

The Pygmy Owl

Volume 31
Issue 6
Feb. 2023

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



February 8, 2023 general meeting

This meeting will be on-line only via Zoom, starting at 7 p.m. through the Zoom link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89353128428?pwd=bXlElZGazZFbnhncGIDZUR6WjBmdz09>

Meeting ID: 893 5312 8428 Passcode: 791094

We plan to return to in-person and on-line (“hybrid”) meetings in March.

The Conservation Challenges of New World and Old World Vultures

Presented by Kim Thorburn

Spokane Audubon Society member Kim Thorburn will present our February 8 chapter meeting program on vultures.



An avid birder who “wishes to soar,” Kim grew up in the Central Valley of California, which made turkey vultures a favorite. As a member of the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and field volunteer on bird species recovery work, she says she “obsesses about wildlife conservation.”

New World and Old World vultures, providers of vital ecosystem services, are biologically fascinating and conservation impaired. Many species of New World and Old World vultures are red-listed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Numerous species of these ancient taxa have not survived to contemporary times but the role of these taxonomic

families in ecosystems is critical. Their crucial role as environmental scavengers underlies the threat to their survival and work to conserve vultures is a lesson in wildlife conservation.

Kim’s presentation will discuss the taxonomy of New World and Old World vultures with biologic tidbits and analysis of the conservation questions.



Vultures of the World
© Roger Hall

The Pygmy Owl

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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 December 21, 2022 through January 20, 2023:

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

Individual: Gena Bradford

Family: Julia Unferth & John Thieroff

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Mark Schuller, Stephanie Zurenko, Courtney Litwin, Sydney Fowler, Norma Trefry, Tina Penny, Stephen Thompson, Sally English

Family: Pearl & Howard Bouchard, Brian & Beth Miller, Ann Hurst, Melissa O'Hara, Dan & Donna Burt, Bill & M'Lou Safranek, Liz Deniro & Paul Swetik

Supporting: Pam McKenney & Mike Regan, Buck & Sandy Domitrovich, Stephanie Lambert, James & Sheila Harless, Lois & Stephen Johnson, Ladd Bjerneby, Hal Robins

Contributing: Therese Nielsen, Marc Lewis,

Lifetime: Chris Loggers & Kathy Ahlenslager

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/>.

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Following a brutally cold December, temperatures for the past several weeks have been above normal, leading to melting and thawing. With more open water, ducks and geese have moved back partially to some of the local hangouts. Thus far, it's been a very poor season for winter finches and their allies. Though unlikely, it's still possible that some winter finches that overlooked our region could pass through moving North in the next couple of months. If water stays open, look for increasing numbers of waterfowl to move into lakes and flooded fields in the region. All in all, it's been a quiet month and year, to date.



White-throated Sparrow
© David Speiser

Long-tailed Duck: Pringle Park (1/9-RDC)

Red-breasted Merganser: Spokane River (1/3-MW)

Anna's Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (12/21-MC)

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Coeur D'Alene (1/9-RB)

Glaucous Gull: Wolf Lodge Bay (1/2-DW)

Northern Goshawk: University of Idaho (1/5-CS);
Spokane (1/7-MW)

Say's Phoebe: Kendrick (1/1-GL)

Blue Jay: Bonner's Ferry (1/14-JR); Sandpoint (1/17-RC)

Pine Grosbeak: Long Canyon (1/2-JR and SE)

Lesser Goldfinch: Paradise Prairie (12/20-AM) Melville (12/26-SS)

Harris's Sparrow: Bonner's Ferry (1/5-eBird)

White-Throated Sparrow: Chattaroy (12/23-eBird);
Spokane (1/1-MW); Pullman (1/1-eBird)



Harris Sparrow
© Ian Davies

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 Koebler; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; AM-Alan McCoy; CiM-Cindy McCormick; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; 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

Wenas Audubon CampOut

June 2-5, 2023

Every spring, Washington State's Audubon Chapters and their friends gather in the Wenas Valley, located on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains between Ellensburg and Yakima. With a variety of natural history and recreation opportunities, the Wenas Valley is a beautiful area that supports a fascinating assortment of spring flora and fauna, and offers the spiritual fulfillment of simply being outdoors in the spring. Everyone, whether a members of Audubon chapters or not, is welcome to join us for this outing.

You are invited to attend a celebration of birds, bats, butterflies, botany, and the beauty of spring in eastern Washington! Visit or subscribe to the blog for the most [current information](#).

The 2023 CampOut will be held Friday, June 2–Monday, June 5. This is one weekend later than previous CampOuts. The shift is intended to avoid the increasingly crowded Memorial Day weekend use of the camp area. Reports from early June campers in past years suggest that the area will be quieter and the change will allow for a better bird and nature experience. Campfire speakers will be scheduled for Friday and Saturday evenings, rather than Saturday and Sunday. Stay up to date by following the Wenas Audubon Campout Facebook page (facebook.com/wenasaudubon) and bookmark the website!

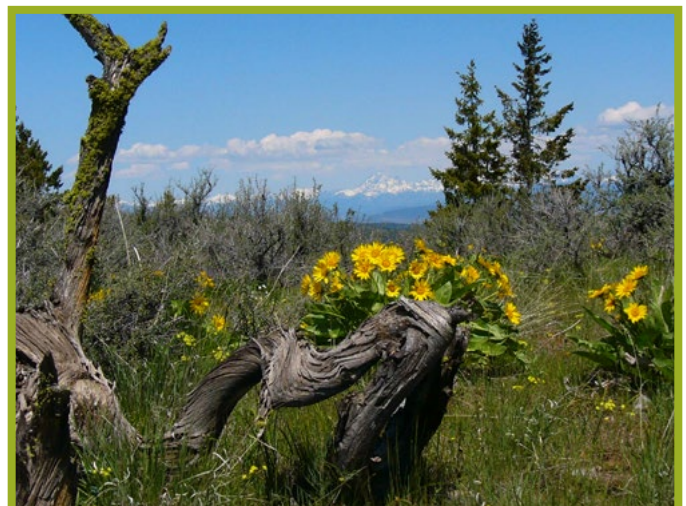
The organizing committee is hard at work planning field trips, campfire programs, and the ever-popular sanitation stations. We hope you'll join us for the return of this beloved, all-welcome event celebrating the natural beauty of the Wenas Wildlife Area.

The annual CampOut takes place at The Hazel Wolf Bird Sanctuary at Wenas Creek Campground (SW of Ellensburg).

This casual and friendly gathering offers a variety of activities, including birding [field trips](#), wildflower walks, [field sketching](#), and [campfire presentations](#) PLUS a special guest speaker TBA. You do not need to be an Audubon member to attend. All are welcome to this family-friendly event!



White-headed Woodpecker art by Carleen Zimmerman



Christmas Bird Count Results

by Alan McCoy

The Spokane Christmas bird count is a wrap as I finally have finished compiling all the data and submitted the report online. The results from this year's count can be found here: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/spokane-christmas-bird-count>. Also on this page is a spreadsheet with bird data for each year from 1980 to present, with some statistics and charts.

Sixty-two people were in the field on the last day of December to enjoy some bird counting on this warmer than average day. The total number of species (83) was just a bit above average while the number of individual birds was a bit below average. This was my experience in the field as some areas were very quiet. Most duck species, especially the diving ducks, were above average and some, like the Pied-billed Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneye and Redheaded Ducks, were at their maximum numbers since 1980. But Green-winged Teal and both mergansers had lower than average numbers. Among the waterfowl however, there was one rarity. Erin Coyle spotted a female Red-breasted Merganser on the Spokane River just upstream from the water treatment plant. She did not get a photograph of the bird; and because it is a rare bird for our area (it has never been recorded on the Spokane count), she needed to carefully document the bird. However, on January 3rd, Michael Woodruff photographed a male Red-breasted and two days later Andrew Thomas photographed a female Red-breasted. These sightings, while not 100% proof, were enough to convince me that Erin probably had seen the bird on count day. This is one of the dilemmas that compilers face when a rare bird is found.

And speaking of rarities, Brenda Day from the Nine Mile Falls team, photographed a blackbird. After much after-the-fact conversation among local and some not-so-local experts, it was decided that the bird was a Rusty Blackbird. The debate in this case was whether or not it was a Rusty or a Brewer's and either would have been an unusual bird at this time of year. Having that photo was absolutely critical for us to have any chance at confirming that identification, so thank you, Brenda! Thanks also to the experienced birders who helped with this ID.



Rusty Blackbird
© Brenda Day

Raptor numbers were up. More Merlin were seen this year than in any of the past 40 years and all other raptors were above average. And a couple of Golden eagles were seen by Carl Barrentine's team in the Painted Rocks area. A Peregrine Falcon, having an altercation with a Red-tailed Hawk, was seen by Joe Cooney at Riverfront Park a day or two after count day so I included it as a "count week" bird.

But not all the news was good. While corvids, juncos, towhees and Red-winged Blackbirds were seen in higher-than-average numbers, woodpeckers, finches (especially winter finches such as Cassin's, Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins) were way below average, as were Song Sparrows. The outlier here is that Pileated Woodpeckers set a 40-year high at 7 seen. Only 5 Ring-billed gulls and, likewise, only 5 Downy woodpeckers made the list and that is a 40-year low. No team saw any Bohemian Waxwings at all!

But I must end on a high note. Michael Woodruff started his day at 2 am for some owling! He was rewarded with his discovery of 2 Western Screech Owls just below Kendall Yards, a Northern Saw-whet near Bowl and Pitcher and 3 Great Horned Owls in the Palisades area. In addition, on his second try, he found the White-throated Sparrow (rarely seen around these parts any time of year) that has been hanging around his neighborhood near SFCC. Thank

Calendar Creator Needed

by Lisa Langelier

For the past five years Joanne Powell has created our annual calendar, featuring the wonderful photographs taken by our Spokane Audubon Society members. She will continue to serve as editor of our newsletter, The Pygmy Owl, but wants to retire from calendar creation.

We are looking for a volunteer who may be interested in filling this role. The work requires 2-3 hours a week starting in May, when photographers submit their images, and continues until the final edits are made in July or August. In total it may take about 30 hours spread over 3 months for the whole project.

The previous calendars have been created in Adobe InDesign. There are templates for many parts of the calendar, but the ability to handle the new photos, both small and large, is critical. Attention to detail is one of the most important skills as a calendar has many moving parts (number grid, photo input, forms to keep track of the entries, etc.). A more detailed analysis will be provided with step-by-step information when needed.

If you are interested in helping with this important task or would like more information about it, please contact Lisa Langelier at sauduboncalendar@gmail.com



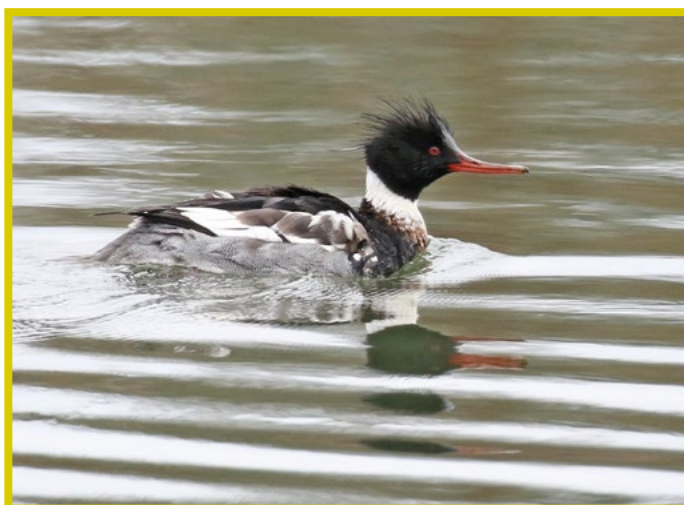
Merlin
© Alan McCoy

you, Michael, for your dedication. And, last of the rare birds, the Valley team saw a Fox Sparrow.

Like most years and for many birding trips, the count was an up and down experience. My team did not see even one Downy Woodpecker but we did see a Merlin taking a bath in the middle of the Spokane River. The most memorable and fun event for me happened in People's Park. Several of us were walking in the brush near Hangman Creek when we came upon 4 very tame Golden-crowned Kinglets gleaning for insects no more than 4 feet from where we stood. Here is one of them.



Golden-crowned Kinglet
© Alan McCoy



Red-breasted Merganser
© Michael Woodruff

Early Birds

by Joyce Alonso

Holiday decorations have been boxed; the tree, stuffed into its sack, and the lights, removed from the roofline. Whether you've made a good start on, or scrapped your New Year's Resolutions is up to you alone. However, if you are a birder, there's at least one ray of sunshine in this dreary winter...the bird list for 2023! Some diehards forgo the couch and the football marathon in an effort to find 100 species on New Year's Day. Others are content with lesser numbers. Confined to the house after a surgery, I was stuck on 22 feeder birds until an obliging Downy Woodpecker visited the suet block yesterday.

Then I started thinking about the migrants...not those laggards who show up in May, but the early ones that appear when we may have snow on the ground and frozen bird baths in the morning. Our lovely Spokane Audubon calendars remind us of "average return" dates for key species. However, experience tells us that some birds forgot to check that information before setting out on the trek northward. Have YOU seen any "early birds" this year?

To me, bluebirds say "spring" like no others...and we do expect them early...in March! But, in 2021, several of us winter birders found gorgeous blue Western Bluebirds in Liberty Lake Park, both on January 25th and February 4th. Swallows, especially Violet Greens and Trees, move north in the last week of March...except the year that they landed on the February Spokane Audubon Snowy Owl Field Trip list! We worried about what they would eat! And then there was the Osprey...who usually returns to us in April as the lakes thaw...except for the miserable one shivering as much as Fran and Brad Haywood and I, at an Idaho lakeshore in February many years ago.

So...keep an eye out for these and other possible surprise returnees. Have you seen Red-winged Blackbirds yet...or a Killdeer...or perhaps an early Pintail... or ??? Or maybe you've had an overwintering migrant who didn't get the memo about holidays in Mexico....a hummingbird at your feeder, a warbler in Riverfront Park?? If so, do let us know on the SAS website. We'd all like to hear about your special experience. Birds...they're always ready to surprise us!



Western Bluebirds in Winter
© Jay Packer



Osprey
© Donna Kimball



Anna's Hummingbird
© Mike Hamilton

Bird-Safe Windows | A Winner For Builders and Birds

Jim Cubie, Acopian Center for Ornithology
Muhlenberg College

The cost of bird-safe glass is so low that millions of birds can be saved when it is installed during the construction of new buildings — without a significant effect on the cost or the profitability of the building.

For example, bird-safe glass can be installed in a new \$8 million 9-story office building for about \$30,000, or four-tenths of one percent (0.38%) of the total cost of the building. This new analysis, released by the Acopian Center for Ornithology at Muhlenberg College, alleviates the concern in the building community that bird-safe glass is very costly. This is less than the cost of a single PR staffer.

Installing bird-safe glass in new commercial buildings will save hundreds of millions of birds that die every year hitting commercial building windows,” said Dr. Daniel Klem, Acopian Center director and the nation’s leading bird/window collision expert.

Building code reforms requiring bird-safe glass in new commercial construction should face little opposition because the cost will be minimal. Policymakers can fulfill their responsibility to protect migrating birds and meet the environmental protection objectives of local ordinances without hurting the construction industry.

The profitability of a new building will not be affected to any significant degree. The monthly debt service on a medium sized office building (\$32,800) will only increase by about \$125 due to the cost of bird-safe glass.

This report is based on five decades of research by Daniel Klem, Sarkis Acopian Professor of Ornithology and director of the Acopian Center for Ornithology, Muhlenberg College, and author of Solid Air | Invisible Killer: Saving Billions of Birds from Windows.

For questions about bird/window collision science: Please contact Dr. Klem at danielklem@muhlenberg.edu and 484-664-3259.

For report findings: Please contact Jim Cubie, J.D., report author and consultant to the Muhlenberg College Center for Ornithology, at 843-991-1059 and jimcubie1@gmail.com.

Full report and financial analysis: [Bird-Safe Windows | A Winner For Builders and Birds](#)



Pine Grosbeak

American Bird Conservancy

The Pine Grosbeak is the largest of northern finches, about the size of an American Robin. Less common than other boreal finch species such as the Pine Siskin, it is a striking sight when it appears perched among snow-covered branches. The male Pine Grosbeak has a rose-red body and rump, set off by dark wings with two white wing bars. Females are duller but still colorful, with mustard-yellow and gray in a similar pattern (although some females, as well as young males, show rust-orange instead of yellow).

This boreal bird's genus name *Pinicola* combines the Latin words for "pine tree" and "dwell." Its species name *enucleator* means "to remove the kernel," acknowledging the Pine Grosbeak's skill at extracting kernels from seeds and fleshy fruits with its stubby, almost parrot-like bill.



Pine Grosbeak, Male
© Christoph Moning

Breeding and Feeding

The Pine Grosbeak is monogamous, forming pairs each spring. The male defends his territory by singing from high in the treetops, and courts his mate by feeding her tidbits of food.

Once mated, the female gets to work building a bulky, cup-shaped nest of twigs, rootlets, and other vegetation. The nest is well-hidden in the foliage of a coniferous tree or a shrub, usually at a height below

12 feet. The female lays two to five eggs, incubating them herself for around two weeks. The male often brings her food while she broods. After the eggs hatch, both parents pitch in to feed the chicks with a paste of insects and plant material that they regurgitate from specialized cheek pouches.

Young Pine Grosbeaks are ready to leave the nest around two weeks after hatching, but they still depend on adults for food for almost another month. This species produces only one brood per season.

Much of the year, the Pine Grosbeak primarily eats plant matter, including fruits, seeds, buds, and needles. Favored trees include mountain ash (rowan), crabapple, spruce, juniper, birch, and maple. In the summer, particularly while feeding young, this bird adds insects and spiders to its diet.

In the winter, Pine Grosbeaks can be found in small groups foraging for grit and salt along roadsides. They also visit backyard feeders for sunflower seeds and suet, often in the company of Black-capped Chickadees and Blue Jays. Take a peek at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Ontario FeederWatch Cam to watch Pine Grosbeaks visiting a feeder.

Region and Range

The Pine Grosbeak is a permanent resident of boreal forests in North America and across northern Eurasia. Nine subspecies are recognized across this wide range, with marked differences in bill and body size and wing and tail length. Although Pine Grosbeaks are resident in many places, in others, populations make seasonal movements depending on food availability. When food is unusually scarce, this species may wander great distances south. Such seasonal movements in search of food, called irruptions, are also noted in other northern bird species ranging from Snowy Owls to Evening Grosbeaks.



Count birds during the 25th annual Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 17 - 20

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), Feb. 17 – 20, is a wonderful way to connect with other birders around the world and contribute to scientists' understanding and protection of birds.

Participating is easy, fun to do alone or with others, and **can be done in your backyard or anywhere** you love to find birds. Simply watch, listen and identify birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days of the count, report them by location to the GBBC at <https://www.birdcount.org/>, and watch the website displays for what everyone else is seeing and hearing around the world.

If you already contribute bird sightings to Merlin or eBird, all your entries over the 4-days count automatically are included in the GBBC.

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the GBBC was the first online citizen-science project (also referred to as community science) to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time. Birds Canada joined the project in 2009 to provide an expanded capacity to support participation in Canada. In 2013, we became a global project when we began entering data into eBird, the world's largest biodiversity-related citizen science (community science) project.

In 2020 a new website was designed to help make your 4-day count easy, clear, and inspiring. In an effort to spread the love of birdwatching even further, pictures of birds and people from around the world participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count are also displayed. No matter what corner of the world you live in or visit, your joy of birdwatching will be shared with others.



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 a permanent replacement can be found among chapter members 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!

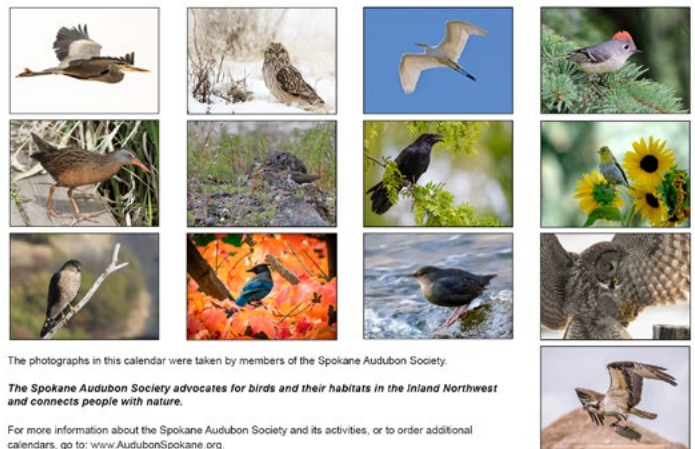
We are pleased to share the 2023 Spokane Audubon Society Birds of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho calendar with you. Despite increased paper costs, calendars are still a bargain at \$12.00. They are still available for purchase on-line, with an additional mailing cost charge of \$2.50 per calendar 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.



Great Gray Owl
© Tina Penny

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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Gill's Printing
Spokane, WA
509-953-3611

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
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P.O. Box 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: _____

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

Name: _____

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City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____



Please make check payable to: Spokane Audubon Society

Send this form and your check to:
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Spokane WA 99224

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