

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 31
Issue 2
Oct. 2022

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

Oct. 12, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

Hybrid Meeting for October

Meet and Greet at 6:15

Our October meeting details below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83649488130?pwd=REImS0I5VTIrUHJmRTg4SWZaZmZ0dz09>

(Meeting ID: 836 4948 8130 Passcode: 372029)

Learn how to prevent bird-window collisions at Oct. 12 first “hybrid” meeting

Our Oct. 12 meeting, featuring information on preventing bird-window collisions, will be both in-person and available via Zoom online. This “hybrid” meeting is a first for us since we’ve been conducting monthly meetings via Zoom ever since the pandemic began in March, 2020. Chapter president Alan McCoy hopes that the combination works for both those who want the in-person experience and those who find it easier to attend from home.

Alan is also the program presenter for this month, showing the displays of bird-window collision prevention methods that he created for Earth Day events last April. Window collisions are second only to cats as the highest cause of death for North American birds. Alan’s displays show six “windows,” each with a different way to discourage birds from flying into the glass, and viewable from the “inside” and the “outside.” To one person attending the program (whether in person or on Zoom) Alan will give away Acopian BirdSaver materials and instructions that can be used to prevent bird collisions for one window.

The 6:30 p.m. meeting will be held at a new location for us -- The Hive, a Spokane Public Library at 2904 E. Sprague Ave., where there is plenty of parking. Those who prefer to join on-line via Zoom meeting can link to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83649488130?pwd=REImS0I5VTIrUHJmRTg4SWZaZmZ0dz09> (Meeting ID: 836 4948 8130 Passcode: 372029)



**See Hybrid Protocol
on page 3**

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



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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status August 19, 2022 through September 20, 2022:

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

Individual: Cheryle Jones-Johnson, Daniel Knierim

Family: Peggy Clemons

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Tina Wynecoop, Nita Hamilton, Debbie Stempf

Family: Mary Benham, Mike & Eileen McFadden, James & Mary Prudente, Harold & Karen Cottet

Supporting: Brian & Beth Miller

Contributing: John Stuart & Carol Mack, David Goss

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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>.



Northern Flicker
© Alan McCoy

Pandemic Appreciation?



Amidst the tragedies of the Covid pandemic are a few good things. One of these is that we learned how to use Zoom. I am excited that we are now able to have meetings in the same physical space where those who are able to attend face-to-face can do so. But I am equally excited that we can now include many others who cannot, or choose not to, be there in person. Virtual attendance is a greener option as it cuts down on transportation emissions. But it also allows those who live in far flung places to participate, and we can feature presentations from folks who live anywhere on the planet! Zoom and other video conferencing technologies have been around a while now, but the pandemic forced us to use it in classrooms, businesses, churches and all sorts of organizations. And so, we did.

Now, however, we are able to host live meetings at which we have a live audience and a virtual audience participating in the same meeting. This opens up a great opportunity and also demands that we learn how to meet the needs of all who attend, whether they be in the room or at home. We have purchased some A/V equipment to enable everyone to hear one another, which is probably the most critical piece of the puzzle. Of course, there is a video component that will be tricky to manage as someone will need to handle the camera that is focused on the in-person presenter as they move about the room. Yours truly is the October presenter and I admit that I can get a bit animated at times so our videocam operator will have their work cut out for them. Any experienced videocam operators want to volunteer? Lindell Haggin, who has hosted our Zoom meetings for the last couple of years, will be our host again (only this time she will be in the room). She will field the chat questions for the virtual audience. Jenny Emerson will be in the room operating the mixer board to handle all the audio issues.

Below this article are some guidelines that we hope will help to make our debut hybrid meeting a success. In some ways this opportunity is brought to you by the Covid pandemic. Would that we had been able to come to this without the horrors of this disease. I hope to see you all at the October meeting whether you attend in person or via Zoom.

by Alan McCoy

Hybrid Presentation Protocol

We want to include everyone, whether you are here in person or here via Zoom.

Our location is at the Hive, which is part of the Spokane Public Library. We must be out of the room by 8 pm and it will take about 30 minutes for us to pack up our equipment and to clean up the room. Thus, our presentation will be from 6:30 to 7:30 pm to allow us to respect their schedule.

Whether you are attending in person or via Zoom, we ask that you arrive 10-15 minutes early. Since the presentation will start at 6:30pm sharp, we want to have enough time for our Zoomers to get admitted to the meeting by the Zoom host, and for everyone to have a chance to “meet and greet” each other.

All audio equipment in the room needs to be muted to avoid possible feedback with our audio equipment.

When those in the room have a question, please walk to the mic located on the table. The mics already will be turned on so please avoid pressing the button (pressing the button will mute the mic). Our speaker will call on you. Speak directly into the mic so Zoomers can hear your question or comment.

When a Zoomer wants to ask a question, either use the chat feature or unmute yourself and “raise your hand” Zoom style and wait for our Zoom host to call on you.

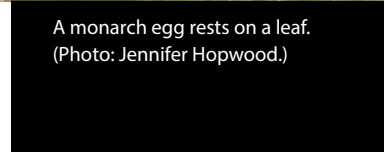
If you cannot hear someone, please speak up to let us know.

Please be patient with us as we learn how to host a successful hybrid meeting.

Your feedback is welcome. Please let us know what worked and what didn't so we can improve your experience at our programs



A western monarch drinks nectar from milkweed blooms. (Photo: Stephanie McKnight.)



A monarch egg rests on a leaf. (Photo: Jennifer Hopwood.)



DC Monarch Summit Secures Funding

Monarch Conservation

This summer, Xerces staff collaborated on a two-day Monarch Butterfly Summit at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, D.C. Hosted by Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley in collaboration with the Department of the Interior, the event brought together key stakeholders to discuss solutions to reverse population decline of the monarch butterfly, particularly the western monarch population.

As part of the Summit, Senator Merkley and Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced \$1 million for western monarchs that will go to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for western monarch grants. In addition, they announced the establishment of a Pollinator Conservation Center of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, whose first hire will be a western monarch coordinator.

Senator Merkley has been a champion for conservation since he entered the senate. The Senator convened the Monarch Butterfly Summit to elevate the conservation issues that western monarchs face, and to include policymakers in work sessions to identify solutions. Working closely with the USFWS and Xerces, Senator Merkley ensured that issues like pesticides, the availability of early emerging native milkweeds in the spring breeding areas, loss and degradation of western monarch overwintering sites, and other important issues would be highlighted throughout the meeting. We hope this will lead to additional focus on key priorities for recovering the western monarch population, such as protecting and restoring overwintering sites, protecting monarch habitat from insecticides, and scaling up production of early-emerging native milkweeds like *Asclepias californica* to support the first generation of monarchs in priority zones.

We want to recognize our members and donors, Xerces' hardworking staff, and our partners in conservation. All of us together form a network of conservationists working to bring back the beloved monarch, as well as so many other vulnerable invertebrates. This summit would not have been possible without all of us working together.



Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

August and September have been seasonable, with one additional heat wave in August and pleasant warm weather in September. A week of smoke in peak migration was unwelcome but likely had little effect on actual bird behavior. During some fall migrations we get good shorebird activity and sometimes good passerine activity. This year has been definitely a “passerine year”, with at least 8 Eastern US vagrants recorded in the region, including a very rare PHILADELPHIA VIREO, only the 6th ever recorded in WA. As we enter October, be on the lookout for late migrants that fell behind the group, even as overall migrant numbers dwindle. Sightings represented in all CAPS are less than annual in our coverage region.

Harlequin Duck: Bunchgrass Meadows (9/4-AT)

Sandhill Crane: Pend Oreille WMA (8/22-eBird); Kootenai NWR (8/30-eBird); Plummer (9/1-eBird)

WILLET: Cow Lake (9/3-JI and TL)

Franklin Gull: Sprague Lake (8/30-TL)

Common Tern: Sprague Lake (9/3-JI and TL)

Lewis’s Woodpecker: Harrison (8/20-RyB); Dover Bay (9/5-RC); Steptoe Butte (9/7-RB); Bayview (9/10-RyB); Bonner’s Ferry (9/17-JR)

PHILADELPHIA VIREO: Steptoe Butte (9/6-eBird)

White-winged Crossbill: Bunchgrass Meadows (9/4-BM, RB, MM)

Lesser Goldfinch: Orchard Bluff (8/21-AT); Spokane (8/24-eBird); Sprague (8/30-TL); Fort Spokane (9/8-TL)

Golden-crowned Sparrow: U of I Arboretum (9/10-MM)

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER: U of I Arboretum (9/14-BM)

MAGNOLIA WARBLER: Washtucna (9/9-eBird); U of I Arboretum (9/14-BM)

BLACKPOLL WARBLER: Steptoe Butte (9/27-RB, MM, BM); Washtucna (9/9-eBird)

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER: Washtucna (9/11-eBird)

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER: U of I Arboretum (9/14-BM)



Philadelphia Vireo
© Mark Morse



Black-throated Gray Warbler
© Mark Daly

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; RyB-Ryan Bart; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; Marlene Cashen-MC; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; Jacob Elonen-JE; NE-Norm Engeland; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; LF-Louie Johnson; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; CiM-Cindy McCormick; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; WM-Will Merg;; TO-Tim O’Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; BP-Brian Pendleton; MR-Maxine Reid; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark Selle; KS-Katie Sorenson; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; WY-Will Young

Member Profile:

Shenandoah Marr

by Madonna Luers

Our Spokane chapter's conservation chair, who launched our "Give A Hoot!" blog in August (see <https://www.audubonspokane.org/give-a-hoot-1/2022/8/20/this-coffee-is-for-the-birds>) is one of our newest members.



Shenandoah Marr

Shenandoah Marr joined in January, 2022, after participating in our Christmas Bird Count. "I had always thought of Audubon as just a bird-watching group," Shenandoah said. "But I learned from our chapter president, Alan McCoy, that Audubon is first and foremost a conservation group. I had been looking for something to do in

the community that combined my interests in wildlife, forests, ecology, and environmental activism. Spokane Audubon has helped me be a part of something bigger than myself."

Shenandoah was born in Santa Barbara, California, in 1975, and has lived most of her life in California, including two summers in Sequoia National Park, and in Hawaii. She moved to Spokane in 2017 after visiting friends here and finding it full of parks and natural spaces and affordable housing. Currently employed as a Licensed Veterinary Technician Supervisor at a veterinary clinic, she holds a B.S. degree in Biology from Humboldt State University and an M.S. in Conservation Biology and Environmental Science from the University of Hawaii.

She participated in a Christmas Bird Count in Ventura County, California, in 2013, but Shenandoah didn't really get into birding until very recently. "I have always liked birds but never bothered to learn much about any other than very common, very rare, or colorful birds," she said, "like native Hawaiian birds, ma-

caws, toucans, Scrub jays, Acorn woodpeckers, and California condors. I always was far more interested in reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. Getting a little older, having less time and energy, and living in a place with real winters all led me to become more enthusiastic about birds over the last year or so. My partner, Dave, and I installed a bird bath in our backyard right after the heat dome in 2021, because I wanted to do something to help our neighborhood wildlife. Birds and insects showed up and I started to really observe them and then I was hooked!" Although Dave isn't quite as committed as Shenandoah to seeking out birds, they recently registered their South Hill suburban property with the National Wildlife Federation as "Certified Wildlife Habitat." Part of the criteria is providing a place for wildlife to raise young, she explained, and they watched a successful clutch of pygmy nuthatches this year.

Her favorite birding experience came this year during a camping trip in the redwood forests of Mendocino County, California. "After spending about 40 minutes looking for birds without much success, I went back to my campsite," she recalls. "A few minutes later a Downy Woodpecker came to a tree about 15 feet away and put on a great show, boring into the branches and picking at insects. I find woodpeckers quite entertaining and it is always a joy to see them."



Shenandoah hasn't really travelled specifically to see birds yet, but spent time birdwatching during recent travels in Australia, Ecuador, and Costa Rica with

the educational organization Save The Frogs. She saw Fairy Penguins, Galahs, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Kookaburra, Rainbow Lorikeets and Red-tailed Black Cockatoos in Australia; Andean Cock of the Rock, toucans and hummingbirds in Ecuador; and several woodpecker and hummingbird species in

Costa Rica/Osa Peninsula. “They were easier to find than the amphibians I’d traveled to see,” she said.

Shenandoah’s favorite birds are hummingbirds of all species because they remind her of her late mother. “Whenever she saw a hummingbird, even though they were fairly common in Southern California, she would excitedly call out ‘Ohhhhh, there’s a hummingbird!’,” she recalled. “Living in Spokane, where they are only here for a brief part of the year, makes seeing them even more special.”

Her tips for new birders are to be patient, don’t expect to be an expert right away, go birding as often as possible with experienced birdwatchers, and use an app such as Merlin to learn what is around at a given time of year. She said she recently observed a lot of different birds she’d never seen just around her home by using the Merlin app sound identification feature.

She believes the way to get more young people interested in birding is to make connections between birds and something they care about. “For example, if a young child is crazy about dinosaurs, have them watch some birds and explain how they are living dinosaurs.” It’s also important for experienced birders to invite young people or birding newcomers to go with them and help them learn what is right here, she says. “It’s a great way to build enthusiasm and make birdwatching contagious!”

Shenandoah, who also belongs to the Lands Council, 350 Spokane and Spokane Zero Waste, sees habitat loss, pesticides and climate change as the most important conservation issues. “Actions such as creating wildlife habitat on your property or in your community, reducing consumption, and composting are important because they empower us as individuals, while also making a difference,” she said. “Doing small things that are within our control makes us feel as if we are contributing solutions to challenges that can seem overwhelming. Larger scale actions, such as contacting our elected representatives and corporations, and responding to requests for public comments on proposed development projects, are extremely important. The more people who voice concerns over climate change, pesticide use, and loss of habitat, the more our voices will be heard, and change can happen.”

Volunteers needed for Climate Watch bird surveying

To test the predictions of Audubon’s Birds and Climate Change Report that two-thirds of North American bird species are vulnerable to climate change, volunteers are needed for a new bird surveying effort.

Climate Watch surveys aim to document species’ responses to climate change by having volunteer community scientists in the field look for birds where Audubon’s climate models project they should be. The surveys are focused on “target species” for which climate models have strong predictions and high detectability in the field. Current target species include bluebirds, nuthatches, goldfinches and towhees.

Climate Watch occurs over two distinct 30-day periods each year, in the winter non-breeding season, January 15 – February 15, and in the summer breeding season, May 15 – June 15.

Participation can be either in a coordinated group effort (maximizing data collection efforts for an area) or as an individual participant.

The first steps are to select a target species that you are confident you can identify, and then claim a 10 x 10 km (6.2 miles) square area to survey through the Audubon Climate Watch online ESRI GIS tool. Then choose 12 survey points within that square area, at least 200 meters apart, with the best habitat for your target species. At each of the 12 points you will conduct a 5-minute bird survey during one day of each survey period, recording the number and species of all birds seen or heard. The final step is to submit your data online through an app or desktop data submission system to the Climate Watch team.

For more information about participating in Climate Watch, see <https://www.audubon.org/news/participant-resources-climate-watch>.



Lindell has retired; we need a new treasurer!

Lindell Haggin deservedly has retired from her 30 years of service as our chapter treasurer, so we need a new treasurer. This position is vital to our small organization, but it does not require a 30-year commitment!

SAS board member Jenny Emerson, who manages our website and on-line services, graciously has offered to act as interim treasurer until the end of the year, when we hope that someone else in the chapter steps up to fill the position for a two-year term.

The job requires attention to detail and about 4-6 hours per month. The chapter provides the Quicken software used to manage our finances and balance our books.

Please contact Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com or call (509) 999-9512 for a more detailed description of the job. Thank you for considering this opportunity to serve with us in our mission to conserve and connect.



Lindell Haggin



Jenny Emerson



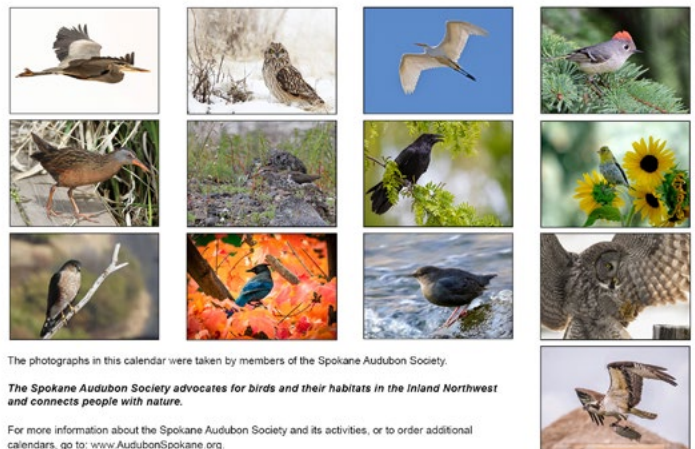
2023 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar is Available!

We are pleased to share the 2023 Spokane Audubon Society Birds of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho calendar with you. Despite increased paper costs, the calendar is still a bargain at \$12.00. They are available for purchase on-line, with an additional mailing cost charge of \$2.50 per calendar mailed, at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/>. They will also be available at our in-person meetings this fall and at Auntie's Bookstore in downtown Spokane.

Twenty-one of our SAS members submitted 76 bird photographs, and 14 of those images are featured in the calendar. Our panel of judges were photographer Bob Stephens, retired Spokesman-Review outdoor editor Rich Landers, and SAS members Joyce Alonso, Sally English, and Gary Lee. They had a difficult job selecting 28 images to include in the calendar, from a Great Gray Owl to a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. For the second year, the calendar also features phenology notes that alert birders of bird species to watch for throughout the year



2023 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar
Birds of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho



The photographs in this calendar were taken by members of the Spokane Audubon Society.

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

For more information about the Spokane Audubon Society and its activities, or to order additional calendars, go to: www.AudubonSpokane.org

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Transitioning to the Age of Electric Vehicles

By Tom Benemann, Founding Member, A Clean New World

The future of electric vehicles (EVs) is now. US auto executives agree with President Biden that one-half of new car sales will be electric by 2030. The state of California just passed a law that says all new car sales in the state must be of the EV variety by the year 2035. In other words, there's no turning back on EV's. EVs will become the most plentiful, visible, and personal of methods employed to fight the effects of climate change.

The transportation industry is the single largest producer of carbon emissions in the United States. EVs will change that because they emit no carbon dioxide and run 95% more efficiently than gas-powered vehicles.

But, like most new technology, there will be a transition period from one hundred plus years of carbon-emitting, gas-powered vehicles to the zero-emitting EVs. Some observers have expressed reservations about the transition. These reservations include: EV battery plug-in to an electrical grid still fed by fossil fuels, the availability of charging stations, continued mining practices that are environmentally harmful, and battery recycling.

Let's look at each one. Government statistics from 2021 say that fossil fuels provide close to 60% of our nation's electricity. The remaining 40% comes from renewables like wind, solar, hydro, and nuclear. As the country responds to the devastating effects of climate change, more and more of our grid will be powered by these alternative, and cleaner, sources. And states like Washington are forcing utilities to make the conversion to clean energy now.

So while the first big wave of new EVs will, like new and existing gas powered vehicles, depend heavily on fossil fuel generated electricity, that dependency will diminish as more electricity from renewables comes on line. The charging station landscape is changing and will change dramatically as more EVs hit the road. The number of EVs on the road has been increasing since 2010. And as previously mentioned, the number will increase dramatically in the near future. The US will need a lot more charging stations than the currently installed base of forty-two thousand to meet the demand, especially for drivers used to traveling long distances. The

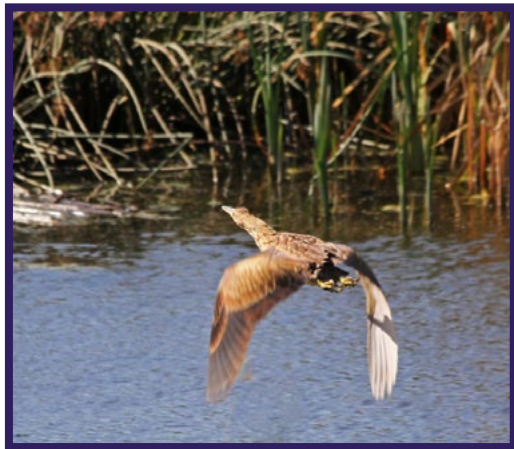
EV charging infrastructure is being built by network charging companies, auto manufacturers (Tesla being the foremost), power utilities, oil companies (that's right!), and government agencies. Utilities like Spokane-based Avista have launched programs to build charging stations along the nation's highways. With both the government and private enterprise strongly behind the build-out, there is reason for confidence that charging station installs will meet the demand presented by sales of EVs.

Then there are the related questions of mineral mining and battery recycling. Let's start with mining. There is no question that the history of mining practices, including that of lead required for batteries in gas-powered vehicles and nickel and lithium for EV batteries, has been detrimental to the environment. But things are changing. Environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) has emerged as a major consideration for leading mining companies, defining how and where they incorporate these issues into global and local business structures. An international committee, which includes the UN, World Bank, and other recognized institutions, is monitoring the ESG performance of mining companies around the world.

Of course, not all nickel, lithium, cobalt, or other EV metals mining projects will be green. But there is hope that the mining industry will find new ways to clean up its act, so to speak. And with the recent passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, greater oversight of mining practices likely will be possible as the sourcing for critical battery elements shifts to the US and its free trade agreement partners. Nickel has been in the news ever since Elon Musk called for more production in a post-earnings phone call in July, saying "Tesla will give you a giant contract for a long period of time if you mine nickel efficiently and in an environmentally sensitive way." Nickel is a key component in batteries; Tesla buys nickel-cobalt-manganese (NCM) from LG in South Korea and nickel-cobalt-aluminum (NCA) from Panasonic. Only 5% of the world's nickel goes into batteries now; the rest goes into making stainless steel. But this is going to change as more companies start producing electric cars and pickups. According to Zach Sha-

han of CleanTechnica, Ford's F150 electric pickup will use NCM batteries that are 90% nickel. Finally, battery recycling started in the 1990's. Today, more than 99% of car batteries are recycled. What about the future of battery recycling for EVs? Naturally, as EVs become popular, there will be great demand for recycling aging EV batteries. It's estimated that today there are fewer than a dozen EV battery recycling facilities around the world, four reportedly in the US. According to London-based Circular Energy Storage, a firm that tracks the lithium-ion battery recycling market, about one hundred companies worldwide recycle batteries or plan to do so soon. One Canadian company, Li-Cycle, is constructing North America's largest EV battery recycling plant in Rochester, NY. Even better news is that EV experts say current lithium-ion batteries last two to four times longer than conventional lead batteries and cleaner methods of recycling are being developed.

The transition to the Age of the Electric Vehicle will take some time, but it holds the promise of a cleaner, less polluted environment that successfully addresses climate change.



Turnbull Wanderings

by Carlene Hardt

At Turnbull this week, I was startled when a Bittern burst out of the reeds on Middle Pine lake and then disappeared again in the cattails. I never did hear its unusual call to know that it was around.

According to weather folklore, more black fuzz on a Woolly Bear caterpillar in the Fall means a longer, colder, and possibly snowier winter to come. If there is more reddish-brown, especially in the middle of the caterpillar, that's a sign of a mild winter. Well, according to this caterpillar, it looks like we might have a longer, colder winter!

I spotted a House Finch way up on a branch. It had a bit of red on it to help identify it.

I haven't seen a Yellow-rumped Warbler before. They are the most common warbler in North America. They're fast enough to catch insects in midair! In winter they spend lots of time eating berries from shrubs. They are short to medium distance migrants, and they are one of the last warblers to leave their breeding grounds in the Fall, and one of the first to return in the Spring.

The cooler weather is here and bird migration is beginning. Keep your eyes out for those birds just passing through that we only see during migration!



All photos by Carlene Hardt



“Howdy Neighbor!”

In some parts of the American West, the long-legged Burrowing Owl is known as the “howdy owl” because it seems to nod in greeting to passers-by. This up-and-down action, however, is really just the owl sizing up potential danger.

The Burrowing Owl’s species name *cunicularia* comes from the Latin word for “burrower” or “miner,” and, true to its name, it nests underground, usually in a burrow taken over from another species sharing its habitat, often a prairie dog, ground squirrel, or tortoise. In areas of soft or sandy soil, this small owl, which is about the size of an American Robin, may dig its own burrow.

Underground Adaptations

The Burrowing Owl has several adaptations more often seen in subterranean mammals such as gophers and moles. It has a higher tolerance for carbon dioxide than do most other birds, which allows it to nest and roost in tunnels lacking fresh airflow. It also has a habit of storing extra food against times of scarcity. (See “Keeping the Larder Supplied,” below.)

Unlike other owls such as the Barn Owl and Long-eared Owl, the Burrowing Owl is often active during the day. Inhabiting wide-open spaces, this owl perches on the ground, where it’s effectively camouflaged by its brown and white-speckled plumage. When threatened, it will often run or flatten itself against the ground, rather than fly away.

Songs and Sounds

Burrowing Owls have a number of different vocalizations, including calls given by adults to stake claim to territory and court mates, to express alarm, and (in the case of young), to beg for food. Young Burrowing Owls can also emit a raspy scream that mimics a rattlesnake rattle, which may discourage potential predators.

Breeding and Feeding

Although most female raptors are larger than their mates, both sexes of Burrowing Owl are about the same size. Burrowing Owl pairs usually only stay together for one breeding season, starting in early spring, when males posture, call, and take short flights to court potential mates.

Once mated, the male locates a suitable tunnel, which he lines with dried plants, feathers, and dry, shredded cow manure. This behavior masks the birds’ scent from potential predators and attracts beetles and other large insects, providing easy prey. After the male finishes arranging the nest burrow, the female moves in, laying a clutch of six to 12 eggs. The male stays nearby in a separate burrow, and provides food for the female as she incubates. Both parents feed the young after they hatch. Nestling Burrowing Owls fledge in about six weeks, then remain in their parents’ territory as they finish maturing.

Burrowing Owls: 1 Adult, 4 young
© Dan Lee



Keeping the Larder Supplied

Although Burrowing Owls are often active during the day, they do most of their hunting from dusk until dawn, using their night vision and acute hearing to full advantage. Long legs enable these unusual owls to pursue quarry on foot as well as in flight. They predominantly prey upon invertebrates, including grasshoppers, crickets, moths, and beetles, but will also snatch small snakes, lizards, mice, voles, shrews, frogs, songbirds, and even ducklings. Burrowing Owls cache food, stashing it in their burrows to ensure an adequate supply during the nesting season. When prey is abundant, their underground larders can contain up to several hundred items!

Region and Range



Like the Short-eared Owl, the Burrowing Owl is widespread throughout the Americas, with up to 22 subspecies recognized. This species ranges from southern Canada through southern Mexico; is found in Florida and on a number of Caribbean islands; and is widely distributed in South America, including eastern Colombia, northern Venezuela, and western Guyana, and from western Ecuador to southern Brazil, south to Tierra del Fuego. It is rare in Central America in winter.

Birds that breed in Canada and the northern United States usually migrate south to Mexico and the southern U.S. for the winter months, but most Burrowing Owls are year-round residents of grasslands, prairie, pastures, or deserts within their range. If welcomed and not harassed, they can also adapt to similar areas provided by human activity, such as golf courses and airports.



Burrowing Owls
© Greg Thompson

Leave the Leaves

By David Mizejewski, NWF

Leaves are starting to change color and begin to fall to the ground. Did you know that leaving the leaves in your yard or garden not only saves you time and energy but also benefits wildlife? Here are a few good reasons to put down the rake:

- Many wildlife species use the leaf layer as their primary habitat: salamanders, chipmunks, wood frogs, box turtles, toads, shrews, earthworms, millipedes, and thousands of insect species
- Provide food for wildlife: creatures like earthworms and millipedes reside in and decompose leaf litter, and also are themselves a source of food for bigger wildlife like birds and toads
- Increase fertility of your soil: as the leaves decompose, nutrients are added to your soil, and also allows for greater water retention

Western Toad
©Bentler.us



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.



The Pygmy Owl
Spokane Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9820
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The Spokane Audubon Society advocates for birds and their habitats in the Inland Northwest and connects people with nature.

Visit our website:

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

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