owl, it is elusive and rare. Our program presenter, Joseph Buchanan, will provide background on the ecology of Spotted Owls in Washington as well as an update on the status of the species, conservation challenges and research and management actions that address those challenges.

Joseph B. Buchanan is a natural resource scientist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife where he has worked for 28 years. For 32 years, Joe has been involved in research, conservation and management relating to Spotted Owls in Washington.



Photo from US Department of Fish and Wildlife library

Northern Spotted Owl with owletes.

Upcoming Field Trips

Tuesday, October 15: DEER LAGOON. Darwin Wile will lead a field trip to Deer Lagoon starting at 9 a.m. Meet at the Bayview Park and Ride. While Deer Lagoon hosts multitudes of birds all year long, it doesn't get much better than October. There will be a profusion of ducks, shorebirds, terns and gulls. Not a bad time for raptors either — eagles, ospreys, harriers, and perhaps a falcon or two and maybe even a Short-eared Owl. Swallows and waxwings should still be present as well as sparrows and finches. Also, we should see numbers of loons, grebes, and scoters and probably brant and geese in Useless Bay, not to mention a pelican or two still hanging around. But the big numbers are likely to be shorebirds — Yellowlegs, Western and Least Sandpipers, Dunlins, Dowitchers, and possibly a Phalarope or two. All in all, October is a splendid time for birding! For more information, contact Darwin at dardrifter@gmail.com.

Saturday, October 19: STRAWBERRY POINT. Jay Adams and Danielle Bishop from the Whidbey Camano Land Trust will lead a field trip to the Land Trust's Strawberry Point Preserve. The preserve is not open to the public yet. This tour will traverse through forest, wetlands and a scenic meadow. Earning a local reputation for being the area in which Bruiser the elk resides, you will more likely see fall migrants and local common songbirds on

Field Trip Checklist

- ✓ Field trips are free and open to anyone interested in birding or conservation. Bring your friends!
- ✓ Beginners are very welcome.
- ✓ Carpooling is encouraged and even required for some sites with limited parking.
- ✓ Dress for the weather and in layers.
- ✓ Very bad weather cancels a trip. Check with the trip leader.
- ✓ If you have them, bring binoculars, scope and field guides.
- ✓ If you might need them, bring a drink and snack.

We are always looking for new trip leaders and assistants. If you are interested, please contact Patty Cheek at pattypipe@gmail.com.

this approximately 1.5-mile-long hike. Whidbey Audubon funded a \$10,000 conservation grant that allowed the Land Trust to protect the first 127 acres of the preserve and spearheaded current efforts to protect 120 more acres of adjoining habitat. See how this grant has been put to work. The trip will start at 9 a.m. and will be about two hours long. The trip is limited to 15 participants and registration is first come, first served. For more information and to register, email Danielle at danielle@wclt.org. Directions

Upcoming Field Trips, see **page 3**

Getting to Know Your Board: Sheri Croll

Sheri Croll was elected as Treasurer for the Whidbey Audubon Society last May. She had a long career in accounting and hopes to set up accounting systems that will be easy for non-accountants to use. She wants to “seek 21st century solutions.”

Sheri’s duties as treasurer are to safeguard the financial and physical assets of the organization, prepare monthly financial statements and annual reports and assist board members and others in understanding the financial impacts of strategic and operational decisions”.

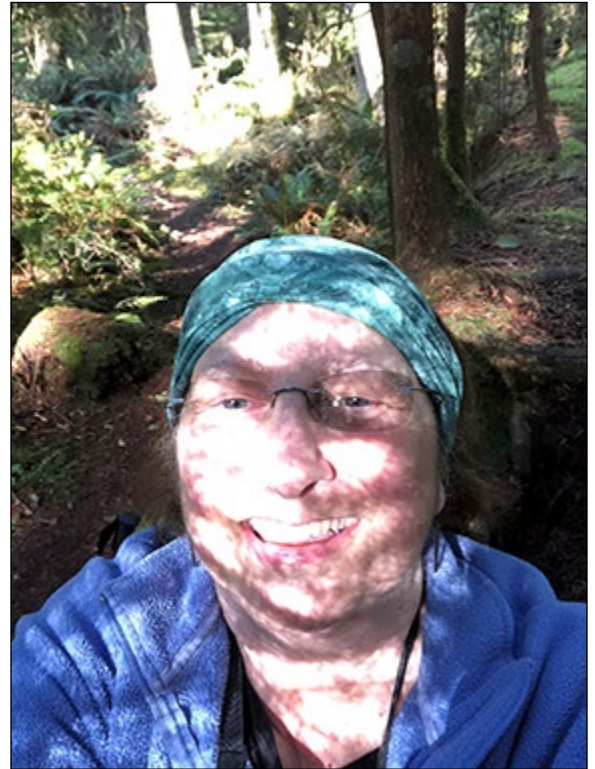
Sheri grew up in Michigan and Illinois and attended the University of Washington, graduating with a degree in accounting. She moved to Ketchikan, then Juneau, Alaska where she lived for 28 years.

She became interested in birds through her maternal grandmother in her childhood. Now that she is retired, she has more time to delve into it.

Sheri joined Whidbey Audubon two years ago after a neighbor introduced her to the meetings. She enjoyed the speakers and when she heard about the treasurer position, she wondered if she could be of service. She took the Birds of Whidbey Class series last year which she says helped her learn more about the people who have been in the organization for a while and she found many like-minded people.

Her favorite birding site is her own dock at Lagoon Point where the Purple Martins nest every year. “They have such cheery voices,” she said. Other than that, she learned about so many sites from the bird class that she doesn’t have a favorite. Deer Lagoon is closest to her house.

Welcome to the Whidbey Audubon Society Board, Sheri!



Sun-dappled Sheri Croll on the Wilbert Trail at South Whidbey State Park.

Conservation Column: Levels of Avian Assistance

Mid-September saw a devastating report about the decline in the number of birds in all habitats in North America on the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology website](#), All About Birds, “Nearly 3 Billion Birds Gone Since 1979.” But unlike global warming and climate change, where individual actions can seem impotent, we can help. Keep your cats indoors, mark your windows to prevent bird-strikes, plant native plants, avoid pesticides, drink bird-friendly coffee (which preserves habitat in the tropics for migratory birds) and use less plastic. Spread the word to your family, friends and neighbors!

National Audubon Society, our umbrella organization, is working flat out to try to protect birds and wildlife. Much of its action is at the national legislative and lobbying level — trying to preserve the Endangered Species Act, preventing oil drilling in the Arctic that could lead to bird extinctions, supporting scientific studies about climate change and birds, as well as many other issues. Many Whidbey Audubon members are also members of [National Audubon](#); if you aren’t, please consider joining [or fill in the form on page 7]. Whidbey Audubon does what it can on the island; National Audubon magnifies our voices and our impact.



Forest by Nicholas Tone, Creative Commons, Map from Birds of North America, birdsna.org

Whidbey Audubon is also part of Audubon Washington, a state coalition of chapters, with a staff that includes a lobbyist in Olympia and a community organizer. Again, it is an opportunity for small groups to be heard on a bigger stage about issues that matter to all of us.

On a local level, you can help collect information and participate in community science projects like Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s [Project Feeder Watch](#) and the annual Christmas Bird Counts. Feeder Watch doesn’t require you to leave your chair, and the Christmas Bird Count is an opportunity to work with local teams counting birds in December (north Whidbey) and January (south Whidbey). Watch *Shorelines* for information on where and when. There are volunteer opportunities to count winter seabirds (Puget Sound Seabird Survey), watch Pigeon Guillemot colonies in the summer (Guillemot Research Group) and even count and identify dead birds on the beach (Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team). Training is provided for all these activities, and the data collected is used in many ways to inform both academics and politicians.

— Kim Shepard, Conservation Chair

End of Season Potluck 10/22/19

Please join us for our Pigeon Guillemot End of Season Data Results and Celebration Potluck on Tuesday, October 22 at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation meeting house in Freeland. Dinner begins at 6 p.m. Please bring a side dish and your own plate, fork and glass. Drinks and desserts are provided. The program will start around 6:45 and everyone is welcome.

Photo by Govinda Holtby

Dates to Remember

OCTOBER

- 10: Whidbey Audubon meeting: *Spotted Owls in Washington State*, Coupeville
- 17: Deadline for November *Shorelines*
- 15: Field Trip: Deer Lagoon
- 19: Field Trip: Strawberry Point
- 22: Pigeon Guillemot Potluck
- 24: Whidbey Audubon Society Board Meeting, Greenbank Fire Station, 7 p.m. Members welcome
- 26: Field Trip: Marymoor Park

NOVEMBER

- 9: Class: *Growing a Year-Round Hummingbird Garden*, 10 to 11 a.m. www.padillabay.gov to register
- 14: Whidbey Audubon meeting: *Migration: Where Do They Go from Here?* Freeland
- 19: Field Trip: Ship Harbor Interpretive Park and Washington Park, Anacortes. Details in November issue.
- 28: No board meeting. Happy Thanksgiving!

Upcoming Field Trips, from [page 1](#)

will be provided upon registration. Sturdy hiking footwear is recommended; trails have some terrain and slight elevation climbs, please bring hiking poles if needed.

Saturday, October 26: MARYMOOR PARK. Frances Wood and Patty Cheek will lead a field trip to Marymoor Park in Redmond. Come explore an area we don't usually visit. Some previous October bird sightings include Cackling Geese, Trumpeter Swan, Ring-necked Ducks, Virginia Rail, Mew Gulls, Northern Harrier, Great Horned Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owls, Pileated Woodpeckers, Cedar Waxwing, American Pipit, Pine Siskin, White-throated Sparrows, Varied Thrush, Northern Shrike, Killdeer, Snow Geese, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Sharp-shinned Hawk and on and on. It's an exciting area to explore. We will meet at the Clinton Park and Ride at 7:30 a.m., carpool and catch the 8 a.m. ferry. Please pack a lunch and we'll plan to return to Whidbey mid-afternoon. Contact Frances Wood wood@whidbey.com or Patty Cheek pattypipe@gmail.com. As always, bring adequate footwear and layered clothing, binoculars, scopes, etc.

Sightings



Photo by Mary Jo Adams

Black-throated Gray Warbler

August 28: I saw a **Black-throated Gray Warbler** at our birdbath this morning. Location: Near intersection of State Route 20 and Fakkema Road. — *Mary Jo Adams*

August 29: Green Heron (juvenile or first summer) We clearly saw the bird in good lighting. It was standing at the water's edge at low tide. After watching it for several minutes it flew to the south along the shore. Location: Langley Marina. — *Frances Wood*

August 31/September 1: A lone **Great Egret** was feeding in Deer Lagoon with gulls and Pelicans. Location: Deer Lagoon.

— *Nancy Van Wormer, Darwin Wile, Linda Griesbach (reported separately)*

September 2: We found a **Hermit Thrush** along a path in Trillium Community Forest. While not rare, this is the first of the season and earlier than normal. — *Steve Ellis*

September 15: American Golden Plover. Location: A juvenile bird feeding with a

Sightings



Photo by Linda Griesbach

Great Egret, left, with Great Blue Heron at Deer Lagoon.

juvenile **Black-bellied Plover** on the extensive mudflats well across from and to the north-east of the viewing platform at Crockett Lake. — *Jay Adams*

September 23: Five **Sandhill Cranes** looking for a sheltered place out of the wind to spend the night. Location: Deer Lagoon, West Dike then flew to Double Bluff Road.

— *Carlos Andersen*

September 24: Saw a kettle of 17 **Turkey Vultures** south of our place on this sunny afternoon. The numbers continued to grow as others came in from the north/northwest After 10 minutes or so, all 32 birds glided off toward the south/southeast. Late September to early October is when I have seen large numbers of Turkey Vultures at this location, al-

Sightings

ways on the move southward. Location: Two miles southwest of the Clinton ferry

September 25: More Turkey Vultures! After scanning the sky for more than 20 minutes on a sunny afternoon, we saw 17 vultures in a kettle to the south of here Their numbers increased as others joined them from the north/northwest. A little farther east, there was also another kettle of 24 birds. The two kettles became close enough to each other to become one for a total of 52 birds!

Our house is about two miles southwest of the Clinton ferry dock near the highest part

of the south end of the island which is about 510 feet elevation. I'm beginning to wonder if we are on a Turkey Vulture "highway" for fall migration. If more move by in migration in this area, good places to view them would be on Rolling Hill Road or perhaps even better from the High Meadow Road/Heggeness Road intersection.

— *George Heleker*

September 27: A flock of 35 **White Pelicans** flew overhead the lower Maxwellton farmlands this morning. They were moving south but soon turned west, as if heading to Deer Lagoon. — *Tom Leschine*

PLEASE POST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS to the *Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) website*.

Sightings should be on Whidbey Island or relate in some way to Whidbey Audubon. Reports should refer to birds or other wildlife that are not commonly seen here. Alternatively, they may refer to migratory birds that arrive outside their normal seasons.

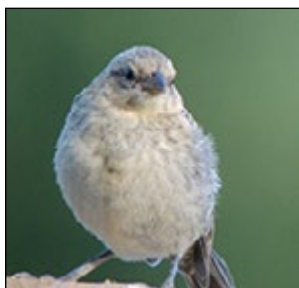
Reports of especially interesting sightings in nearby areas are welcome. Greater selectivity is needed to keep the email volume reasonable so editors will exercise judgment on whether the rarity, proximity and significance of sightings merit inclusion.

These guidelines reflect the interests of local birders. Please respect the essentially scientific nature of the Sightings feature. Thanks for your cooperation.

There are designated spaces to submit your information, such as what you saw, where you saw it and the date and approximate time. Although we are asking those who post to leave a phone number or email address with your sighting, they will not be included on the actual "Sightings" page. Thank you!

Keep up with "Sightings" on the WAS website, on your mobile device at www.m.whidbeyaudubon.org or on the *Whidbey Audubon Society Facebook page*.

Juveniles from the Photo Gallery



Cowbird fledglings Photos by Mary Hollen



Baby Spotted Sandpiper with parent. Photo by Mary Jo Adams

Double Income, No Kids

An Osprey Report from Maxwellton Valley

For those who spend your hours observing any specific nest over a season, you know what a connection it can become. We start feeling protective of the occupants. We anthropomorphize and we speculate. We cheer them on, we're conflicted when their successful season sends them off into their world, and we anticipate their annual return.

The Osprey of our Greater Miller Lake Ecosystem have now elicited just such a personal emotional investment for a seventh season. During both the 2014 and 2015 nesting seasons, it was nearly impossible to accomplish a thing at our place. With a spotting scope perched on our kitchen counter, constantly following the family's progress was entirely exhausting.

We can't know for sure if this particular pair of birds has been the same pair over the years, or if they represent any offspring previously from this nest. The builders of the nest, which is just over a mile south of the South Whidbey High School Osprey nest, have moved it between two different trees above the Miller Lake west shore. Two of the past seven years here, it has not produced offspring, and although 2019 has been one of those unsuccessful seasons, from the sounds of the late summer screeching all around, it appears that the rest of the Whidbey nests have been plenty productive. Even though the Miller Lake Ospreys took a break from fledgling care this year, they continually worked on their nest through the summer, as if there were chicks in



Photo by Cathi Bower

No! Don't call Wildlife Rescue. This Osprey is merely resting after a hunt.

The Grace of Trumpeter Swans

The low-pitched trumpet came from behind us. Turning, I spotted two large white birds that then flew right over us. Their translucent flight feathers glowed in the early morning sun. Their wingspan, more than six-foot, created a moving shadow across Fir Island. Long white necks extended in front of solid bodies, and elephantine black legs and feet were tucked tight against their underside. More than 25 pounds each, these Trumpeter Swans flew with grace, style and dignity.

The pair circled the field a quarter mile east of our location, then set their wings, dropped their black feet and landed

Trumpeter swans, see page 6

it. They were adding sticks and liner material up until a few weeks ago, as they do to build the sides up while the young are growing. The urge has been strong with this pair.

The rebound achieved by Osprey worldwide is remarkable. As with many other species, we found them at the brink just a few decades ago, and as is often noted about some wildlife and habitat — all we had to do was get out of the way and also give them a nudge with the 1970 establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency and resulting actions. During the years since, their numbers have steadily risen at an annual two-and-a-half percent increase, and the birds are found nesting throughout North America. This fish-hawk occupies its own family classification, apart from other types of hawks.

Referred to as a Fish Hawk, River Hawk, Fish Eagle, (Sea Eagle is a different bird) we also fondly recognize

them regionally as Seahawks, though actually there is no such bird. As much as I'd love to go on about Seahawk Season, I'd

better suggest that for more detailed factoids and legend regarding the local sports mascot, check out the amusing article on the National Audubon website, "Birds in the News, What Is a Seahawk, Anyway?" www.audubon.org/news/what-seahawk-anyway, January 29, 2015.



Photo by Philip Robertson/Flickr Creative Commons

Two Seahawks, zero actual birds.

When you've noticed that the screeching has ceased along our Island shores, your Osprey have packed their bags, but look for their return with the lengthening days next year. The birds who were accompanied by their offspring to South America in the fall, will leave the kids there for at least another year, but each spring, the older adults make their way back to the north to begin again.

Bon Voyage for now, *Pandion haliaetus!*

— Cathi Bower, *Bird early — bird often*

BIN South Observes Birds in Action

August 29: At Deer Lagoon today, we tried turning some of those Westerns into different pipers and peeps, and we wanted the Greater Yellowlegs to be Lesser sometimes. We worked and worked on somehow getting a dowitcher or other shore-walker in with all the rest. There were a couple odd ducks that were possibly interesting **Mallard crosses** and/or in-between seasonal plumages. We heard tell of a Wandering Tattler, but didn't spot him, and didn't even see the Pelicans that may or may not be around still.

Thankfully it was a lovely morning with delightful company. We recorded only 32 species — no hummers, no woodpeckers, no doves, no thrushes, no warblers — no geese! (If that sounds disappointing, try a few days of Nevada in August for perspective, so that seeing even a minimum of our late-summer Island regulars makes a for great day.)

A close-in perched **Cooper's Hawk** was a highlight and so was a really late family of downy-headed, wide-mouthed **Marsh Wrens** popping around in the reeds. Remember that very vocal male who was so proud of his many woven nests all season? Apparently, he did good.

September 12: Quiet day at the Lagoon (at least until the Island County Public Works Department's meeting that evening concerning public access to the dike).

Highlights included observing two separate hawk buffets. Like watching a car crash. Everyone was looking **Cooper's** way when he snagged a bird out of the top of a fir. Later, a young **Harrier** landed with what appeared to be a Chickadee and worked on that. The group would not let me count that Chickadee on our list, even though when we first saw it, it started out as bird — not food. Fortunately, we saw some more [**Chickadees**] in the trees on the way back out the path, for a total of 34 species.

We did an out-and-back, as there is a new "No Trespassing" sign designating the Island County property boundary at the south end of West Dikes.

And that's all I'm going to say about that.

— *Cathi Bower, Bird early, bird often*

Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) South meets every other Thursday morning. Time varies with the season. Contact Cathi Bower for more information: whidbird@whidbey.com.

Trumpeter swans, from page 5

without a stumble among several hundred swans. A few trumpets and calls drifted toward me from the crowd. Most of these largest of North America's waterfowl seemed to be resting on the green grass. The trachea in these birds is more than three feet long, about a half-inch in diameter, and has a volume three to four times what one might expect for a bird this size. The trachea folds back and forth in the chest and creates the resonating chamber for the beautiful call that caught my attention.

Populations of Trumpeter Swans were decimated in the 1800s and early 1900s. They were shot for their skins, flight feathers and undoubtedly meat. In 1935, only 69 birds were known to exist, although probably some undiscovered flocks occurred in remote parts of Canada and Alaska. In 2005, a continent-wide survey estimated that the population had grown to more than 34,000 individuals, a conservation success. Stopping the hunt and protecting habitat were critical, but also the birds adapted to wintering on agricultural lands, accessing novel food items. In winter, lead poisoning and collisions with power lines are now the major mortality issue.

Managers have introduced the species into several eastern states



Photo by Thomas Bancroft ©

Trumpeter Swan families grazing on the Skagit Flats of Mount Vernon, Washington [cropped].

where they now breed. A few even winter in birding spots that I visited in Western Pennsylvania and Ohio as a high school student. Scientists at Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology have analyzed *eBird* data to provide a much more refined abundance map than are currently available in birding guides or on other websites, see [Trumpeter Swan Abundance on eBird](#).

It shows that the Salish Sea and south into Oregon are important wintering areas for our west coast population. These birds then migrate through British Columbia to breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska. The Central Rockies population had expanded substantially from the range in 1968, and birds are found in a band from the northern prairies across the Great Lakes.

A pair and two full-grown gray cygnets began running, head and neck extended while flapping their wings. They quickly became airborne, banking to the left while climbing up over the flock, before turning to fly north away from us.

— *Thomas Bancroft, an active member of Audubon and currently the Secretary of the Washington Ornithological Society*

Volunteer Corner

Whidbey Audubon Society is a nonprofit group that runs on the work of volunteers. We need the help of our members in order to function.

We have two opportunities available neither of which take much time commitment:

Newsletter Mailing: This job entails the mailing of the paper copies of our newsletter, *Shorelines*. The volunteer would be responsible for picking up the printed copies from the printer, printing off and attaching address labels, adding adhesive closures and stamps and depositing the newsletters into a USPS mailbox. This job takes about four hours nine times a year (July, August and December excluded). You need to be available the first week of the month in order to meet our deadline.

Publicity Chair: This job would require publicizing our events for the general public. This would include contacting the local newspapers, *Drewslist* and possibly creating and distributing posters to let people of Whidbey Island know about our programs, field trips and other events. The time commitment is about four to six hours nine times a year (July, August and December excluded). The publicity chair attends board meetings and oversees the website and social media content.

If you are interested in either of these jobs, or want more information, please contact Sharon Gauthier at sharongauthier88@gmail.com or 360-682-5140.

Welcome New and Renewing Members

New:

William & Jean Coltrin

Lori Reiter

Renewing:

Arlene Diamond

Phyllis Kind (Pigeon Guillemot)

Gene Robinson

Sharon Croll (Spotted Towhee)

Wendy Wilson

Mary Jean Brady (Scholarship Fund)

Elizabeth Jacques (Spotted Towhee)

Marcia Lazoff (Spotted Towhee and Scholarship Fund)

Ann Casey & Carol Plunkett (Spotted Towhee & Scholarship Fund)

Jeff Rogers & Kathryn Beaumont (Spotted Towhee & Scholarship Fund)

Kimberly & John Shepard (Spotted Towhee)

Babette & John Thompson (Spotted Towhee)

Allison Hiltner & Jonathan Maas (Spotted Towhee)

Bill & Cheryl Bradkin (Spotted Towhee)

Be sure to renew your membership on time. I will send out email reminders to help you remember.

— Jann Ledbetter, Membership Chair

Coming to the General Meeting?

Consider coming a little early to help us set up chairs and a table or two. Thank you!

Whidbey Audubon Society Membership

Please make your check payable to WHIDBEY AUDUBON SOCIETY (WAS)

Mail to: Jann Ledbetter, 1112 Maple Place, Coupeville WA 98239

Name _____ **Y20**

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____ (Your issues will be emailed to you.)

_____ Check here to receive your *Shorelines* by mail. Please add an additional **\$5.00** to defray mailing costs.

SELECT a Category of Membership

_____ Individual Annual Membership \$20

_____ Pigeon Guillemot \$75

_____ Household Annual Membership \$30

_____ Red-tailed Hawk \$100

_____ Spotted Towhee \$50

_____ Osprey \$ _____

\$ _____ Additional Donation to be used for Scholarships

All memberships include 9 issues of *Shorelines* annually, a WAS window decal, discounts and early registration in our educational classes.

_____ **SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY MEMBERSHIP** for first year National Members only.

Receive a joint membership in National and Whidbey Audubon for one year for only \$35.

Make check payable to National Audubon.

*The Whidbey Audubon Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Donations are tax deductible.
It is Whidbey Audubon policy to never share our membership and subscription information with other groups.*