



Shorelines

Newsletter of the Whidbey Audubon Society

February 2021

Whidbey Audubon Society is dedicated to the understanding, appreciation, and protection of birds and other wildlife species and their habitat on Whidbey Island and surrounding waters.

Whidbey Audubon Meets Virtually Thursday, February 11 Malheur—Where the Birds Are Plentiful and the People Are Not

The February Whidbey Audubon Society program is a photographic journey through space and time in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR) by Dan Streiffert.

“The first time I went to Malheur was in April of 2007 for the *John Scarff Bird Festival*.^{*} I have been going back every year since. In my opinion, this is the best birding/photography location in the Pacific Northwest. The birds are plentiful and the people are not,” begins Streiffert.

Three migration routes converge, making it one of the most important feeding and resting locations on the Pacific Flyway. Thousands of Northern Pintails, Snow and Ross’s Geese, American Wigeons, Green-winged Teal, Northern Shovelers and Canvasbacks rest and refuel here on their long migrations. Hundreds of Sandhill Cranes and Trumpeter Swans add to this spectacle, which is in full swing from mid-March to mid-April.

Because it is a basin lake, Malheur varies in size and depth each year depending on snowpack and rainfall. In 2018 there was virtually no snow on Steens Mountain and as a result, Malheur

Lake was barely visible, even from the visitor center. Many that visit in such a year are disappointed and leave early. Yet if one knows where to look, there are plenty of birds to see.

Streiffert’s presentation covers 2007 to 2018, starting from the area adjacent to the cities of Burns and Hines, and working south to Malheur Lake, the Visitor Center and continuing to Page Springs Campground at the south end of the refuge.



Dan Streiffert of Rainier Audubon Society



Photo by Dan Streiffert

Black-necked Stilt

Dan Streiffert is a retired software engineer who worked in the economic operation of power systems. He now spends as much time as possible photographing wildlife. He is currently the Conservation Chair of Rainier Audubon Society in Auburn, Washington. He is the editor of the *Heron Herald* newsletter.

**The meeting will be via Zoom
7 to 8:30 p.m. (program at 7:30)
Thursday, February 11**

Our monthly programs are free and open to all. If you are *not* a Whidbey Audubon Society member and would like to attend, please register on our website whidbeyaudubonsociety.org. We’ll email a Zoom *join* link to all members and registered nonmembers. Registration closes at 8 p.m. on February 10. And, if you are not a member, please consider joining us.

^{*}The Harney County Migratory Bird Festival is held in honor of John Scharff, MNWR manager from 1935 to 1970.



President's Column: The Window Seat Perch

Pine Siskin Irruption and Salmonella

I am inundated with questions about the Pine Siskin irruption and whether people should take down their feeders. This is the irruption year to beat all previous irruption years of Pine Siskins (PISI). It has been described by the National Audubon Society as “mind-boggling numbers of PISI.” Another article I read called it a Biblical irruption. It may be the biggest irruption ever on record because they're everywhere from coast to coast and farther south.

Pine Siskins normally inhabit coniferous or mixed coniferous-deciduous forest in Canada and the upper ranges of the northern US. However, this year, there has been a reduction in coniferous cones in Canada and they have been coming here in what's called charms, companies, or tremblings of PISI. They estimate

anywhere from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. I saw a huge charm at Double Bluff and they were all over the alders and on the ground in the rocks. I could get close to them. Amazing! I should have had my camera.

However, the overpopulation of PISI is probably causing salmonella poisoning. They get sick and don't stick with their group. They stay on feeders, poop everywhere, become lethargic and eventually die. They can infect other birds from their feces and from direct contact. To say the least, this causes us to make ethical decisions about our feeders in spite of Project Feeder Watch. Do we leave them up and leave it to nature? Do we take them down until February? Do we clean them every single day, and change the water in the bird bath every day too? Can we leave the suet up because there's no place for them to light? What about peanuts for the other birds?

Click the red text to view the recommendation from *Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*, “Help protect wild birds from deadly salmonellosis,” January 8, 2021.

Another interesting article is “Sick And Dead Birds Showing Up Around Backyard Feeders As Salmonellosis Outbreak Worsens,” by Matthew Russell, from the *Animal Rescue Site*.

Seattle Audubon Society's website features a page, “Salmonellosis.”

Each birder has to answer for his/her decision. Give it a thought.

— *Patty Cheek, President*

Would that I were under the cliffs, in the secret-hiding places of the rocks, that Zeus might change me to a winged bird.

— *Sophocles – Hippolytus, 428 b.c.*



Visit: www.christiescreations.net/hummingbirdpoem.html

Poem by Christie Hammond with Craig Johnson's page design and photographs.

Member Celebrates Her 100th

My friend and fellow birder, Irene Christofferson, just turned 100.



Irene and her family summered on the Island, then moved here permanently about 25 years ago. We met at the Island Athletic Club and started talking about birds and birding. About five years ago, she attended the Birds of Whidbey class series, and can still dependably identify most local birds by description and by ear. Currently her favorite birds are the Anna's Hummingbirds who frequent her feeder. She is also interested in reading about bird and habitat issues in *Shorelines*.

— *Susan Bennett*

Happy Birthday, Irene! from your Whidbey Audubon friends

Conservation Column: State Conservation Issues to Follow

Washington's legislature has begun a new year and a short 105-day session. Members have been urged to bring forward only those bills deemed most urgent or important. Aside from the first day, the House and Senate will be holding all meetings remotely, and the issues of the pandemic and the economy will get most attention. However, the governor's budget proposal includes a green energy initiative to reduce carbon emissions. More electric cars, converting ferries and buses from diesel to electric and weatherization and retrofits to save energy in public and private buildings are included.

Audubon Washington's legislative priorities for 2021 are

1. Funding conservation
2. Tackling greenhouse gas emissions
3. Climate resilience.

Learn more at wa.audubon.org/news/policy-priorities-2021

Whidbey Island has been struggling with its waste and recycling and we all know there will be changes and costs. A new bill has been filed calling for extensive changes to statewide recycling waste streams, SB 5022-2021-22. (Also referenced HB

1118) The bill includes recycling targets, reuse targets, recycled content requirements, addresses toxics, social equity and transparency. Local governments would retain authority over their curbside collection programs. The Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) regulations/collection service franchises remain in place. The bill also includes a ban on Styrofoam. Read and follow the bill on the Washington State Legislature website. Things change fast in short session, so follow what is important to our environment, and let your legislators hear your support. All hearings will be online, giving you the opportunity to voice your opinion from your home!

Our legislators:

- Ron Muzzall, Senate: ronmuzzall.src.wastateleg.org/contact-me, 360-786-7618
- Greg Gilday, House: Greg.Gilday@leg.wa.gov, 360-786-7884
- Dave Paul, House: Dave.Paul@leg.wa.gov, toll-free hotline: 800-562-6000 or for TTY/hearing impaired, 800-635-9993) Direct line: 360-786-7914

Dates to Remember

Please check our website for more detailed information and how to enter ZOOM for some of these upcoming events: www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org/events-list.

FEBRUARY

- 6: Sound Waters**, ZOOM; soundwatersuniversity.org
- 11: Whidbey Audubon Program** on ZOOM: *Malheur: Where the Birds are Plentiful, and the People are Not* with Dan Streiffert, [previously announced program is cancelled]
- 12 to 15: Great Backyard Bird Count**
- 17: Birds 'n' Beer** ZOOM 5 to 6 p.m.
- 18: Online Class** on ZOOM: *Habitats of Whidbey Island* with Dyanne Sheldon, 7 to 8 p.m.
- 18: Deadline for March Shorelines**, contact the [editor](mailto:editor@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org)
- 24: Page Peepers Book Group**. ZOOM. 7 to 8 p.m.
- 25: Board meeting**. ZOOM 7 to 9 p.m. Members welcome; president@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org

MARCH

- 5 or 8: Deadline for Scholarship applications** (CHS and SWHS March 5; OHHS March 8)
 - 11: Whidbey Audubon Program** on ZOOM: *Do Crows Have Language?* with Douglas Wacker
 - 18: Birds 'n' Beer** ZOOM 5 to 6 p.m.
 - 18: Deadline for April Shorelines**, contact the [editor](mailto:editor@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org)
 - 25: Board Meeting** ZOOM 7 to 9 p.m. Members welcome. president@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org
- *** Rufous Hummingbirds return to Whidbey Island this month!

Check Your Artificial Nighttime Lighting

In support of Whidbey Audubon's policy commitment to making members more aware of the negative ecological effects of artificial light at night on all living things — including humans — the society is offering free home consultations regarding current lighting and more ecologically friendly lighting options.

To participate, interested parties should contact [Jay Adams](mailto:Jay.Adams@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org) by email to set up an appointment.

Please note: Appointments are currently on hold until the threat of COVID-19 has been essentially eliminated. In the meantime, searching online for information about the effects of and alternatives to artificial light at night. WAS website also has information under [Stewardship, Light Pollution](#). It can go a long way toward making appropriate changes to one's own lighting scheme.



The bright lights of cities can have disastrous effects on MIGRATING BIRDS, many of which fly at night. Flocks can become disoriented and thrown off their migratory path or worse— collide with buildings or lighted towers.

Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings

December 19: Rock Sandpiper, seen with a large flock that included 17 **Surfbirds**, 19 **Sanderlings** and about 300 **Black Turnstones**, at the end of the Area 13 Christmas Bird Count. The Rock Sandpiper was smaller than a turnstone, all gray head and back, with gray on breast breaking into spots, then fading to white belly. The base of the bill and the legs were colored yellow or orange. (The light was very dim at dusk) Location: Snakelum Point, Coupeville. — *Sarah Schmidt*



Photo by Carla Corin

Red Crossbills.

December 24: A White-winged Crossbill just visited our bird bath with a group of **Red Crossbills**! Not on the Whidbey list and not usual for western Washington either. Location: West Beach and Barque, Oak Harbor.

— *Carla Corin*

December 30: Two Northern Fulmars. Location: Port Townsend ferry. Very stormy. Island County waters. Confirmation: Small tubenoses. Light morphs. Mostly soaring but stiff-winged flight when flapping. Seen clearly with binoculars from 100 yards.

— *Dave Parent*

January 3: Saw large group of **Common Mergansers** feeding in Holmes Harbor. They were at the boat launch and then moved over towards Nichols boatyard. I would es-

timate 150 to 200 birds in the group. Also, amongst the four dozen or so **Canada Geese** at Nichols there was a single **Great White-fronted Goose**.

— *Deb Stewart*



Photo by Brian Kenney

Cackling, Snow and Canada Geese.

January 5: Group of about 75 geese at the Nichols Brother's Boatyard beach appeared to be about a third **Cackling**, two **Snow** and the rest **Canada**.

— *Brian Kenney*



Photo by Paul and Stef Neis

Hundreds of Pine Siskins

January 6: Over 200 **Pine Siskins** in alder tree and at yard feeders today, started out with a couple of dozen coming in daily a few weeks ago, been increasing each day. Location: Aquila Drive.

— *Paul and Stef Neis*

January 9: Townsend's Warbler. The Birds of Whidbey Island Checklist shows this as rare in winter eBird does show winter sightings for Townsend's. This bird was working through western hemlocks, gleaning insects. It was gone within a minute. Location: Near Del Fairfax Pre-

serve. — *Dave Krause*



Photo by Dave Krause

Townsend's Warbler.

January 20: One **Eared Grebe**, mixing with a group of **Horned Grebes** around the longer Holmes Harbor Golf Course dock.

— *Brian Kenney*

January 26: Male **Bushtit** calling for many minutes from a thorny wild rosebush in my yard. A female finally came to visit him and they had a conversation for a couple minutes. She did not get closer than a couple feet and did not stay. Male remained in the bush and still called, but he finally gave up and flew off. Location: Crockett Lake, Olympic View

Drive. — *Marianne Burr*

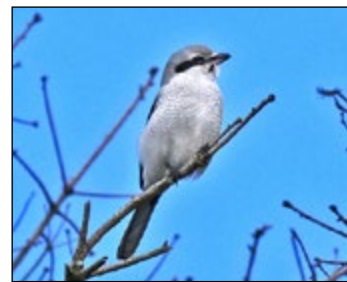


Photo by Dave Krause

Northern Shrike.

January 27: Northern Shrike hunting. Flew from high perch to high perch, scanning in all directions. Whidbey Audubon Society's Birds of Whidbey Island Checklist indicates Northern Shrikes as "Occasional" in winter. All my sightings of Northern Shrikes on Whidbey Island have been in open areas and the shrikes are always perched at the tops of trees or tall bushes in these openings, affording good views all around. Location: On bluff below Admiralty Inlet Natural Area Preserve.

— *Dave Krause*

PLEASE POST UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS to the *Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) website*, Select the aqua button, "Report a Sighting." You can also submit a photo using the aqua button labeled "Submit Gallery Photos."

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 or on our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/WhidbeyAudubonSociety.

Whidbey Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Highlights

North Whidbey (Oak Harbor)

The Whidbey Audubon Bird Count North (WAOH) took place on Saturday, December 19. Some groups had to revise their birding techniques due to Covid-19 restrictions. Here are some highlights from that day as well as a summary of past counts:

Oak Harbor CBC Summary Statistics:

- Count began – 1987
- Average # species – 116 over 33 counts
- High count – 127 in 1998
- Low Count – 65 in 2010
- Highest # of participants – 57 in 2011. Total # of species that year – 88
- Lowest number of participants – 15 in 2006. Total # of species seen that year – 120
- Total species seen over the life of the count – 184

Highlights in 2020:

- Black-billed Magpie – seen at Ault Field – a circle first
- Swamp Sparrow – seen at Crockett Lake Preserve – a circle first
- Northern Pygmy Owl – heard at Fort Ebey State Park – a

circle first

- Red-naped Sapsucker – seen during count week/private yard – the second for the circle
- House Wren – location uncertain – the second for the circle
- Rock Sandpiper – Snakelum Point – the third for the circle.

Other notable birds/numbers in 2020:

- Total species tallied – 115
- Total birds tallied – 21917

Highs and lows for the circle:

- Brandt's Cormorant – 43, new high
- Brant Goose – 213, new high
- Cackling Goose – 347, new high
- House Wren – 3, new high
- Pine Siskin – 2930, new high
- Common Loon – 17, new low
- Red-tailed Hawk – 32, new low

— Jay Adams, Compiler and
Dave Krause for tallying and formatting

South Whidbey Christmas Bird Count Summary 2020

The South Whidbey CBC Circle was held on Saturday, January 2, 2021. This was our 10th bird count. Because of the Covid-19 Pandemic; teams were very small, traveling within their own germ pods.

The weather was a full-on presence. Very windy, followed by rain. The Beaufort scale was at an 8 to 9; which is gale, to severe gale; especially on the west side of the island at 50 to 60 m.p.h. Some areas



could not be safely surveyed. Other sections could only be partially surveyed. This was a true “hunt” to find that little pocket that one might find a wigeon or two. Because of the high winds, most all auditory birding was diminished.

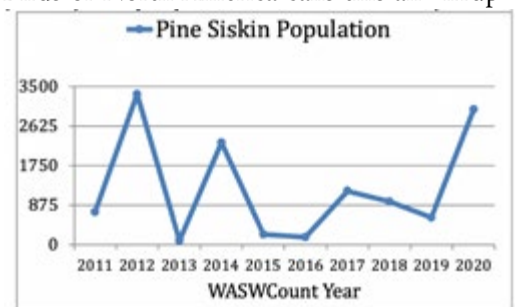
I have included a word cloud of the adjectives that were used to describe how the day was. I say three cheers to all of you who braved the elements to gather data for this ever so important community science survey.

We had a total of 11,889 individual birds categorized into 91 species. The circle was able to pick up only two additional species for count week (three days before and three days after count day), totaling our species diversity to 93.

Unusual Sightings:

- White Throated Sparrow
- Three Wilson Snipes
- A Rough-legged Hawk
- White-fronted Goose.

The most abundant species for 2020 was the Pine Siskin! at exactly 3,000. Birds of North America calls this an “irruptive species.” See the below graph that accounts the population of the Pine Siskin for the last decade in the South Whidbey CBC circle.



Dark-eyed Junco is our second most abundant species at 1,149 individuals. The third runner up was the American Robin at 888.

The data will be available on the National Audubon website come Spring. The circle code is wasw. Here's a link: netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/Historical/ResultsByCount.aspx

A big thank you to everyone who participated in the Christmas Bird Count. And if you weren't able to donate your time, you can donate your money! The Christmas Bird Count relies on 100-percent donations to maintain the database and keep it available to researchers, action.audubon.org/online-actions/WPECgr6TXk64IvphaQSG-Q2.

— Govinda Holtby, Compiler

Bird of the Month: the American Black Swift (*Cypseloides niger*)

People sometimes ask me “What is your favorite bird?” To be honest I like them all, but swifts, especially Black Swifts, are definitely in the top five. What’s not to like about an enigmatic bird that eats, sleeps, mates in the air and who nest behind waterfalls? It is believed that the males, once fledged, never descend to earth again!

I have encountered these birds from the bluff in my backyard to the highlands of Costa Rica. My first sighting was in Olympic National Park. In the early 1980s I worked there on the Rocky Mountain Goat survey. Every evening, I watched the sunset from a very large rock behind my tent on Klahane Ridge. One night after a storm, five large swifts swirled directly over my head. They were catching and eating my personal entourage of mosquitoes. They were so close I could hear their flapping wings and see their shining eyes. When I got back to park headquarters, I perused the library and found and identified my insectivorous benefactors.

Black Swifts nest on inaccessible cliffs, often behind waterfalls. The parents construct a nest of moss, seaweed and other plant material. The first nest was discovered in 1901. A single egg is laid and both parents feed the chick. All adult swifts have an expandable throat pouch to carry food to their young. This is an unusual feature in birds. The chick fledges in about 48 days, usually in late August or September. They leave the nest and immediately embark on migration. Compare this with American Robins which fledge in two weeks. It is unknown how the chicks survive the constant damp waterfall spray. One thought is that they become dormant between feedings. Our local Anna’s Hummingbirds also become dormant during cold nights.

Black Swifts eat a variety of flying insects which they catch and eat on the wing. Sometimes these feeding forays take place thousands of feet above the earth, well out of sight of human observers with binoculars. Swifts in Washington State usually live in the mountains, but when weather conditions are bad, they are capable of quickly traveling many miles to more favorable feeding areas. Hence the observations of them in the Puget Lowlands during mountain storms. I have twice seen them off my home bluff near Saratoga Road. Once, during a massive winged termite flight, I saw dozens feeding over State Route 20 near Diablo Lake. I pulled over and got out to take it all in.

One of the last great avian mysteries was discovering where the Black Swifts spend the winter. This discovery needed to wait until geolocators, a device that uses the Global Positioning System (GPS) to track movement, became small enough to allow unimpeded flight on such a small bird. No small feat considering the birds weigh only 1.5 ounces. Researchers discovered in 2012 that the birds winter in the lowland tropical rainforests of western Brazil. These data were collected from only four birds



from Colorado. Are there other nesting areas or do all Black Swifts return to the same area?

There is so much we don’t know about these elusive birds. It is believed, however, that the North American Black Swift population has declined by 90 percent since 1970. Brazil is undergoing rapid deforestation. If the entire population winters in the same area as those Colorado birds, the bird may be headed for extinction.

So, keep your eyes open if you are in the mountains in summer and you are close to a waterfall. Also watch for them in the lowlands during cold, rainy or snowy summer mountain storms. One place I have frequently seen them is the Buckner Orchard near to both Stehekin, Washington and Rainbow Falls. Nesting birds have been recently observed at Snoqualmie Falls.

— Dave Parent, DVM



BIN South Descends on Deer Lagoon

December 31: At Deer Lagoon, where our hopeful bunch saw and/or heard at least 52 species.

What was your “first bird” sighting January 1? At dawn, I went right ahead to a window, boldly peeking directly toward the feeder and accepted that **Spotted Towhee** is my First Bird for 2021. We can each just conclude our own preferred portent for these things.

For a clever take on the meanings of seeing various birds first, check out the blog of renowned birder, Laura Erickson, *First Bird of the Year: What Does It Mean?* “Seeing a Pine Siskin first may indicate that you’re headed for an extraordinarily sociable year.” Hahahahaha — we can only hope. Happy New Year.

January 14: Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) was awesome (as in the usual sense of *impressive*) out at Sunlight Beach and the East Dike. On the beach side was **seabird** variety galore, plus a **Cooper’s Hawk** flew in and posed for a while for us on a driftwood stump! In the dike shrubberies, were just about every one of the usual suspects, for a total of at least 45 species identified that morning.

Oh! Two weeks ago at BIN, after most everyone had finally dragged themselves away, a couple of us even spied a Northern Shrike, which is always the highlight of any day ever, in my opinion.

— Cathi Bower- Bird early-bird often

Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) South meets every other Thursday

and has also started a Birding at Home group. Contact Cathi Bower for more information: whidbird@whidbey.com. The group follows county and state guidelines for Covid-19.

Welcome New and Renewing Members

Perry Yaw & Kristen Swenson	Anne Proffitt
Ellen Hecht	Charles Pettis
Judith Kaplan	Pamela Gibson
Anthony Tobias	Cynthia White
Janet Armstrong	Marcia Sill
Trenton Schrader, Spotted Towhee	
Robert Edstrom & Melissa Quinn	

Renewing Members

Arthur & Iris Misner	Stella & David Schoen
Erika Sweger	Jeri Gregory
Glenn Duncan & Nancy Luenn	Lloyd Kiff
Libby & Chip Hayward	Anne Harvey, Red-tailed Hawk
Howard Garrett & Susan Berta, Red-tailed Hawk	
Jim & Fran Boyle, Red-tailed Hawk	
Carla & Lenny Corin, Spotted Towhee	

Whidbey Audubon Society Membership

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

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

Or pay online with PayPal or a credit card, www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org/membership

Name _____ Shorelines Recognition? ___ Yes ___ No

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 **\$10.00** 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 \$250
\$ _____ 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.*

Whidbey Audubon Society

Whidbey Audubon programs are 7 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month except December, July and August

Meetings are conducted virtually this year using ZOOM, register at www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org

Whidbey Audubon Board and Committee Chairs 2020-2021

President.....	Patty Cheek
Immediate Past President.....	Sharon Gauthier
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Board Member-at-Large.....	Joe Sheldon
Board Member-at-Large.....	Dave Krause
Board Member-at-Large.....	Kathy Obersinner
Christmas Bird Count North Chair.....	Jay Adams
Christmas Bird Count South Chair.....	Govinda Holtby
Birdathon.....	Kathy Obersinner
Scholarship Committee.....	Ann Sullivan
Hospitality Chair.....	OPEN
Newsletter Mailing.....	Marcia Lazoff
Specimen Library.....	Robin Llewellyn

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Thursday, February 11

7 to 8:30 p.m. via Zoom

**Malheur—Where
the Birds Are
Plentiful and the
People Are Not
with Dan Streiffert**

Online education class
Thursday, February 18

7 to 8:30 p.m. via Zoom

**The Habitats of
Whidbey Island
with Dyanne Sheldon**