Pygny Owl The Newsletter of the Spokane Audubon Society

Volume 31 Issue 4 Dec. 2022

Dec. 14, 2022, 6:30 p.m.

This meeting will again be a "hybrid" – you can attend in-person at The Hive, a Spokane Public Library at 2904 E. Sprague Ave. where there is plenty of parking, starting at 6:15 p.m. for our usual meet-and-greet, or you can attend virtually on-line, starting at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom link

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89648925787?pwd=OFAzY2RBYVd4RHRpQ2x6S2pDM0t3Zz09

Meeting ID: 896 4892 5787, Passcode: 422297. See our hybrid meeting protocol on page 8.

The in-person meeting will include recognition of some of our Save-A-Bird Team volunteers, some holiday refreshments, and a continuation of our fund-raiser with your donations for gently-used bird books and other bird-related items. Bring cash (or checks) for inexpensive holiday shopping.

Wolf Conservation and Management in Washington

presented by Ben Maletzke

With State and Federal protections, wolves have returned on their own by dispersing into Washington from neighboring states and provinces as well as dispersing from packs established within the State.

The Lookout Pack, which was the first known pack in 80 years, settled in northcentral Washington in 2008. They continue to steadily recolonize parts of Washington, including the northeast, the Blue Mountains in the southeast, and are working their way south down the Cascades into the central and southern portions of Washington. Statewide Wolf Specialist, Ben Maletzke, will present information on the ecology and status of wolves in Washington.



Gray Wolf © WDFW



Ben and a local Gray Wolf © WDFW

Ben has worked as a Wildlife Biologist with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), conducting research and management on lynx, cougar, black bear and wolves since 2000. He currently serves as the Statewide Wolf Specialist for WDFW.

The Pygmy Owl

Volume 31 Issue 4 Dec. 2022

The Pygmy Owl, the newsletter of the Spokane Audubon Society, is published monthly, September through June.

Spokane Audubon Society P.O. Box 9820 Spokane, WA 99209-9820

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



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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status October 20, 2022 through November 20, 2022:

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

Individual: Andre Wamsley, Ruby Hammond Supporting: Bill & Ann-Scott Ettinger, George Stampher, Donna Hoskins, Patricia Giesa

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Ardy Bass, Michelle Ho, Steven

Siegfried

Family: Theresa Puthoff & Larry Deaver, Russ & Marian Frobe, Georgina De La Garza,

Jerry & Jennifer King

Supporting: Brenda Klohe

Contributing: Michael & Pam Dixson,

Sharon Lindsay



Pileated Woodpeckers by Alan McCoy

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

There was no fall. Simply put, it went summer-to-winter! After having the warmest October on record, we're having possibly the coldest November. The weather doesn't seem to have affected the normal movement of birds throughout the region. However, in the past week, virtually all smaller bodies of water have frozen and, at the current rate, larger bodies will follow suit soon, which may mean less overall winter bird activity. Unlike the past few falls, Blue Jays seemed to have passed us by this year, sadly. All that said, 'tis the season for winter finches and their allies, so always be on the lookout for those. Interesting sightings of the past month listed below:

Surf Scoter: West Medical Lake (10/28-eBird); Sprague (11/11-TL)

White-winged Scoter: Dreary (11/5-GL)

Anna's Hummingbird: Moscow (10/27-eBird); Coeur D'Alene (11/8-eBird); Spokane Valley (11/16-MC)

Lesser Black-backed Gull: North Idaho College (11/19-RyB)

Pacific Loon: Hayden Lake (11/6-JI); Mill Canyon (11/11-TL)

Black-backed Woodpecker: Priest River (11/11-eBird)

American Three-toed Woodpecker: Little Pend Oreille NWR (10/29-eBird)

Lapland Longspur: West Plains (11/11-AT); Rathdrum Prairie (11/12-RyB)

Lesser Goldfinch: Paradise Prairie (11/9-AM)

White-Throated Sparrow: Cougar Bay (10/31-RyB); Wolf Lodge Bay (11/6-JI)

Rusty Blackbird: Hidden Village (KD)



3-Toed Woodpecker - Male © Blair Dudeck



3-Toed Woodpecker - Female © Chris Wood

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; RyB-Ryan Bart; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; MC-Marlene Cashen; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JE-Jacob Elonen; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; CiM-Cindy Mc-Cormick; 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; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff

How to identify look-alike winter finches

(From Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch)

Can you tell a House Finch from a Purple Finch or Cassin's Finch? These finches are some of our favorite common winter feeder visitors, but they can make for very tricky IDs! Adult males of all three species sport red plumage in varying shades and intensity, while females and immature males are similarly brown and streaky. But even though these birds look very similar, there are a few visual keys to ID. Check out our quick review below.

Finch Species	Male Finches	Female and Immature Finches
House Finch	Rounded head Red concentrated on head and breast only Bold brown streaking on the flanks	Uniformly brown head—no facial pattern Long, thin, blurry streaks on breast
Purple Finch	Larger head in proportion to body Pink wash on the wings and belly, as if dipped in raspberry juice No distinct streaks on belly or flanks	White eyebrow stripe Dark stripe trailing away from the beak Short, thick, smudged streaks on breast
Cassin's Finch	Raspberry crown stands out more than red at brows Crown often peaks or sticks up Minimal streaking on the flanks	Less-defined white eyebrow stripe Sharply defined streaks on breast



House Finches - Male & Female © Jm Merritt



Purple Finch © Bryan White

To feed or not to feed wintering wildlife

Many of us like to feed year-round resident birds through the winter months in our yards to enjoy seeing them close-up. And as long as we keep those feeding stations clean to avoid spreading disease and spaced to minimize concentrations that draw predation, it's usually harmless.

But what about other wildlife, like deer? Here's some advice from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW): Wildlife adapt to survive winter months without our help

Many well-meaning Washington residents in urban and suburban areas enjoy feeding deer in their yards, especially during winter months. Although some people see this type of feeding as helping these animals, it actually can hurt them and potentially cause illness and death for the animal.

Many people believe that deer lack good natural food sources during winter and therefore need supplemental food to survive. However, these animals have remarkable abilities to survive winter conditions without human help, including:

- Growing insulating guard hairs and underfur
- Storing fat
- Changing their diet to fibrous, woody browse
- Migrating to areas with less snow and better feed
- Lowering their metabolic rates
- Conserving energy by restricting movements during severe weather

Feeding wildlife can cause serious health issues for the animals and negatively affect you and your neighbors. WDFW discourages feeding deer in urban and suburban areas for several reasons:

- Deer digestive systems are well adapted to handle natural forage. Although these animals will eat feed that humans provide, carbohydrate-rich foods like fruit, grains, and corn aren't normally part of their natural diet, especially during winter, and can cause serious health problems.
- The high amount of sugars in fruit, grain, and corn rapidly ferments in the stomach, causing an over-production of acid and damage to the stomach lining. Acid and bacterial toxins can then leak into the blood-stream, causing a painful death.

- Feeding urban and suburban deer can increase negative human-wildlife interactions and result in unintended consequences for the animal and your community. Specific examples include: increased risk of vehicle collisions; increased aggression towards pets and people; increased risk of disease transmission; increased dependency on humans for food and a loss of normal, wild behavior; increased negative impacts to wildlife diversity and abundance; and increased damage to fences, gardens, and ornamental plants and trees.
- Supplemental feeding may attract carnivores, such as bears, cougars, and coyotes that may prey upon wild animals using a feed site or nearby pets or farm animals. Encounters between humans and large carnivores are typically rare, but feeding deer creates the potential for unnecessary and avoidable conflict between humans and predators. This may cause a dangerous situation for people and result in an animal being euthanized.

Though WDFW may conduct large-scale deer feeding programs in certain areas, primarily in winter, these are only done under very specific conditions, like reducing agricultural crop damage.





Christmas Bird Count

by Alan McCoy

Need to get outside and do something different? "I can't help you with the painting that day; I am doing the Christmas bird count! Or, "You'll have to take care of the kids and animals that day because I'm going on the Christmas bird count!" The Christmas Bird Count is a fun way to spend some quality time outside. Join us on this year's Christmas Bird Count and enjoy your feathered friends with others who share your passion! You don't have to be an expert to participate. Although it is a dawn to dusk affair, you don't even have to stay the whole day – part-timers are welcome, too. And if you live within the count circle, we need "feeder watchers" too. Please call if you want to join a count or if you have questions about the Christmas Bird Count.

Cheney's Christmas Bird Count is on **Sunday December 18, 2022**. Contact Sandy Schreven at 509-999-9061 or email sschreven@hotmail.com to join the Cheney count.

Spokane's Christmas Bird Count will take place on **Saturday December 31, 2022**. Please contact Alan McCoy at 509-999-9512 or email ahm2352@gmail.com to join the Spokane count.



Alan McCoy & Dave Plemons during a CBC



Buffleheads and Goldeneye by Alan McCoy



Townsend's Solitaire by Alan McCoy



Bald Eagle by Alan McCoy

Avian influenza: Common questions and answers from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Updated Nov. 21, 2022 to reflect current conditions.

With colder weather returning and wild birds flocking together to feed, WDFW is seeing an uptick in reports of suspected cases of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus H5N1 2.3.4.4 strain. Following are answers to common questions regarding HPAI, the impact to wildlife, and the potential spread to domestic animals and humans:

What is HPAI?

Avian influenza, also known as bird flu, refers to the disease caused by infection with avian (bird) influenza (flu) Type A viruses. These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect poultry and other bird and animal species. Wild aquatic birds include ducks, geese, swans, gulls and terns, and shorebirds. Wild birds that feed on these aquatic species, like raptors or ravens, are susceptible. Avian influenza A viruses are very contagious among birds through saliva, nasal secretions, feces, and contaminated surfaces. These viruses are classified into two categories: low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). LPAI viruses cause either no signs of disease or mild disease in chickens/poultry (such as ruffled feathers and a drop in egg production). HPAI can be transmitted to domestic birds such as chickens, ducks, and turkeys and generally leads to death.

Can HPAI transfer to humans?

Bird flu viruses are not easily transmissible from birds to people, but without proper hygiene, or if in prolonged contact with a sick bird, it's not impossible that people feeding wild birds or hunters handling harvested birds could contract bird flu. The following common-sense precautions are recommended to reduce the risk of contracting any wildlife disease:

- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning bird feeders or cleaning hunter-harvested birds.
- Do not harvest or handle wild birds that are obviously sick or found dead.
- Wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol hand sanitizer immediately after cleaning bird feeders or handling game.

 Wash tools and work surfaces used to handle feeder birds or clean game birds with soap and water, then disinfect with a 10 percent solution of chlorine bleach.

If you experience flu-like symptoms following contact with sick or dead wild birds or have concerns about potential exposure to infected birds, contact your local health department. They can provide public health recommendations and guidance on symptom monitoring and testing of people exposed to avian influenza.

Additional animal and human health and safety information regarding avian influenza is on the <u>U.S.</u>

<u>Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service</u> website.

Is it common for other animals to catch HPAI?

A raccoon kit (baby) found at a park in Franklin County in June 2022 tested positive for HPAI. It was one of four kits found; two were dead and two euthanized due to showing obvious signs of being sick. A gull from the same park also tested positive for HPAI. In Spokane County in mid-July of 2022, a second raccoon was also confirmed to have the HPAI virus.

These are not the first cases of HPAI in mammals. This strain has also been detected in red foxes and striped skunks in North America. However, these are the first detections of H5 2.3.4.4 in raccoons in North America, and the first detection of HPAI in a mammal in Washington state.

While these developments may be concerning to some as they signal a spread of the HPAI virus from birds to mammals in our state, they are not completely unexpected and not something to panic about. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as HPAI H5N1 viruses continue to evolve, other mammals may become infected.

What can be done to prevent the spread of HPAI to other wildlife species?

Humans should avoid handling sick or dead birds and should keep their pets from scavenging or interacting with dead wildlife. Practices that cause birds to congregate in large numbers such as feeding waterfowl should also be avoided.

Do not dispose of processed bird carcasses in the field where they could be eaten by scavengers or raptors that could then become sick. Double-bag them and place in the garbage, bury, or incinerate them. Also take special precautions to ensure that all equipment (boots, clothes, vehicles, firearms) are cleaned and disinfected to prevent the spread of diseases.

If you observe sick or dead birds, or other wildlife, please report it to <u>WDFW's online reporting tool</u>. What can be done to treat wildlife with HPAI? Unfortunately, treatment is not an option for wild species. Most birds that become ill with HPAI will die from the infection.

Can my domestic animals catch HPAI?

Given what is currently known about this strain of HPAI, this is unlikely. Still, appropriate action should be taken to reduce the potential risk to mammals such as cats and dogs, including not allowing domestic animals to scavenge sick/dead birds or other wildlife, or even interact with sick wildlife.

HPAI does infect domestic chickens, ducks, turkeys. If sick or dead poultry are observed, please report to the Washington Department of Agriculture.

Where does the HPAI outbreak in WA wild birds and other animals stand currently?

A total of 62 cases of HPAI, out of 96 potential cases tested, have been detected statewide to date this year. In Spokane County, a bald eagle, raven and raccoon tested positive in May. You can view positive detections in Washington state on the WDFW website.

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 6:30 pm 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.

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

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 Still 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, calendars are still a bargain at \$12.00. They are still 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. On 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











ore information about the Spokane Audubon Society and its activities, or to order additiendars, go to: www.AudubonSpokane.org

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

Spokane Audubon Society P.O. Box 9820 Spokane, WA 99209



Large, common, and widespread, the Great Blue Heron is perhaps the most familiar wading bird in North America. The Great Blue Heron is an adaptable species, and its population is increasing in an era when many other bird species are in trouble. A favorite subject of bird photographers, there's something ancient-looking about the Great Blue Heron, and there is a reason for that.

Living on Past Success

The Great Blue Heron probably never shared the landscape with *Tyrannosaurus rex* or any other dinosaur. The Mesozoic Era, or age of the dinosaurs, ended about 66 million years ago. While some birds lived alongside dinosaurs, no extant bird species has a lineage that old. Although its genus *Ardea* dates back 14 million years, the oldest fossils of the Great Blue Heron are from the Pleistocene Epoch, about 1.8 million years ago. So, this bird's "prehistoric" appearance — with its long, thick bill, curvaceous and powerful neck, and long legs — is more a reflection of successful adaptations that have served the species well over the past 1.8 million years.

That's not to say that the Great Blue Heron has stopped evolving. Various populations changed in size and physical proportions through the millennia in response to differing geographic factors, and ornithologists puzzle over the species' taxonomy. There are between four and nine recognized subspecies, including the "Great White Heron," a pure-white form found in the Florida Keys and the West Indies. This population is regarded by some as a separate species. When a "blue" Great Blue Heron mates with a "Great White Heron," the result is a "Wurdemann's Heron," which has a white head, but otherwise resembles a "blue" Great Blue Heron.

Unique Appearance

The great blue is the largest heron in North America, standing close to five feet tall, with a wingspan of up to 6.5 feet. Its large size, blue-gray coloration, and black-striped head distinguish it from other large North American herons.



Great Blue Heron at Turnbull © Carlene Hardt

The only other tall and overall-gray wading bird in North America is the Sandhill Crane, which has a dark bill, red crown, and a posture quite unlike the heron, including a "bustle" on its hind end (formed by the inner-most flight feathers, known as tertials). Cranes fly with their necks outstretched, while herons usually fly with their neck tucked into a tight "S" shape. In flight, the great blue's deep, slow wingbeats and curved neck posture are distinctive.

At some point during the year, the Great Blue Heron can be found near just about any body of water throughout North America. This bird breeds from southern Alaska, across central Canada to Nova Scotia, south to parts of the Caribbean and northern Mexico (rarely in northern Belize as well). The northern breeding population migrates to warmer climes for the coldest months. During the winter, the great blue is found across Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, reaching the northern coast of South America. A resident population occurs in the Galápagos archipelago. Although usually solitary outside the nesting season, the Great Blue Heron sometimes migrates in small flocks, either by day or night.

Usually silent, the Great Blue Heron sounds off when disturbed and while on its nest; in fact, its breeding colonies are often quite noisy. Its most-commonly heard call is a loud, "cranky" squawk.

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Not a Picky Eater

The Great Blue Heron will eat whatever it can catch with its formidable bill: fish, crustaceans, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, and birds — especially ducklings. It usually forages alone, locating food by sight. Once a Great Blue Heron spots a meal, it strikes quickly, straightening its long, powerful neck and grabbing its quarry with its spear-like bill, then swallowing it whole. Excellent night vision allows this versatile wading bird to hunt in darkness as well as in daylight.

Colonial Nester

The Great Blue Heron nests in colonies that can include up to several hundred stick nests. These colonies, also called rookeries, are usually located high in trees near or above water, and sometimes on islands, to discourage predation by reptiles and mammals. Sometimes pairs nest in lower shrubs and bushes, or even on the ground. Nesting great blues may even accept human-provided platforms, if they prove safe from predators. Pairs often return to the same colony, and reuse nests from previous years.



Great Blue Heron at nest with chicks © Spark Dust

Great Blue Herons are monogamous during the breeding season, but they form new pairs each year. Courtship begins as the male selects a nest site, then displays there to attract a female, extending his neck while spreading out his specialized neck feathers (nuptial plumes) and shaking twigs held in his bill. He may also fly in a circle around the potential nest site. Once he attracts a female, the pair will bond through continued displays: twining necks, clattering bills, and raising their nuptial plumes. The male will bring more sticks and branches to the female as she begins her nest, which is a rough platform lined with softer materials such as moss or dry grass.

Once the nest is complete, the female Great Blue Heron lays three to six pale-blue eggs, and both parents incubate in turns for about a month. The young hatch with open eyes and down-covered backs, heads, and sides. Eggs hatch over a period of several days, so nestlings are normally at varying stages of development. Older nestlings often kill their younger siblings or push them out of the nest, particularly in times of food scarcity. This seemingly cruel behavior, called siblicide, has a practical purpose: If there is enough food, more chicks survive; if not, only the strongest make it to adulthood.

Both parents feed their offspring by regurgitating food, and the young leave the nest two to three months after hatching. Once fledged, the young birds remain dependent upon their parents for food for another three weeks or so.

Thriving Despite Challenges

Great Blue Herons were hunted for their plumes until the early 20th century, and over the past century, they have endured habitat loss and disturbance: Wetlands have been drained, water quality has declined, and heron nesting efforts have been disrupted by development and human recreational activities. Although Great Blue Herons are adaptable, ongoing land-use change, especially along shorelines, is a continual threat.

Locally, the Great Blue Heron's success often hinges on people's interest in protecting their sensitive breeding colonies. Fortunately, in many areas, nesting colonies thrive where the birds and their stick nests are left alone during the months-long nesting season.

American Bird Conservancy and other conservation groups are working across North America to protect and restore the continent's wetland habitats, and the birds that call these places home.

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 Spokane, WA 99209-9820

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Visit our website:

https://audubonspokane.org

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:	-
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Annual memberships provide ongoing suppo conservation and educational activities.	
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Please make check payable to: Spokane Audubon Society

Send this form and your check to:

Audubon Membership Attn: Alan McCoy 615 W Paradise Rd Spokane WA 99224

Join us, or renew your membership, online at our website:

https://www.audubonspokane.org.
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Contact Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com or (509) 999-9512.