

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 30
Issue 2
Oct. 2021

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

October 13, 2021, 7:00 p.m.

This meeting is only via Zoom on-line since pandemic conditions and prevention restrictions continue to keep us from meeting in person. To join the Zoom meeting

(ID: 830 3159 1406, Passcode: 633798), link to

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83031591406?pwd=VktyMUdka3dmVjFUTWdocVpYQ2wrdz09>

Winter Raptor Survey Project

presented by Jeff Fleischer



Jeff Fleischer was born and raised in southeast PA in a semi-rural area, developing a love of the outdoors, and wildlife in particular. He moved out west to attend Oregon State University in 1969 to pursue a Wildlife Management degree. During the summers, between school years, he was fortunate to

work as a student trainee for the US Fish and Wildlife Service on three different national wildlife refuges in the west. Upon graduation, his first permanent duty station was a year and a half at Malheur NWR, followed by a two-year assignment at a refuge in north TX, then finishing his career with an eight-year stint on the Klamath Basin NWR, where he developed a keen interest in birds of prey.

He then moved his family to the Willamette Valley where he worked another 25 years with the US Postal Service in Albany, OR. It was during that time in Albany where he spent a lot of time birding and ultimately developing a feel for how important Linn County (his home county) was for wintering birds of prey. Linn County is known as the grass seed capital of the world and as such supports a tremendous rodent population. A lot of winter days spent in the field yielded hundreds of birds of prey with a large variety of species attracted to this food base. The wildlife survey work that he accomplished while working on

the refuges created a desire to more formally census these wintering birds. This led to developing the current Winter Raptor Survey Project (WRSP), which completed its 17th survey season this past winter.

The WRSP is sponsored by the East Cascades Audubon Society chapter based in Bend, OR. The project was originally designed to survey only areas throughout OR and, through survey work, try to determine density and distribution for a variety of wintering raptor species, and monitoring changes from year-to-year. A desire to understand how OR fits in with the rest of the Pacific NW regarding birds of prey has led to a formidable expansion of the project.

The project is an incredible display of citizen science in serious action! The first year the project had 79 routes, the end of last winter saw that number increased to 452, covering over 27,000 miles of transects each month throughout OR, ID, WA, a small part of northern CA, and a small part of NE Utah, surveyed by a cadre of volunteers exceeding 350! The project will be expanded this coming season as there are more areas in WA that need to be covered to get an even fuller picture of raptor use in the Pacific NW.



Red-tailed Hawk
by WRSP member

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Spokane Audubon Society
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Owl illustrations on pg. 1, 11 and 12 © Jan Reynolds.



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The zoom presentation, titled “Winter Raptor Survey Project”, will offer the viewers a chance to see how this project was developed and how it has expanded over the years. It is full of wonderful photographs of all 31 species that have been found during project surveys. Most of the photos were taken by project participants which makes this program and the project a very personal experience for everyone involved. In addition to the photos, there will be



Bald Eagle
by WRSP member

accompanying charts and maps that help display the data that has been collected over the years. Come join us to learn about birds of prey in the Pacific Northwest through this great citizen science project and feel free to bring your questions, looking forward to a lively presentation and discussion time!

Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status August 21, 2021 through September 19, 2021:

Welcome and thanks to our **new members**:

Individual: Dennis Smith, Sydney Fowler

Contributing: Allison Bennett

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Nita Hamilton, Pam Wolfrum

Family: Buck & Sandy Domitrovich, Mike & Eileen McFadden, Harold & Karen Cottet, Patricia & Gerald Johnson

Supporting: Marc Lewis, Brian & Beth Miller, Edward Gibb & Family

Contributing: Margo Wolf & Leonard Shields

If you change your email address, please send your new email address to me, Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com and I will make sure you get the Pygmy Owl in your email inbox. Another way to get the Pygmy Owl is to go to our website: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/the-pygmy-owl/>

Member Profile:

CURTIS MAHON

by Madonna Luers

A Hollywood movie started Curtis Mahon birding about five years ago.



The 2011 American comedy “The Big Year,” based on Mark Obmascik’s 2004 non-fiction book “The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession” about three men competing to identify the most bird species in North America in a calendar year, was one of Curtis’ dad’s favorite movies because he found it “hilarious.”

“Putting Jack Black, Owen Wilson and Steve Martin together is guaranteed to be a good time,” Curtis said of the actors who played fictional birders on the same quest. “What really struck me from the movie was the characters having access to rare bird alerts. I tried to find something like that and came across eBird. From there I was hooked. I still get a short email alert from ebird each day for all rare birds seen in the US, just like a Kenny Bostick (the record-holding character played by Wilson) might if he were running a more modern big year.”

Curtis was born in 2001 in Anchorage, Alaska where his parents both worked in aviation, his mom as a pilot and his dad as a pilot/mechanic. He moved with them to Deer Park, Washington about 10 years ago and is currently in his senior year as a biology major, specializing in wildlife, at Eastern Washington University. For the past few summers he’s worked at Denali National Park in Alaska, Glacier National Park in Montana and, this year, doing field work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge near Great Falls, Montana.

Curtis first joined Spokane Audubon Society in February 2017 after helping out with the Spokane Christmas Bird Count (CBC). “That was also my first

real CBC,” he recalled, “and that sense of a community of birders that I received from that CBC was something that, as a beginning birder, I knew I wanted.”



Curtis Mahon recorded a Marbled Murrelet as his 500th life bird at Rosario Head in Skagit County last December.

Since then Curtis has participated in ten CBCs -- four more in Spokane, three in the Chewelah area, and three in the Cheney area. He’s also made a presentation at a chapter meeting about birding in Alaska.

Curtis often birds with a “bridge” camera -- bridging between point-and-shoot and digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras. His camera has a built-in long (65x) optical zoom lens that allows photographing birds at a distance and then reviewing the shot to identify species. “These super zoom cameras are great for identifying very distant shorebirds or getting close-ups of warblers in the bushes,” he said. “That variability helps greatly when you’re trying to use a camera as a replacement for binoculars.”

He loves to travel to see birds and tries to make one larger trip per year to see unique species. “I often go to Texas where I can visit my dad and see a plethora of amazing avifauna at the same time,” he said. “In

addition to the places I've previously worked and lived, I've also traveled to Hawaii, California, and Delaware. I also really enjoy travelling around to all parts of Spokane County. Making a lap around town from the Little Spokane River to Turnbull to the Saltese Wetlands is great summer fun."

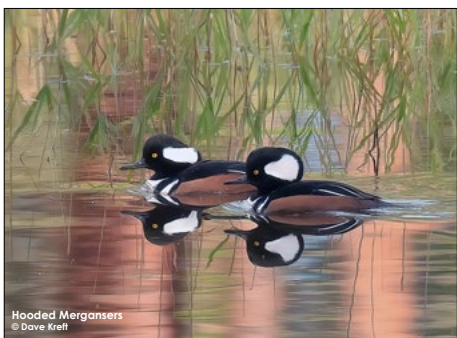
Curtis' favorite birding experience so far was at Hosmer Grove on the island of Maui, Hawaii. "It's a patch of non-native forest on Mount Haleakala at 7,000 feet where four species of honeycreepers are very common and not at all shy," he said. "Seeing scarlet red liwi, Apapane, and the island endemic Maui Alauahio at close range, while Amakihi and more call all around you in misty cloud forest, is magical. "

His favorite bird is the American Kestrel, for the male's striking colors and the female's subtle beauty. But he also likes their "personality," having met individuals in captivity that "are simply a joy and seem like super cute attention seekers."

Curtis' tip to birding newcomers is to use computer/mobile unit applications, such as Cornell's Merlin or Larkwire, to learn bird sounds. "The only way that works better would be hearing a bird song you don't recognize and then finding that bird singing," he said. "Using these apps or other web resources, like Xeno-canto or the Macauley library, allow you to hear a range of variation within a species' song or call that will help you be a better birder. Many of the best field guides today, such as Sibley's, can also be in an app on your phone for about the same price as the book, but with the benefit that the phone apps are able to be updated if a species taxonomy is changed, such as with the recent split of Mew Gull into Common and Short-billed."

Curtis believes two of the most important issues for the future of birds are feral cats and window strikes. "I feel these problems are sometimes overlooked for the more comprehensively important matters such as climate change," he said, "but these two factors are responsible for the deaths of three billion birds a year, with 2.4 billion of that from cats alone. Given the relative ease of fixing these issues, compared to climate change, we should be pressing governments to do more to protect our birds from these threats. Some of the best things we can do as individuals is to not feed feral cats, use enclosures to restrict outdoor pet cats, and use products that help make glass windows safe for birds."

2022 SAS calendars are now available



2022 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar
Birds of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho

Our calendar includes 27 beautiful photographs of local birds by 15 chapter member photographers, and a little bit of information about the 12 monthly featured species, including American White Pelican, Barred Owl, Greater Yellowlegs, and Lewis's Woodpecker.

For the first time, the calendar also includes notes on phenology -- seasonal natural events and their cycles, including bird migration and nesting --

The Spokane Audubon Society limited edition 2022 calendar is available for purchase and you won't want to miss this one.

to provide a general alert about what to watch for when. These notes throughout the calendar are based on several local "citizen science" sources. We think you'll find them interesting markers of our ever-changing seasons of bird watching.

You can purchase calendars on-line through our website (www.audubonspokane.org) with a credit-card for \$12, plus \$2 to cover processing fees and mailing to the postal address you provide. You can also send a check payable to "Spokane Audubon Society" for \$14 per calendar, with your name and postal mailing address, to Spokane Audubon Society, P.O. Box 9820, Spokane, WA 99209-9820. Calendars are also sold at Auntie's Bookstore in Spokane and The Well-Read Moose in Coeur d'Alene.

Proceeds from calendar sales help to fund the work we do to protect bird habitat and assist in securing public access to birding areas.

Migrating birds face challenges

As we watch so many species we've enjoyed this past spring and summer depart this fall for wintering grounds, here's some food for thought and action about the hazards of bird migration -- from habitat loss to light pollution to climate change -- excerpted from Cornell University Lab of Ornithology's Living Bird magazine article "Is Bird Migration Getting More Dangerous?" by Marc Devokaitis.

Imagine walking coast-to-coast across the United States and back—6,000 miles—over the span of a few weeks, using nothing but your own body power. Now imagine you are the size of a lime. That's akin to what some Blackpoll Warblers face as they start off from Colombia each spring on the way north to breeding grounds in the boreal forest, and back again in the fall.

Despite the grueling trip, blackpolls are among the most abundant warblers within their vast breeding range, which stretches from New England to the Maritime Provinces of Canada and across the continent to Alaska. But this once-robust population is crumbling, suffering a 90% loss in the last 50 years.

"There are more people, more structures, more lights, more weather. And the changes seem to be speeding up," says Andrew Farnsworth, a senior research associate at the Cornell Lab and project leader for the BirdCast program that studies bird migration via weather radar. According to Farnsworth, addressing these new threats is key to turning around the larger loss of 3 billion birds: "Finding out what happens to birds during these migrations has to be a focus if conservation measures are going to be effective."

the good news is that in the past decade, there has been a rapid rise in new research methods and new technologies to study and understand bird migration and a growing group of scientists like Rosenberg and Farnsworth dedicated to creating safer passage for migratory birds.

Migration is an exhausting and uncertain undertaking—but judging by the thousands of bird species world-wide that have evolved to migrate, it's a gamble that seems to pay off. Bird migration capitalizes

on seasonal surges in protein and nutrients—like insect hatches and fruiting seasons—that are needed for breeding. These globe-spanning voyages might seem extreme, but most migratory birds don't make their entire journey in one trip. Instead, they play a game of hemispheric hopscotch, skipping from one migratory stopover site to the next, like a family minivan hitting rest stops on a cross-country road trip.



Artwork by Charlie Harper

Amanda Rodewald, senior director of the Center for Avian Population Studies at the Cornell Lab, says that prioritizing the lands that are most important to birds on migration can guide conservation efforts to be more strategic and effective. In 2019, Rodewald was part of an international research team that used the Cornell Lab's eBird database to identify the most important areas in the Western Hemisphere for over 100 Neotropical migratory songbird species across their entire breeding, migratory, and wintering ranges. A second study in 2020 revealed that nearly half of priority stopover sites occur within human-dominated landscapes—and that fewer than 10% are protected.

"These kinds of models are game-changers for decision-makers, managers, and landowners who want to protect migratory birds in regions where land is already in high demand for other uses," Rodewald says. She points out that it's much more cost-effective to protect a stopover site than an entire landscape. "We can reduce the overall cost of conservation, but while maximizing positive outcomes. We can accomplish more with less."

Light Pollution and Migration

While long-distance migratory birds use their stopover habitats by day, for many, the actual miles clocked happen under the cover of darkness.

This strategy of migrating by night—when there are fewer predators, fairer winds, and cool damp air that minimizes water loss—has worked wonderfully for birds for millennia. On clear nights, nocturnal migration had the added perk of allowing birds to use the starry sky as a navigational aid.

But within the past century, birds' stellar view has faded. About a third of the world's human population lives in places where they can no longer see the Milky Way, and light pollution continues to increase by around 2% per year. Instead, a different set of constellations has sprung up from terra firma—billions of artificial lights beckoning brightly from below as they dim the view above.

Changing Climate and Migration

A 2015 study found that reported mass mortality events for birds as a group trended upward from 1940 to 2000, with weather events far and away the most common cause. And the weather is getting worse. The 2018 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change documents how a changing climate is causing more intense weather-related events around the globe—more intense rain and snow events, more droughts, more floods, more heat waves, more storm surges.

Light Pollution by Fabio Falchi/NASA



And it isn't just severe weather events, but the bigger picture of accelerating climate change that is poised to wreak havoc with long-distance bird migrations. A 2019 study using 24 years of radar data found that migrations across all bird species are shifting earlier by almost two days every decade.

While the future for bird migration is somewhat uncertain, Amanda Rodewald says we already know many ways that people can make it safer. Her punch list of priority conservation actions includes restoring ecologically degraded migratory stopover sites, developing incentives to protect sites on private lands, implementing public outreach campaigns like Lights Out and Keep Cats Indoors programs that reduce threats to birds on migration, and working to reduce the exposure to chemicals and pollution that can weaken the body condition of long-distance migratory birds.



by Frans Lanting

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

After the hottest, driest year ever, we have had several good rain systems. Migration has been interesting and maybe even a little exciting, with continued shorebird action at mudflats that normally wouldn't exist most years. In a short while, leaves will start falling and many thousands of ducks and geese will move into the Inland Northwest. As always, keep your eyes out for unusual sightings:

Snow Goose: Slavin Ranch (9/16-JI)

Greater White-fronted Goose: Kettle Falls (9/11-eBird); Boundary Creek WMA (9/11-JI)

Clark's Grebe: Sprague (8/21-TL); Mill Canyon (9/13-TL)

Anna's Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (8/31-MC); Pullman (9/13-eBird); Viola (9/16-NM); Moscow (9/17-NP)

Sandhill Crane: Kootenai NWR (8/8-SE and JR); Dreary (8/22-eBird); Reardan (9/1-MC); Boundary Creek WMA (9/11-JI); Saltese (9/17-MC)

Black-bellied Plover: Cow Lake (9/7-eBird); Sheep Lake (9/13-TL)

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER: Boundary Creek WMA (9/9-JR)

Sanderling: Sandpoint (9/7-JR); Slavin Ranch (9/9-JI); Sheep Lake (9/17-JI)

Short-billed Dowitcher: Sheep Lake (8/21-TL)

Sabine's Gull: Sandpoint (9/2-RDC); Calispell Lake (9/11-TL); Sprague (9/17-JI)

Franklin's Gull: Sandpoint (9/13-eBird)

Short-billed Gull: Sandpoint (9/1-JR)

Common Tern: Sandpoint (8/29-FC); Sprague (9/3-TL); Sunnyside Rd. (9/9-TL)

White-faced Ibis: Saltese Flats (8/25-FC and RC)

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK: Potlatch (8/24-NP)

Broad-winged Hawk: Saddle Pass (9/6-JR and SE); West Spokane (9/14-MW)

Lewis's Woodpecker: Usk (8/20-TL); Dreary (8/29-GL); Washtucna (9/5-RB)

Black-backed Woodpecker: Mt. Spokane SP (8/30-MS)

White-winged Crossbill: Bunchgrass Meadows (8/9-AT); Ball Lakes (8/26-eBird); Mt. Spokane SP (9/2-TL)

Lesser Goldfinch: West Spokane (8/19-MW); Feryn Conservation Area (9/1-MS); Melville (9/2-SS); Wentel Grant Park (9/2-JI); Mead (9/7-TL)

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Little Spokane NA (9/11-NE); Viola (9/13-NM)

White-throated Sparrow: Potlatch (9/3-NP); Barstow (9/9-DB)

OVENBIRD: Ritzville (9/8-eBird)

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER: Washtucna (8/29-BM)

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER: Pullman (9/8-MM)

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK: Pine Bluff (9/17-AT)

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; TB-Taylor Baldwin; Marlene Cashen; FC-Forest Cordoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; Jacob Elonen; NE-Norm Engeland; FF-Fred Forssell; BF-Bob Flores; DG-Don Goodwin; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; CH-Cameron Heusser; I-Jon Isacoff; LJ-Louie Johnson; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-David Kreft; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; CL-Carl Lundblad; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; WM-Will Merg; RuM-Russ Morgan; TO-Tim O'Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; JP-Jim Patten; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark Selle; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; SW-Steven Warren; KW-Kevin Waggoner; MW-Michael Woodruff

Grouse funds helping restore Douglas County's Spiva Butte

by Madonna Luers

The Spokane Audubon Society (SAS) board of directors recently voted to use some of the chapter's prairie grouse habitat restoration funds to help restore habitat lost to wildfire at Douglas County's Spiva Butte Nature Preserve.

After wildfire in September 2020 destroyed shrub-steppe habitat at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area in Lincoln County, SAS solicited donations for restoration. The SAS board initially donated \$1,000 through the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's fund to purchase seed for WDFW's first restoration efforts.

SAS was committed to providing up to an additional \$10,000 directly to WDFW for forb purchase and planting. But \$7,311 of the chapter's state ALEA (Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account) grant funds for grouse monitoring were shifted to habitat restoration at Swanson Lakes. These grant funds were designed to reimburse lek-monitoring volunteers for mileage, but the Covid pandemic restricted volunteer activity and some funds were unused.

Ongoing generous donations, along with annual contributions from the Crosetto Foundation for upland game bird and waterfowl habitat work, have brought

the SAS grouse fund to near \$14,000. But at this time WDFW has no immediate need for additional funds for Swanson Lakes recovery.

However, the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust is in need of funds to restore shrub-steppe and riparian habitat at its Spiva Butte Nature Preserve where nearly all 1,396 acres burned in another September 2020 wildfire. Spiva Butte provides critical shrub-steppe habitat for one of the last two viable sage-grouse populations left in Washington state. Its riparian corridors also provide critical wintering habitat for sharp-tailed grouse. A major donor in purchasing the preserve was the Crosetto Foundation.

The SAS board voted unanimously to contribute \$10,000 to the Spiva Butte restoration project since it is in keeping with the designation of donated funds. The remaining grouse funds will be kept in reserve for any additional needs at either Swanson Lakes or other areas vital to the survival of our threatened grouse species.

Spiva Butte
By Ferdi Businger





Chipping Sparrow

BIRD OF THE WEEK

The dainty little Chipping Sparrow is a familiar sight in suburbs and backyards across North America. In the springtime, this sparrow is easily recognized by its bright reddish crown, bold black and white facial pattern, and unstreaked gray breast and rump. This coloration becomes less conspicuous during the fall and winter. Juvenile birds are heavily streaked, and might be mistaken for another bird species altogether, such as a House Finch.

Adaptability is one of the main reasons this small sparrow is so widespread. Many sparrow species occur only in grasslands or shrublands, but the Chipping Sparrow can be found in a wide variety of open forests and edges, favoring those with lots of shrubs and other undergrowth. It's not limited to these areas, though, and is also common in suburban yards and parks, golf courses, orchards and agricultural areas, and many other developed landscapes.

The Chipping Sparrow is easy to observe as it feeds, since it often forages on the ground in open suburban habitats. It is a common sight under backyard feeders, where it favors sunflower seeds and cracked corn.

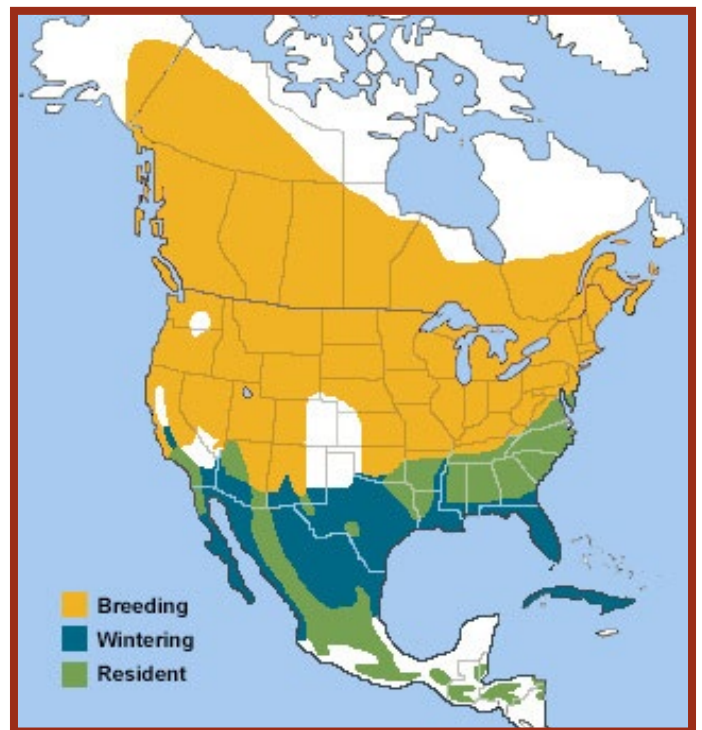
Like other members of its family, such as the Song Sparrow and the White-throated Sparrow, the Chipping Sparrow switches its diet with the seasons, feeding mainly on insects during the spring and summer and seeds in fall and winter. (This reliance on insects is one of the reasons native plants, which support insect diversity, are so important.)

Chippies are quite sociable during the winter and can be found feeding in mixed flocks with other sparrows such as White-crowned and Grasshopper Sparrows, along with other bird species.

Prolific as well as adaptable, the Chipping Sparrow usually produces two broods per season; the male cares for fledglings from the first brood while the female starts a second. Fledglings remain near the nest with their parents for another few weeks. Once fully independent, they form flocks with other young birds, eventually joining groups of post-breeding adults before migration begins.



Chipping Sparrow © Evan Lipton



Chipping Sparrow Range

Pygmy Owl Contributions

Spokane Audubon Society members who want to contribute to the Pygmy Owl newsletter can submit articles on, and photos of, birds and bird conservation issues to info@spokaneaudubon.org for publishing consideration.

The newsletter deadline is the 20th of the month for the next month's edition.



American Kestrel
© Bob Cashen

Details of the field trips will be found on our website <https://www.audubonspokane.org/upcoming-events>.

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual Membership and Donation:

Student (under 21): \$10 per year _____

Individual: \$20 per year _____

Family: \$30 per year _____

Supporting: \$50 per year _____

Contributing: \$100 per year _____

Lifetime: \$500 _____

Other: _____

Annual memberships provide ongoing support for our many conservation and educational activities.

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To:

*The Spokane Audubon Society advocates
for birds and their habitats in the Inland Northwest
and connects people with nature.*

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