



# Shorelines

Newsletter of the Whidbey Audubon Society

Volume 43 Number 1

September 2023

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.

## Next Meeting Will Explore *Life on the Rocks*

Join us in Coupeville for the next general meeting of the Whidbey Audubon Society on Thursday, September 14, for *Life on the Rocks*, a program on Whidbey Island's shorebirds to be presented by Steve and Martha Ellis. The meeting will be at 7 p.m. at the Coupeville Recreation Hall, 901 Northwest Alexander Street.

Whidbey's rocky and sandy shorelines attract a variety of specialized shorebirds. This diverse group ranges from the robust Whimbrel and Black Oystercatcher to the diminutive Black Turnstone and Rock Sandpiper. Many other birds visit the rocks but only a handful can thrive here.

Each species has its own adaptations and behaviors for surviving in this harsh environment. Much can be learned from the shape of the bill: Turnstone: *flat, pointed and slightly upturned*. Oystercatcher: *stout, long and straight*. Whimbrel: *long and down-*

### Join Us!

Thursday evening  
September 14

Coupeville  
Recreation Hall  
901 NW Alexander Street

7:00 socializing  
(donations for snacks welcome)

7:15 brief meeting

7:30 program begins

To participate virtually:  
please register for a  
Zoom link on the Whidbey  
Audubon Society website.

Volunteers are welcome  
to set up the room at 6:30



Photo by Dave Krause

Black Turnstone, Rock Sandpiper and two Surf-birds on the rocks at Penn Cove in January.

*curved*. They all feed among the rocks, but from different shelves in Nature's supermarket.

Highlights of the program include courtship and nesting, flight patterns and population trends. You'll also learn the best times and locations for viewing these fascinating birds on Whidbey.

Steve and Martha Ellis are longtime Coupeville residents who have been leading field trips and giving talks on a wide range of natural history topics for more than 30 years. Steve is a past president of Whidbey Audubon Society and Martha is a member of the Washington Native Plant Society.



Photo by Beth Stephens

Steve and Martha Ellis, *Life on the Rocks* presenters.

## Upcoming Field Trips

**Saturday, September 2: FIRST TRIP OF THE SEASON! SOUTH WHIDBEY STATE PARK**, 9 to 11 a.m. Meet at the back parking lot at 8:50 a.m. (You will need a Discover Pass or day fee.) We will only walk a short, easy distance, just listening and looking for birds among the trees. Trip leader is Patty Cheek. Please register on the [events page](#) (click on red text).

**September or October: SEMIAHMOO**, a proposed trip is being planned to one of the best birding areas in the Pacific Northwest. Planning depends on tides and bird numbers. One of our local experts, Jay Adams, will lead. Space is limited. If

Field Trips, see [page 3](#)

This meeting is hybrid. Members and guests must register to participate remotely on Zoom. Please click this [link](#) to register for the Zoom meeting.



## President's Column: From the Window Perch

Our mission statement says: *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.*

We have a big job of protection to do with Deer Lagoon. It is an Important Bird Area (IBA) and we need to monitor the area to be sure that it remains protected. Since 2002 when Deer Lagoon was created we have worked with Island County, Useless Bay Colony, the Washington Department of Natural Resources and others to protect and restore habitat on the lagoon. Many agencies and groups are involved with the lagoon's life and access, making it a complicated management problem.

The issues are many and varied: hunting, kayaking, kite surfing, fireworks, illegal cutting of trees, the question of what constitutes "passive recreation," dog poop (see Carlos Andersen's *Shorelines* article in this issue on [page 9](#)) and mowing the dikes. We need a conservation team that can monitor and work with the different agencies. Will you help? Please click red to contact Linda Griesbach at [conservation@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org](mailto:conservation@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org) or [Carlos Andersen](#).

Carlos, Linda, Carol Russo and I have been working on preserving the plants that we joined with Island County (IC) to plant in February 2022. This was in response to their mowing

the dike during the nesting season in May 2019. IC is watering the plants once a week through the summer. There is still much Scotch Broom and Tansy Ragwort to be weeded — and we need your help. We have bags and weeding implements. We're all weed wranglers. Donate an hour a month to weed wrangling and you'll feel great. Every Scotch Broom gone is worth the effort — the seeds last 45 years! We also do a lot of education as people walk by on the dike and ask questions. This is important for Whidbey Audubon Society (WAS) community outreach. You represent our mission by working on the dike. And help protect bird habitat.

Including this one, you're going to find no fewer than *three* exhortations calling for volunteers in this newsletter. Is this excessive? No! We have critical needs for members to come forward and help us with the essential work of the organization.

We need a new *Shorelines* editor — and quickly. Jenny Brown has shepherded the newsletter for an incredible 12 years but has finally moved on. (A huge thanks from all of us, Jenny. You've done a marvelous job!) I drafted my husband Larry to edit just this one issue, which he graciously agreed to do despite working to avoid editing jobs throughout his entire career in journalism. A new editor needs to begin with the October issue, which needs to be assembled soon! The editor sets deadlines,

**President's Column, see [page 5](#)**

### Whidbey Audubon Society

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### Board and Cabinet Chairs 2023-2024

#### Executive Committee

President Patty Cheek  
Vice President Linda Griesbach  
Treasurer Charlotte Ginn  
Secretary Janet Jernigan

#### Auxiliary Committee

Past-president(s) Sharon Gauthier  
Nominating 2023 Kathy Obersinner  
Sharon Gauthier  
Patricia Duarte  
Internal Audit Lance Porter  
Roy Selber

#### At Large Appointments

Cathi Bower  
Patricia Duarte  
Kathy Obersinner

#### Core Cabinet Chairs and Subcommittees

Support Services Jann Ledbetter  
Membership Management, Jann Ledbetter  
Online Services & Technology Support OPEN  
Special Project Grants and Fundraising OPEN  
History and Records –Janet Jernigan

#### Conservation & Science OPEN

Conservation – Linda Griesbach (temporary chair),  
Salish Sea Guillemot Network – Cathi Bower

Christmas Bird Count North – Jay Adams,  
Christmas Bird Count South – Govinda Holtby  
Bird Specimen Library – Robin Llewellyn

#### Outreach Susan Prescott

Publicity – Susan Prescott  
Newsletter Editor– OPEN  
Volunteer Recruitment and Management–Sheri Croll  
Social Media – Cathi Bower

#### Events Stephanie Neis

Membership Meetings & Programs – Stef Neis  
Field Trips – OPEN  
Birding in Neighborhoods South – Cathi Bower  
Birding in Neighborhoods North – Denise Marion  
Nancy Luenn

Page Peepers – Patty Cheek  
Birdathon – OPEN  
Birds 'n' Beer – Patty Cheek  
Bird in Hand Festival – Robin Llewellyn  
Wings over Whidbey Festival – Stephanie Neis

#### Education Sharon Gauthier

Online Educational Classes, Patty Cheek  
Public Presentations OPEN  
School Programs OPEN  
Birds of Whidbey Class – Dyanne Sheldon  
Scholarship Program – Ann Sullivan

# A Chatbot Chirps for Whidbey Audubon Volunteers

I wrote up a plea for volunteers to step up for the open Whidbey Audubon Society positions, then ran it thru ChatGPT, asking for a lighthearted version. I liked the bot's effort, so here we go.

—Jann Ledbetter

## *Hey there, nature enthusiasts and bird lovers!*

*Guess what? Whidbey Audubon is on the lookout for some awesome folks—and yes, that means YOU!*

*We are a flock of over 500 fabulous members, soaring high in the bird-watching skies. But here's the scoop: the real magic happens behind the scenes, thanks to a pint-sized crew of hard-working champs. These Board wizards and top-notch volunteers? They've been spreading their wings and dedicating over a decade of their lives to this bird-tastic cause!*

*Now, hold onto your binoculars, because we've got a little vacancy notice. We're searching for two shining stars to take on some key roles: the **Shorelines editor** and a **field trip chair**. And hey, there are more spots waiting to be filled with fantastic people like you, so we can keep the birdwatching bonanza rolling.*

*Think about it. You could be the wind beneath our wings, helping us soar to new heights. Ready to dive into awesome programs, thrilling field trips, enlightening classes, and all-around feathered fun? Give a shout-out to yours truly or one of our cool Board members. Let's join forces and make Whidbey Audubon's wingspan even grander!*

And now, back to some unfancied-up facts and human-generated writing by Volunteer Committee Chair Sheri Croll.

## *Top Five Fallacies About Becoming Involved with Whidbey Audubon Society*

- **Everyone who does real work for Whidbey Audubon Society is paid.**

**FALSE:** While we do have a few contracts for ongoing business purposes, the things we do throughout the year are accomplished 99 percent by volunteers.

- **Whidbey Audubon Society does not need me to get involved.**

**FALSE:** Since 99 percent of our work is done by nonpaid individuals, we ALWAYS need volunteers. *Shorelines* editor and Field Trips chair are the most critical needs right now, and other positions are also currently available. See page 2.

- **Only old people are involved in Whidbey Audubon Society.**

**FALSE,** but okay, anecdotal evidence suggests maybe we currently tilt toward the grandparent end of the age spectrum. We

want to adjust this! Whether you are demographically young or enthusiastically young at heart, join us, become involved, and make this group the vibrant, inclusive organization we need for the future!

- **Becoming involved in Whidbey Audubon Society takes too much time.**

**FALSE,** but we understand this hesitancy. We are working on a redesign of the volunteer program so you'll be able to download an app to your phone and find opportunities that fit into your schedule. You'll be able to sign up for them without needing to play telephone, email or text tag. Stay tuned.

- **I want to become involved with Whidbey Audubon Society, but I have no one to contact.**

**SUPER FALSE!:** Just send an email to [Sheri Croll](#) by clicking her name in red.

## **Field Trips, from page 1**

you wish to be included, sign up on the was website. Details will be forthcoming.

**Friday, November 10: DEER LAGOON** with site expert Carlos Andersen, who will lead this exploration of one of our island's most desirable birding areas. Meet at the parking area at the end of Deer Lagoon Road off Millman Road at 9 a.m. A walk along the dikes and marshy areas will be sure to find wintering waterfowl arriving for the season as well as a number of marsh residents.

**Saturday, November 18: FORT EBAY STATE PARK** Local expert Steve Ellis will lead a trip into this jewel of a state park, which offers a mixture of forest and seabird species. Be prepared for a bit of walking. And if you are lucky you may spot an orca, as participants did on last year's trip. Meet at the end of Libbey Road at Libbey Beach County Park. We will carpool from there to the state park. A Discover Pass or day fee is required for vehicles entering the state park. Rain cancels trip.

**Saturday, January 20: DECEPTION PASS LOON TRIP**

Sarah Schmidt will lead. Details will be forthcoming.

**February TBD: WEST BEACH AND PENN COVE** Steve Ellis finds this a great area for many wintering seabirds. A good trip for those with mobility issues as there will be very little walking. Meet at the end of Libbey Road at Libbey Beach County Park. Carpooling is a must as limited parking exists along the planned trip route. Rain cancels trip.

There will also be field trips to the Skagit Valley in January or February and a proposed family birding trip in April led by Steve Ellis.

**We are continuing to look for volunteer trip leaders.** A birder doesn't have to be an expert to lead a trip. Part of the fun on a trip is that everyone can contribute different skills and knowledge. If you have a desire to bird a special spot or know some areas that you think would interest others, please click my name below to email me for assistance in setting up a trip.

— *Charlotte Ginn*

# Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings Sightings



Photo by Denise Marion

## Caspian Terns

**May 31:** A flock of **Caspian Terns** (I counted 47) at Windjammer Park. This is my fourth summer in Oak Harbor and the first time I have seen such a large number. They were eating plump-looking finger-sized fish. Is it coincidence that salmon fingerlings were recently released into the harbor from the marina hatchery after a four-year hiatus?

—Denise Marion



Photo by Gina Horrock

## American Bittern

**June 18:** An **American Bittern** at Deer Lagoon

—Gina Horrock

**June 18:** A flock of about 25 **Red Crossbills** landed in my yard. —Joe Sheldon



Photo by Denise Aubuchon

## California Scrub Jay

**June 24:** A **California Scrub-Jay** came and perched on my deck railing. Apparently very rare overall, and especially in June. Location: Whidbey Shores off Fox Spit Road.

—Denise Aubuchon



Photo by Linda Griesbach

## Mother Pileated Woodpecker, on left, with juvenile.

**June 28:** A female **Pileated Woodpecker** was excavating a tree with a juvenile nearby. The juvenile was almost the same size as the female, but **its crown** was noticeably paler. Junior clambered around the tree and approached Mom

from the other side, whereupon she paused from her work to feed Junior. Dense foliage and distance made for a poor photo opportunity. Location: Earth Sanctuary, Freeland.

—Linda Griesbach

**July 12:** **Lots of American White Pelicans** are gathering at Deer Lagoon. Yesterday 27 flew in at 5 a.m. followed by 100 plus at 6 a.m. Today there appeared to be over 150 in two large groups mid-estuary and smaller groups to the northwest. Much moving around. Location: Visible from the south end of Deer Lagoon Road, the West Dike Trail and Double Bluff Road.

—Libby Hayward



Photo by Libby Hayward

**Brown Pelican**, left, with a flock of **American White Pelicans**.

**July 17:** Carlos Andersen told me he saw a **Brown Pelican** around the **American White Pelicans** at Deer Lagoon. Surprise! It's in some of my pho-



Photo by Carlos Andersen

## Virginia Rail

tos!—Libby Hayward

**July 18:** A **Virginia Rail** at Deer Lagoon.

—Carlos Andersen

**August 10:** There were seven **Wilson's Phalaropes** on the water not far from Keystone Spit. They took off as the ferry approached its dock and were joined by two others. The crossing had the usual **murrelets**, **guillemots**, **auklets** and a **Marbled Murrelet**. Some of the Auklets were carrying fish in their bills. Location: Port Townsend-Coupeville ferry near the Whidbey side.

—Steve Ellis

Please post unusual sightings on the [Whidbey Audubon Society \(WAS\) website](http://www.whidbeyaudubon.org); find it under the "Birds" menu. See regular postings [here](#).

## BIN South's Summer: Deer Lagoon Never Disappoints

The first summer Birding in Neighborhoods (BIN) was spent on a deck at Scatchet Head in perfect conditions, observing 23 species! Thank you, Sherry, for sharing your **Western Tanagers**, **Black-Headed Grosbeaks**, **Robins**, **Doves**, **Flickers** and so much more — a very pleasant morning of "Slow/Sit Birding."

Next came an even more beautiful day on Sunlight Beach including spotting a surprise pair of **Purple Martins** in a piling cavity, and listening to the demanding squawking at the **Heron** rookery hidden behind the alder foliage.

Midsummer can be quiet, but Deer Lagoon never disappoints. Watching **American White Pelicans**, **Cedar Waxwings** and **Common Yellowthroats** never gets old.

The peak of Pigeon Guillemot Survey season brought us to a bluff colony at Possession Sound Preserve. During the visit we witnessed a prey delivery to a chick burrow and enjoyed many other sightings along the stroll to the beach, including a pair of **Black-throated Gray Warblers**. Unfortunately they were hard at work feeding a **Brown-headed Cowbird** fledgling.

By the first of August, shorebird season ramps up, and Deer Lagoon is the perfect place to compare **Killdeer**, **Spotted Sandpipers**, **Least Sandpipers** and **Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs**. It's also the season of gathering — large flocks of **Bushtits**, **Finches** and **Red-winged Blackbirds** socializing and dispersing.

BIN South, see [page 5](#)

# BIN North's Summer: Strawberry Point to Crockett Lake

**June 14:** On a sunny morning in June, Birding in Neighborhoods North visited Strawberry Point Preserve to explore Whidbey Camano Land Trust's expanded trail system. The spring-green forest offered a constant birdsong serenade. Birds identified by sight or sound included the **Pacific-slope Flycatcher**, **Bewick's Wren**, **Common Yellowthroat**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, **Swainson's Thrush**, **Rufous Hummingbird**, **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, **Brown Creeper**, **Wilson's Warbler**, **Western Wood-Pewee**, **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, **Steller's Jay** and a flock of **Brown-headed Cowbirds**.

Crossing the meadow, we spotted a large mammal under the trees at the bottom of the slope. Enter Bruiser the Elk! He looked at us and we looked at him, admiring his impressive antlers. Eventually, he ambled away and we returned to birding.

Moving on, we observed **Cedar Waxwings** and glimpsed a **Western Tanager**. In all, we identified 29 species.

**July 12:** Seven lucky birders shared two delightful surprises on the Pratt Loop Trail.

The day was sunny and too windy for many birds, but as the trail passed a sweeping view of farms in the valley, we spotted three plump, fuzzy-looking young **Barn Swallows** sitting on a wire fence close to the trail with their parents. The juveniles had nearly all their adult coloring. The five swallows were brilliant in the sunshine; we watched them for a long time.

As we entered the forest, the wind died down. We were



Photo By Denise Marion

BIN North birders Marilyn Thomas, Kathy Klein and Dolores Maggione.

accompanied the rest of the way by the songs of the **American Robin**, **Spotted Towhee**, **Swainson's Thrush**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, **Orange-crowned Warbler**, **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** and an orchestra of other birds. Several of our group had a quick look at a **Hairy Woodpecker**, but very few birds were visible. Just as Denise said she would be grateful to spot even a robin,

**BIN North, see page 7**

## BIN South, from page 4

Super entertaining was a flock of **Bushtits** landing on the bulrushes. They would alight on the tops, which would then bend waaaaay over. So cute!

A few sightings we didn't manage to figure out. Perhaps because we didn't have our usual puzzle-resolvers with us, we could only settle on "some kind of flycatcher" (possibly **Willow**) perched in an alder; "some kind of small gull" (fairly certain **Bonaparte's**) flock that took off for the beach; and a brief fly-by of "some kind of mid-sized raptor" (a possible **Peregrine**).

Every summer includes a morning of Lagoon Point **Purple Martin** observation – enjoying their enchanting antics and song.

**Western Sandpipers** are back, and also at Deer Lagoon there were a dozen **Killdeer**, a **Greater** and a **Lesser Yellowlegs** again, and after we'd called our final answers on those, the **Lesser** confirmed with its vocalization: *too-too*. In the alder tops above the marsh were a beautifully perched **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, with a couple of **Anna's hummers** way up there, and those **Robins** of all ages who lead us down the path of anything-but-a-Robin.

—Cathi Bower *Bird early – Bird often*

**BIRDING IN NEIGHBORHOODS SOUTH** meets every other Thursday morning (next date is September 7). Time varies with the season. Click red text to email [Cathi](#).

## President's Column, from page 2

send notices to contributors, edits the articles, meets with newsletter designer Susan Prescott and reads the page proofs. This is a significant position in WAS because it is the main way we communicate with members outside our website. The editor does not need to attend board meetings. It's fun to do because you get a bird's-eye view of WAS. Email former editor [Jenny Brown](#) or Outreach cabinet chair [Prescott](#).

We also need a new **field trip chair** because Charlotte Ginn is moving into another position. Thank you for your years of dedicated work, Charlotte!

I loved this position when I had it. You get to work with trip leaders from the past, find new ones, come up with new ideas for field trips, add special trips to the itinerary, and help new leaders. Field trips are the way I became interested in birds and habitats. I was very new to birding when I started. It was just a matter of scheduling one to three dates a month with the leaders and publicizing the trips through *Shorelines* and the website. You don't have to go on every trip you schedule. Of course, you can go on the trips if you choose to do so. It's a great way to learn the birds.

Click red to email former field trip chair [Charlotte Ginn](#), if you're interested.

—Patty Cheek, *President*

## Avian Flu

### *What About Transmission?*

What do we know about avian flu outbreak in Western Washington?

Historically, the virus has been detected only in domestic birds, but apparently is emerging in wild birds. Since early July, a tern/gull colony just across Admiralty Inlet from Whidbey Island has been hit hard by the highly infectious current strain H5N1. This news was concerning on many levels, not least of which is directly for the health and safety of our local summer seabird surveyors, Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST) participants and other beach users.

We first received news of this outbreak from our fellow Pigeon Guillemot observer, Jefferson County East regional coordinator Brenda Johnson. She wrote to our team at Salish Sea Guillemot Network, “You may have already heard about the presence of Avian Influenza at the tern/gull colony that is nesting on Rat Island, near Fort Flagler. WDFW and others have been collecting dead birds and taking samples for analysis this week of July 10 and have confirmed that the virus is the highly infectious type H5N1. A number of the Caspian Tern carcasses are washing up on the beach. A briefing by WDFW on Thursday offered strategies on how to minimize human/dog exposure and disturbance of the tern colony. Of course, there is concern about transmission to the guillemots and eagles, too. Marine mammals can also contract it. Transmission is primarily by oral contact with body fluids (especially feces) of the infected animal. State Parks and WDFW are putting up signs and closing Rat Island to any human access. There will be WDFW and Department of Public Health guidance coming soon that explains what we community scientists should do if we find any sick or dead wildlife, but in the meantime please only carefully collect carcasses into trash bags (doubled) while wearing gloves and an N95 mask.”

For understanding procedures or reporting wildlife concerns, you can find everything you need to know on the [WDFW website page](#): Report wildlife observations to Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. In the event of an immediate public safety issue, wildlife violation, or an injured or dangerous animal, email the [WDFW Enforcement office](#) or call 360-902-2936; or call 911.

— Cathi Bower

## Dead Eagle Found at Lagoon Point

Eagle sightings are a common phenomenon during our Pigeon Guillemot (PG) surveys at Lagoon Point North. Almost every week we report an eagle “disturbance” on our beach data sheets. On July 22 we had a different kind of disturbance when we found a dead eagle tangled in seaweed and lying on the beach near the public access point. There was a high tide that morning, and many people were fishing in close proximity to the carcass. Because of the outbreak of avian flu in Western Washington, the crowd on the beach added to our concerns. We photographed the bird, but not having gloves or N95 masks, we knew it was unwise to touch the carcass.

My survey teammates and I were unsure how to proceed but knew that reporting the bird was crucial. I Googled “What to do when you find a dead eagle in Washington State.” The advice was to call 911, which I did. A helpful dispatcher took down my information and location of the carcass, and asked a series of questions: Did we think it was killed by gunshot or poison? Had it been maimed in any obvious way? Had anyone removed its tail feathers? As far as we could tell the answers were all no, although we were uncertain about poisoning. Despite the fact that Bald Eagles are no longer on the endangered species list, they are still protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, which forbid the killing or harming of eagles. When I mentioned the possibility of avian flu, the dispatcher said she was sending “an officer to investigate” and transferred me to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

Meanwhile, my PG survey teammate

Linda Griesbach read the WDFW statement on the avian influenza outbreak and diligently followed the advice to report sick or dead birds immediately using an online form — one to [report at-risk wildlife](#) through the online ArcGIS Survey123 application. Also to document sick, injured or dead animals click [here](#). The form was not user-friendly, but Linda persisted and submitted it. She has had no response.

I received a phone call from WDFW the following Monday thanking me for reporting the incident. In the

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*The advice was  
to call 911...*

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meantime, I contacted Lee Badovinus, a Whidbey Pigeon Guillemot coordinator who

recommended that I describe the circumstances surrounding the dead eagle to Katie Laushman, Wildlife Area Manager for the North Olympic and South Puget Sound Wildlife Areas at WDFW. I received the following reply to my email note and attached photos:

“Thank you for sending this information along. I passed it along to our wildlife vet and the district biologist for the Whidbey area, so they now are aware. It looks like that eagle is pretty old and waterlogged, so likely not of much diagnostic use for testing for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), but it’s a helpful reminder to be keeping our eyes out for other wildlife in the area.”

With that response from Katie, we felt that we had done all we could to document the incident and inform authorities. Linda returned to Lagoon Point the following morning and the eagle was no longer on the beach. Whether carried out to sea by the next high tide or removed by a wildlife officer, we never learned.

— Anna Banks

## Conservation Matters: Thirsty Natives and Weed Wranglers

“Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink,” lamented Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. We islanders are surrounded by glorious cool water, but not the kind that is fit to drink, nor to water plants with. Landscaping with native plants, when planted in appropriate places, typically requires less supplemental watering than non-natives. But even some of our **natives have become stressed** this year due to significantly less than normal rainfall. Many will benefit from a sip of water through the rest of our dry season. Island groundwater sources are precious, so water judiciously. Early morning before the heat of the day is a good idea. Direct the water to the roots and avoid runoff onto driveways and other hard surfaces. Sprinklers and other overhead sprayers waste significant amounts of water through evaporation. Thoughtful watering now will perk up your native plants and help strengthen them prior to entering the dormant season.

If you would like to discuss strategies for **landscaping with native plants** to reduce water requirements in your garden or to attract more birds to your yard, let us know. A couple of Whidbey Audubon Society (was) members would be happy to visit for a brief consultation. Send an email to [conservation@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org](mailto:conservation@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org) and put “Native Plant Consultation” in the subject line. We will be in touch to arrange a date. There is no charge, but was will be grateful for any donation you care to make. We look forward to meeting with you.

The **avian flu** is still having an impact on birds in Washington state. One example is the Caspian Tern colony at Rat Island in Jefferson County. The pre-flu colony size was estimated to be 1,000 to 1,500 adult terns. Since the outbreak of flu was first detected in this population in July, Washington State Fish & Wildlife has collected the carcasses of at least 960 adults and almost 300 chicks. In addition, several deceased gulls (presumably Olympic) and 120 deceased gull chicks were collected. If you encounter a dead bird you suspect may have succumbed to avian

flu, take precautions. Although this flu is not easily transmissible from birds to people, check out the safe handling information at Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) [website](#), “Species & Habitat” page and scroll to “Wildlife Diseases.” You can also report “at risk” wildlife observations (for any species, not just birds) at the WDFW [Wildlife Observations page](#), under “Get Involved.” This information will be helpful as the state continues to track the impact of avian flu on bird populations.

The WDFW has drafted a periodic status review for our native **Northern Spotted Owl**, *Strix occidentalis caurina*, and is seeking the public’s input. The state’s draft includes a recommendation to keep the owl on the state’s Endangered Species List. The Northern Spotted Owl continues to face challenges due to habitat loss, climate change and the continued increase of competition by nonnative Barred Owls. If you wish to comment on this review, [email](#) or snail mail Taylor Cotten, WDFW, P. O. Box 43141, Olympia, WA 98504-3200. Comments must be submitted by October 29.

**Weed wrangling** at Deer Lagoon has continued on a limited basis during the summer. Despite the dry conditions, over 1,000 Scotch Broom plants (including the ever-important taproot!) have been extricated from the low dike in late July and August. Thanks to the volunteer weed wranglers, this is a significant reduction that helps make way for the native plants installed there in February 2022. Weed wrangling at the lagoon will resume in earnest this autumn after the (hoped-for) rains have softened up the soil. The work is not especially physically taxing, although it does require some stooping or bending. A few hours of your time will make a huge, positive impact on the health and beauty of this designated Important Bird Area. If you would like to be notified about upcoming weed removal opportunities, contact Linda Griesbach at [conservation@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org](mailto:conservation@whidbeyaudubonsociety.org).

— Linda Griesbach

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### BIN North, from page 5

we passed the “Nuthatch Tree.” This huge old snag had a row of holes going up the trunk like buttons on a snowman. **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were busy going in and out of the holes and all around on the dead branches. What a treat! Despite the shortage of visible birds, we identified 26 species.

**August 9:** Shortly after 9 a.m. at Keystone Harbor, the 50 percent chance of rain turned to 100 percent. Eight birders standing in the Keystone boat launch parking lot assessed our insufficient-for-steady-rain attire and the lowering clouds. We decided to go birding anyway. We saw **Pigeon Guillemots** and a **Belted Kingfisher** in Keystone Harbor. A line of **Heermann’s Gulls** on the gravel spit displayed all phases of their plumage, from dark brown to sooty gray with white heads and distinctive

orange bills. The dilapidated pier was crowded with **Double-crested Cormorants** and **Pelagic Cormorants** including some juvenile pelagics.

After admiring a female **Purple Martin** on a wire and **American White Pelicans** on Crockett Lake, we retreated to Callen’s Restaurant to warm up, dry our binoculars and enjoy hot drinks and good conversation. We were damp and had seen only 13 species, but it was still a good day.

— Denise Marion

**BIN NORTH** meets the second Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m. Contact by email [Denise Marion](#) or [Nancy Luenn](#).

# Twenty Years of Guillemot Research Strengthens the Science

## Why are Pigeon Guillemots a big deal on Whidbey?

As soon as I moved here in 2000, I discovered that Whidbey Island hosted a large population of about 1,000 Pigeon Guillemots during the breeding season. Little was known about their breeding colonies, what the birds ate, and if the population was increasing or decreasing. Whidbey Audubon began sponsoring a long-term community science summer breeding survey to study these adorable black and white seabirds with fire-engine red feet. That survey soon became a signature project of Whidbey Audubon, and we changed the Whidbey Audubon Society logo to highlight our commitment to these birds.

### Why do we study these seabirds?

Once we discovered that Whidbey Island is a hotbed of breeding guillemot activity in Puget Sound, we contacted seabird scientists and learned of the need to gather more science-based data. We developed our survey to provide the information that would be helpful to those scientists. Soon after, the Puget Sound Partnership identified the Pigeon Guillemot as an indicator species. Our Whidbey Guillemot Survey has been a contributing partner to the understanding of this species as recorded on the [Puget Sound Vital Signs website](#). Researchers at the University of Washington learned of our survey and have used our long-term data to publish more in-depth studies of guillemots. See the article [“Community science effort helps UW researchers understand local seabird populations”](#) by Dan Dinicola, August 25, 2020; School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences, University of Washington.



Photo by Cathi Bower

A Pigeon Guillemot watches from a typical breeding cavity on a bluff.

## What is the Salish Sea Guillemot Network?

As word got out about the success of our Whidbey Guillemot Breeding Survey, other regions around the Salish Sea wanted to begin their own surveys, based on the protocol we established. There are now seven regions from the South Sound to the Strait of Juan de Fuca that have established guillemot breeding surveys. These regions have joined together as the Salish Sea Guillemot Network (SSGN) to share resources and information. All the regions contribute to our data collection

system, an ArcInfo application called Survey123. The Whidbey survey remains the largest in terms of birds surveyed and volunteer contributions. Whidbey Audubon continues to provide the leadership, expertise and resources to strengthen the SSGN. For more information or to join our survey team, check out the [Salish Sea Guillemot Network website](#). Find it also through the [Whidbey Audubon Society website](#) on the Stewardship page.

— Frances Wood

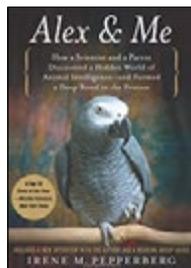
## Birds 'n' Beer Might Fly to the Pubs



We kick off another season of **Birds 'n' Beer** on Wednesday, September 20 at 5 p.m. We want to hear all your birding stories, and, if you have them, to see your pictures. It's an informal setting. Come and enjoy the company — and pop open a beer, if you like. This first meeting is a ZOOM meeting but we are planning to have pub events throughout the year. Register at [whidbey-audubonsociety.org](#).

## Page Peepers Read *Alex & Me*

This book is the story of a parrot named Alex and a scientist named Irene Pepperberg, and the relationship that grew between them for 30 years. Through it she found out so much more about “bird brains” than she ever knew from science alone. Just before Alex died, he said to her, “You be good. I love you.” Astonishing. I tremble to know that there is so much to communication between us and animals. See you at the Zoom meeting at 7 p.m. September 27. If you'd like to participate in Page Peepers please [email me](#).



— Patty Cheek

## Bird Class is Brimming

The Birds of Whidbey Class is now full for students starting in September 2023. We've got great instructors lined up and a new location for the class in “downtown” Freeland at Whidbey Water Services. The class is a comprehensive coverage of all the major birds found on Whidbey, both residents and migrants. The class meets for nine months twice each month and also includes a monthly field trip focused on one species. If you're interested in taking the class in the future, you can sign up on the [wait list](#) on the Education page of the [Whidbey Audubon website](#). Classes are held in Coupeville in even-numbered years and in Freeland in odd-numbered years. The wait list is currently a year-plus long, so plan ahead!

—Dyanne Sheldon

# Dogs and Bird Habitats — What to Do?

Roaching this subject may not be popular, but we have to talk about how to balance our love of dogs with the support of our sensitive wildlife habitats.

Since the pandemic began, according to *The Guardian*, about nine million dogs have been added to American families. Consequently, domestic dog impacts on our natural environments are much more visible.



Keeping dogs leashed and on trails protects them from contacting animals that are rabid or simply aggressive. It protects your pet from infectious diseases or parasites that can live in the waste of wildlife or other dogs. Avian influenza unfortunately arrived in Washington State about a year ago and contact (like sniffing) with liquids from a dead or infected bird can be fatal to a dog. Island County Code 6.08.090 states that dogs **when not**

**at the premises of the dog owner must be on-leash at all times except when visiting a designated off-leash area. That leash cannot be longer than eight feet.**

Scientific data about the negative impacts dogs have on birds is overwhelming and can be found at online sites like National Audubon, the National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Popular Science and many others. Bottom line, dogs have negative impacts on wildlife, especially birds. These occur whether or not the dog is leashed, though off-leash dog impacts are greater. This is especially troubling during migration season. Birds naturally view dogs as predators and can sense dogs moving towards them well before their human handlers realize what is happening.

Dog poop is a health and environmental hazard. Pollution from pet waste introduces excess nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium into local waterways. It increases nitrogen in the soil around the trail, giving weeds the advantage over native plants. Dog waste is designated as a solid waste in Island County Code and must be picked up and disposed of properly, i.e., in the trash. And leashing helps owners keep track of their dog's "movements."

Keeping dogs on leashes does help. Many dogs are naturally inclined to hunt birds after generations of breeding for that purpose. Off-leash dogs scare and chase feeding, nesting, and resting birds. They destroy nests and kill chicks. Causing birds to take flight wastes critical energy reserves especially during migrations. Exposing a nest even for a few minutes can kill chicks due to increased sun exposure and predation. These actions violate the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Off-leash dogs can also do environmental damage by trampling sensitive plants, making an area more vulnerable to invasive species and other external threats.

Finally, no matter how friendly and well-behaved your dog may be, other people may be frightened. Leashes protect the experience of others who may be allergic or afraid of dogs or simply might not want to be approached by dogs they don't know.

With the continuing increase of visitations to our sensitive environmental habitats, it is critical to be aware of what we can do to protect and preserve them before more permanent damage occurs.

—Carlos Andersen

## WHIDBEY AUDUBON SOCIETY - MEMBERSHIP

Please make your check payable to: WHIDBEY AUDUBON SOCIETY  
 Mail to: Whidbey Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1012, Oak Harbor, WA 98277  
 Or pay online: [www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org/membership](http://www.whidbeyaudubonsociety.org/membership)

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**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.*

## Bird of the Month: Wilson's Warbler

We have been fortunate for the past eight years to have a pair of these super-cute warblers returning and breeding in the native thicket we created at our house. In early May we look forward to a pretty regular event we call “the Wilson's Warbler show.” The “show” is their almost daily early evening ritual bathing at the bubbler fountain. Usually only one appears at a time, but sometimes both come—with great theatrics!

And this summer two pairs arrived!

So what do we look for in spotting these sweet little birds? They are one of the smallest warblers in the U.S. but are easily identified by their bright yellow color and black cap. They have long and thin tails, small and thin bills, and can seem rather round-bodied and large-headed for their size.

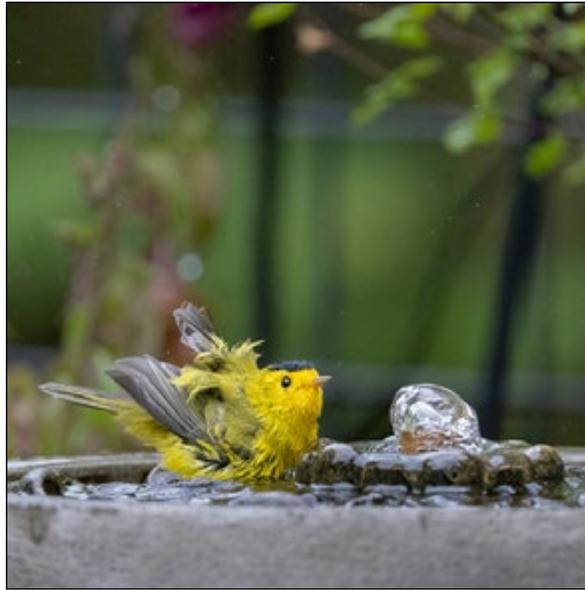


Photo by Jann Ledbedder

Wilson's Warbler frolicking in the bubbler fountain.

Wilson's Warbler, *Cardellina pusilla*  
Order: Passeriformes  
Family: Parulidae

Wilson's warblers do not come to seed feeders. Their diet consists solely of insects. They flitter about in the understory of shrub, sometimes hovering, grabbing bugs from the foliage. They seem to particularly like our blueberry bushes and early on we thought it was the blueberries they were after!

One thing I was not aware of is that the West Coast Wilson's Warblers will nest up to five feet off the ground. We had thought it might be the thick, mossy forest floor that was preferred. Either way, our thicket definitely fits the bill.

Every once in a while we have witnessed a male perched on a willow branch at the forest edge. At this time his call is probably

a single chip note to warn the mate and young that there are intruders nearby. Most of the time we hear their rapid chatter “*chchchchchchch*” and see some flitting movement between shrubs as they dash around to grab insects.

And then there are the offspring! We consider ourselves extra lucky when we have witnessed the emergence of one. When most warbler nestlings fledge they leave the nest and never return, but Wilson's Warblers have been known to return to their nest for a night or two after fledging.

Wilson's Warblers, while common, are in steep decline. Habitat loss in both breeding grounds and wintering grounds, along with threats along migratory pathways, are believed to be the main causes. The North American Breeding Bird Survey shows that they are declining at about two percent per year with an estimated cumulative decline of 60 percent between 1966 and 2019.

At this writing in late August our warblers have taken their leave and are already migrating down to Baja California Sur for the winter. Gosh, we have done that trip a winter or two ourselves!

*My little Wilson's Warbler  
We know you need to go  
When all of our yards are covered in snow.  
Please travel and winter safely  
We will patiently wait  
Until that spring day you fly  
Back over our garden gate.*

(Sources: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Birds of the World* and *All About Birds: The Sibley Guide to Birds*, Second Edition)

—Stef Neis

## Dates to Remember

Check the Whidbey Audubon Society website [events calendar](#) (clicking red text takes you directly to the webpage or email address) for further information on these upcoming events, including how to register for Zoom for online programs and meetings. There may also be further details on some of these events elsewhere in this issue.

### SEPTEMBER

- 2: **Field Trip to South Whidbey State Park**, 9 to 11 a.m.
- 7: **Whidbey Bird Class begins**
- 7: **Birding in Neighborhood (BIN) South**, 8 to 10 a.m.; meets every other week
- 9: **An Afternoon of Raptors**, noon, Pacific Rim Institute
- 13: **Birding in Neighborhood (BIN) North**, 9 to 11 a.m. Every second Wednesday
- 14: **General Meeting and Program: *Life on the Rocks*** with Steve and Martha Ellis at 7 p.m. in Coupeville.
- 20: **Birds 'n' Beer, ZOOM** at 5 p.m. every third Wednesday
- 21: **BIN South**, 8 to 10 a.m.
- 27: **Page Peepers: *Alex and Me: How a Scientist and a Parrot Discovered a Hidden World of Animal Intelligence and Found a Deep Bond in the Process*** by Irene Pepperberg, ZOOM at 7 p.m.
- 28: **Board Meeting**, 6 p.m. at Freeland Public Library; all are welcome

# Birdathon 2023 Was Over the Top

Every year the birding community's generous donations to Whidbey Audubon Society's Birdathon clearly shows the dedication to protecting Whidbey Island birds and their habitats. This year we *beat* our goal of \$8,600 by more than \$1,000! We raised \$9,650, of which \$4,386 has been designated for the general fund and \$5,161 for the scholarship fund (\$103 is still undesigned).



As announced in June, the **All For Knot** team (**Joe Sheldon and Dave Parent**) recaptured the **Golden Binocular Award** with their sightings of 128 species. And now, with all funds collected and accounted for, we would like to applaud the **Wingin' It**

team (**Janet Hall, Sarah Schmidt, Libby Hayward, Dyanne Sheldon**), which brought in \$2,916.50, earning them the **Bronze Owl Bank (BOB) Award** once again for bringing in the most donations! Thank you to **Wingin' It** and to all teams for your great birding and fundraising!

Whidbey Audubon would also like to thank **Windermere Real Estate, South Whidbey** for their generous contributions to our Birdathon effort. We appreciate your support and dedication to birds!

Thank you, thank you, to all our Birdathon supporters! Your participation shows your deep caring for birds and their environment.

— *Kathy Obersinner*

## An Afternoon of Raptors

Pacific Rim Institute, 180 Parker Road east of Coupeville, is hosting a Raptor Day especially designed for elementary and high school students on Saturday, September 9 — though visitors of all ages are welcome, and it's free. Expert handlers will not only talk about the birds but also have them take flight, weather permitting. The raptor fest begins at noon with hot dogs and beverages provided by the Central Whidbey Lions Club, with the main program scheduled from 1 to 3 p.m.

### Contents

Meeting Explores <i>Life on the Rocks</i> .....	1
Upcoming Field Trips.....	1
<i>President's Column</i> .....	2
Chirps for Volunteers .....	3
Sightings .....	4
BIN South's Summer.....	4
BIN North's Summer.....	5
Avian Flu.....	6
Dead Eagle Found at Lagoon Point ...	6
<i>Conservation Matters</i> :.....	7
Twenty Years of Guillemot Research...	8
Page Peepers Read <i>Alex &amp; Me</i> .....	8
Birds 'n' Beer Might Fly to the Pubs...	8
Bird Class is Brimming.....	8
Dogs and Bird Habitats.....	9
<i>Bird of the Month</i> : Wilson's Warbler..	10
Dates to Remember.....	10
Birdathon 2023 Was Over the Top...	11
An Afternoon of Raptors.....	11

### General Meeting & Program

**Thursday, September 14**  
Both In-person and Virtual  
Meeting and Socializing at 7,  
Program at 7:30 p.m.

### Life on the Rocks with Steve and Martha Ellis

Coupeville Recreation Hall  
901 NW Alexander Street

**Register Here for Zoom**

The public is welcome to attend this  
free event.