

Volume 20  
Issue 2  
October 2012

# The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society



## October 10th Program:

### *Bird-related Research and Monitoring at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge*

with Mike Rule, Turnbull NWR Biologist

Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, located in the upper reaches of the “Channeled Scablands,” supports a diverse wildlife community of nearly 300 species including ducks, geese, swans, migratory songbirds, raptors, Rocky Mountain elk, moose, and white-tailed deer.

The wetlands on the refuge support 17 species of waterfowl that either nest in the refuge area or use it during migration. Up to 30,000 ducks and geese and several hundred Tundra Swans stop over during both spring and fall migration. Several species of waterbirds also breed on the refuge with colonies of Eared Grebes and Black Terns located in several wetlands as well as a Great Blue Heron rookery. Twenty-five species of shorebirds utilize the refuge primarily during fall migration. Refuge Ponderosa pine forest supports nesting populations of Western Bluebirds, three species of nuthatches (Pygmy, Red-breasted and White-breasted), Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, Western Wood-Pewees, Northern Pygmy-Owls and several species of woodpeckers. Riparian areas on the refuge provide habitat for 45 species of landbirds. Grasshopper, Vesper, Savannah, and Lark Sparrows and Western Meadowlark are commonly observed in steppe habitat in the southeast portion of the refuge.

Mike will be describing the different bird monitoring research and monitoring efforts on the refuge. He will present some results from this work and discuss the role that many volunteer citizen scientist including several Audubon members have played in efforts to collect bird specific data.

Mike has thirty years of experience in developing and implementing wetland and upland habitat management and restoration programs on both National Wildlife Refuges and private land projects. He specializes in implementing



habitat restoration and management programs to benefit migratory birds and other native wildlife species through the design and construction of wetland impoundments, water level manipulation, prescribed fire, cultivation, herbicides, grazing and haying.

For the past 21 years, Mike has been the lead biologist at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge where he has been responsible for developing and implementing a monitoring plan for refuge wildlife populations and habitats. He has extensive experience with Geographic Information Systems. He has utilized GIS to model potential threatened and endangered species habitat, assess landscape connectivity of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, prioritize land protection efforts for Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge and to monitor and evaluate invasive species control efforts.

Spokane Audubon's October program will be held at the  
*Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Building,*  
2117 E. North Crescent Avenue (see page 8 for directions).

Please join us at 7 p.m. for refreshments and a brief business meeting.

The program will begin at 7:30 p.m.

## The Pygmy Owl

Volume 20, Issue 2 ~ October 2012

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Spokane Audubon Society  
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## President's Message

by Kim Thorburn

Do you have a Discover Pass?

State lands— parks, wildlife areas, and natural resources lands— are essential for the protection and sustenance of birds and other wildlife. Discover Passes give us access to these lands. More important, they provide revenue for their upkeep and improvement.

As state governments have struggled during the economic downturn, they have sought means to support their public lands. California has been forced to close state parks or put them in the hands of private management. Washington officials have vowed to keep our lands public. They have turned to us, the users, for help. That's where the Discover Pass comes in.

Check out our website, [spokaneaudubon.org](http://spokaneaudubon.org) for more information about how to obtain a Discover Pass. Join me in supporting our state lands. It's for the birds.



### Discover Pass Basics:

- Annual Pass: \$30 (\$35 with transaction and dealer fees if purchased at a licensed dealer, by phone or online)
- One-day Pass: \$10 (\$11.50 with transaction and dealer fees if purchased at a license dealer, by phone or online)
- One Discover Pass can be used for two vehicles.
- May be purchased online, by phone, in person or when you renew your vehicle license.
- Revenue from the Discover Pass is shared among three state agencies:
  - 84 percent to State Parks
  - 8 percent Fish and Wildlife
  - 8 percent Department of Natural Resources

November newsletter deadline:

**Friday, October 26**

Send material to:  
[carmen@floreo.com](mailto:carmen@floreo.com)



On Sunday afternoon, September 9, a wildland fire ignited near Coffeepot Road north of Odessa. Strong winds the following day quickly pushed the fire northeastward through spring-abundant, but drought-dried fuels. By Tuesday, there was control but not containment and the fire covered 20,000 acres. Known as the Apache Pass fire, thousands of acres of shrub-steppe were damaged and destroyed at the heart of the Lincoln County greater sage-grouse and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse recovery project. Many areas of native plant restorations were consumed.

Simultaneously, two fires in Douglas County, jointly called the Barker Canyon Complex, burned over 90,000 acres of the shrub-steppe habitat of Washington's largest greater sage-grouse population. Throughout the West, 2012 has been a record-setting fire year. Loss of shrub-steppe to fire occurred in eastern Oregon, southeastern Idaho and western Nevada.

Fire is part of the natural ecology of the shrub-steppe but human alterations to the landscape have greatly affected the normal cycles. Invasive plants, especially cheat grass, cause earlier, hotter conflagrations. Extreme weather events, like the current prolonged drought, drive the blazes, which tend to be large and destructive. Regenerative effects of historic fire cycles may not occur.

The long-term effects of the 2012 fire season will unfold over the next months and years. Fragile bird populations, like the greater sage-grouse and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, are bound to be affected. Grasses and wildflowers will return next spring but these birds depend on sagebrush for forage, cover, and reproduction. Shrubs, if they survive the fire, return more slowly over several seasons. Time will tell if the 2012 fire season turns back recent small recovery successes for the greater sage-grouse.

# Fire on the Shrub-Steppe

by Kim Thorburn, photos courtesy of Kourtney Stonehouse

*(Above, Spring 2011. Below, September 2012.)*



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## Calendar Photo Preview, featuring comments from the photographers

We at Spokane Audubon are fortunate to have so many talented photographers in our midst. Here is a preview of some of the photos from the 2013 Spokane Audubon Calendar, *Birds of Eastern Washington*, along with comments from the photographers. Thank you to our photographers for giving us a greater understanding of both their birds, and the patience and skill required to get a great photograph!



**Lindell Haggin**  
*Solitary Sandpiper*

I took the photo of the Solitary Sandpiper on the “island” on our property on the Little Spokane River. Initially I was looking into the sun when I spotted it, but it allowed me to circle around so the sun was at my back. It was standing on a log that had floated into the bay years ago during spring flood. I took the picture with a Canon EOS Rebel T3i with a Canon EF 70-300mm lens at f/7.1, 1/400 sec, ISO 1000.

I saw a Solitary Sandpiper again this fall in a slightly different location. It also allowed me to maneuver around to get some good shots. Maybe they're just publicity hounds.

**Buck Domitrovich**  
*Common Loon*

The Loon picture is the result of many many early mornings of going and setting up so the loons did not know I was there. I had my tripod as low to the ground and spread out as much as it would go. Over three or four mornings I took a lot of shots but when the loon did the wing flap for me I knew it was what I was looking for.

Shutter speed 1/800 of a second, F-stop F-8, ISO 400, focal length 700.0mm, Canon 20 D, Lens Canon 500mm F 4 L, 1.4 extender on the back of the lens.



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**Melissa Cummins***Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch*

I took these photos in October, 2010. I had driven up to the top of Mt. Spokane in hopes of spotting some Gray-crowned Rosy-finches. Luckily, as I walked up toward the CCC shelter at the top, I noticed a flock of birds in the pine trees ahead of me. After watching them through my binoculars for a few moments, the entire flock landed almost at my feet. There were feeding on the seeds of a small ground cover plant. If you look closely you can see some of the seeds in the bill of the finch. The finches seemed almost oblivious to my presence, and I was able to take quite a few close up photos. This is one of my favorite birds, so it was exciting to get some quality shots.

Canon EOS REBEL XT*i* with a EF100-400mm lens, f/5.6, 1/1600 sec, ISO 400.

**Kim Thorburn***Least Sandpiper*

As an avid birder, I look forward to waves of shorebirds stopping for a bite in potholes mud when going to and coming from their arctic breeding grounds. When struggling with species identification, I appreciate the least sandpiper that shows its distinctive orange legs to separate itself from other similar peeps.

Canon EOS REBEL T1*i*, f/7.1, 1/400 sec, ISO 100.

Calendars are \$10 and are available at general meetings, or from our web site, [spokaneaudubon.org](http://spokaneaudubon.org). Look for additional photo previews in the November and December editions of *The Pygmy Owl!*

***Please join us for a special calendar presentation on Tuesday, October 23, at 7 p.m., at Auntie's Bookstore (402 West Main, Spokane, WA 99201).***

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**Audubon Council of Washington  
(ACOW) Meeting:  
October 6, 2012**

Kitsap Audubon Society invites Audubon members to this one-day meeting at the new Poulsbo City Hall. The keynote speaker is David Yarnold, President and CEO of National Audubon Society (photo right). The new Pacific Flyway director, Michael Sutton, will also speak.

Highlights of the day include a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new and final Puget Loop map of the Great Washington Birding Trail, with Poulsbo Mayor Becky Erickson and Birding Trail Director Christi Norman.

The annual ACOW brings together leaders from the 26 Washington State Audubon chapters and Audubon Washington staff for workshops and presentations on a host of topics of interest to Audubon members throughout the state. There will be regional breakout sessions to exchange information and review progress at the state and chapter level.

If you're travelling, a block of rooms with special rates from \$79-98 per night is being held at the Poulsbo Inn & Suites, conveniently located right on State Hwy 305 as you enter Poulsbo. Hotel reservations may be made by calling 360-779-3921 or email manager@poulsboinn.com. Audubon ACOW is the group name.

Online registration is available at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/263251>. (Password: audubon)

Registration cost is \$30 and includes morning and afternoon snacks, plus a boxed lunch. To register by check, please contact Joseph Manson at (206) 652-2444 x100 or [jmanson@audubon.org](mailto:jmanson@audubon.org).

For more information, check out Kitsap Audubon's web site: <http://www.kitsapaudubon.org/>

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**Help Us Celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week!  
Turnbull NWR Community Work Party**

Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge and Spokane Audubon Society will host a community work party as part of an ongoing community effort to restore native riparian habitat to benefit birds and other wildlife species. We have hundreds of native saplings to plant, and fencing to build at the project site to protect the trees from deer, elk, and moose browsing. Everyone is welcome!

When: Saturday, October, 20 2012.

Planting Time: 9 am to 12 p.m.

Lunch: Potluck 12 p.m.

Where: Turnbull NWR Headquarters, 5 miles south of Cheney on Cheney-Plaza Road: turn left on Smith Road and drive 2 miles on gravel road to headquarters.

Clothing: Long-sleeved shirt, work pants, sturdy boots or shoes, gloves.

Equipment: (if you can) pliers, shovels (preferably with your name on them)

**SAS Field Trips:  
October – December**

**October 27, 2012 Saturday  
Grant County Late Fall Migrant Trip  
Leader: Gary Blevins**

This is a beginning, intermediate and advanced birder-oriented trip to look for specialized birds, such as Arctic Gulls, Lapland Longspurs, and other hard to find and see Northern visitors. There may be some down time, with little action in between bird sightings, but potential for rarities is high. It's a day trip from sunrise to sunset. Contact Gary Blevins (533-3661 or [garyb@spokanefalls.edu](mailto:garyb@spokanefalls.edu)) by October 20 if you plan to attend.

**Target Birds:** loons and grebes, scoters and rare wintering waterfowl, wintering raptors, Glaucous, Thayers, and Glaucous-winged Gulls, Snowy Owl, Northern Shrike, Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspur, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch

**November 17, 2012, Saturday  
Douglas Plateau Northern Visitors Trip  
Leader: Kim Thorburn**

The Waterville Plateau is a challenging but huge quality destination for rarities during the late fall and winter months. We'll work the rolling steppe of the Plateau in search of the unusual raptors, owls, and passerines and also head down to the Columbia River in search of rare Arctic Gulls and saltwater waterfowl, such as scoters, Long-tailed Duck, and Pacific Loon. If attendees are interested, we will spend the night of November 16 in Brewster for an earlier start with the birds during this short daylight season. Contact Kim Thorburn (465-3025 or [kthorburn@msn.com](mailto:kthorburn@msn.com)) by November 10 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

**Target Birds:** loons and grebes, scoters and rare wintering waterfowl, wintering raptors, Glaucous, Thayer's, and Glaucous-winged Gulls, Snowy Owl, Northern Shrike, Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspur, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. We will hope for elusive rarities, including Gyrfalcon and Northern Hawk Owl

**December 8, 2012 Saturday  
Eagle Watch Trip  
Leader: Joyce Alonso**

This trip takes us around Beauty Bay on Lake Coeur d'Alene where the Bald Eagles feeding on spawned out salmon are always a sight to behold. Weather permitting, those interested may drive down to the Thompson Lake/Harrison region where a variety of birds winter in a slightly warmer zone. Probable particulars: 8:00am start at Liberty Lake Albertson's parking lot. Contact Joyce Alonso (448-2447) by December 1 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

**Target Species:** Bald Eagles, several duck and grebe species, American Dipper, Pacific Wren, Pileated Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Tundra Swans, Northern Pygmy Owl

Please join us on Wednesday,  
November 14th  
for our program on  
***White-headed Woodpeckers***  
featuring  
Wildlife Biologist Jeff Kozma.

**Spokane Audubon Society  
Membership Form**

Local Membership Dues:

Individual: \$20/year \_\_\_\_\_

Couple & Family: \$25/year \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \$10/year \_\_\_\_\_

Lifetime: \$300 \_\_\_\_\_

National Membership Dues: \$35/year \_\_\_\_\_

Individual + National Dues: \$55/year \_\_\_\_\_

Couple + National Dues: \$60/year \_\_\_\_\_

**Your local membership provides you with *The Pygmy Owl* and supports your local chapter's many conservation and education activities. You will also be eligible for website privileges.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



Please make check payable to:  
**Spokane Audubon Society**  
Send this form and your check to:

Audubon Membership  
Attn: Dave Plemons  
1817 S. Regal  
Spokane, WA 99223

Current members may renew memberships from our web site::

<http://spokaneaudubon.org>

Receiving duplicate newsletters?  
Errors or other changes needed on  
your mailing label? Contact Dave  
Plemons at [davep\\_acer@msn.com](mailto:davep_acer@msn.com), or  
534-4404.



The Pygmy Owl  
**Spokane Audubon Society**  
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**October 10th Program**  
*“Bird-related Research and Monitoring  
 at Turnbull NWR”*  
 7:30 p.m.

**To:**

*The Spokane Audubon Society provides resources and services to educate people about birds, wildlife, and the importance of habitats, and to advocate and support public policies and actions that conserve and restore wildlife habitats.*

**Visit our website: <http://spokaneaudubon.org>**

**Directions to the General Meeting:**

*Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Building  
 2117 E. North Crescent Avenue*

**To get to Riverview Retirement Community:**

**From West Spokane & South Hill**

- I-90 East to Exit 281 toward US-2 E/US-395 N/Newport/Colville
- Follow US-2 E/US-395 N to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**From Spokane Valley**

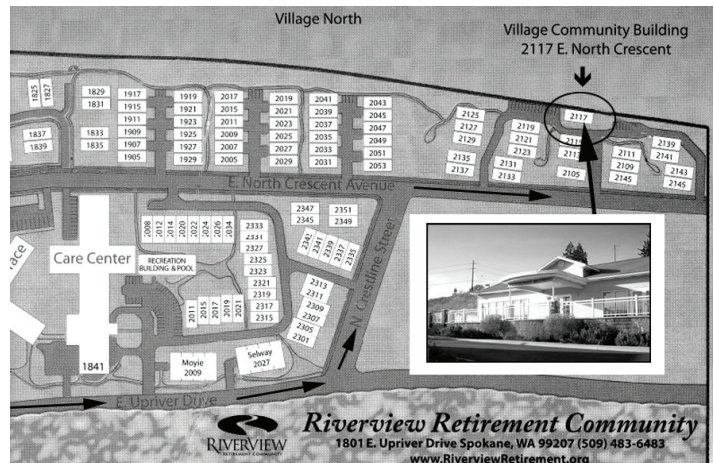
- I-90 West to Exit 282A
- Follow N. Hamilton St. to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**From North Spokane**

- Take US-395 S to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**Once you're on E. Upriver Drive (see map below):**

- Follow E. Upriver Drive to N. Crestline Street
- Turn Left at N. Crestline Street
- Turn Right on E. North Crescent Drive
- Proceed to entry on left showing numbers 2105-2145



Limited parking is available by the Village Community Building. Overflow parking is along E. North Crescent Ave.