

Volume 22
Issue 7
March 2015

The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



March 11th Program:
Owls of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge,
with Wildlife Biologist Michael Munts



Join us on March 11th as we welcome Little Pend Oreille NWR Wildlife Biologist Michael Munts for a program about owls of the Refuge. Eleven species of owls are known to occur at Little Pend Oreille NWR. We will explore basic biology and identification of each species. Mike will also discuss the time of year and areas of the refuge where each species might be located and tips for finding them.

Mike, the wildlife biologist at Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge, has done research on Great Gray and Western Screech Owls in Idaho and songbirds in Western Montana. He grew up in the Idaho Panhandle and has been birding and studying birds in various parts of the Inland Northwest for more than 25 years.

Photos courtesy of US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Spokane Audubon's March program will be held at the
Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Building
(see page 8 for directions)

Please join us at 7 p.m. for refreshments and friendly conversation.

The program will begin at about 7:30 p.m., after announcements.



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

Spokane Audubon Society
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Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and pg. 8 © Jan Reynolds.



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Notes from the President

by Fran Haywood

SPRING!! Yippie!! Although many of you will say we have had spring for a month already, it is time to really be looking for returning birds and insects, including butterflies, bees and, of course, ticks. Also, watch for wildflowers popping up.

I hope that many of you will go on some spring field trips and volunteer for some of our activities. These include helping with educational programs at schools, libraries and the Refuge, working at the Turnbull tree-planting event, and assisting with activities at the Spring Festival in May.

Don't forget the Turnbull dinner and auction on March 14th, which helps to fund their environmental education programs. Turnbull involves over 8,000 children in nature programs at the Refuge and gives outreach presentations in the schools during the winter. If you have anything to donate to the auction, contact Friends of Turnbull at their website or our liaison, Joyce Alonso (939-0120).

I hope you all have discovered *our* website. You will find a wealth of information there; Alan McCoy works very hard to keep it updated. Turnbull's website also has lots of information on their activities, including special spring festival programs, and walks, which may require reservations.

Current environmental issues: Mt Spokane. We have joined a group of concerned citizens in to a lawsuit against the Washington State Parks Commission for their decision to permit construction of a new ski lift and runs through old-growth forest on Mt Spokane. The primary duty of the Parks Commission is to preserve and protect these designated park lands for everyone, rather than alter them to benefit a specific group. We will keep you posted on updates.

Other issues include protecting Marbled Murrelets and their habitat; protecting and studying forage fish needed to feed seabirds; protecting the entire state from coal and oil spills and limiting new oil terminals. Also of concern is the expanded practice bombing range of the Navy in sensitive areas.

These are the highlights. Please contact your legislators and urge them to help with these issues that are of prime importance to everyone in our state.

In the meantime, get outside to enjoy our wonderful weather and be thankful that we don't live on the East Coast.

Field Trip Report: Winter Lake and Wetbelt Trip

by Joyce Alonso

On Dec. 13th, 2014, for the first time in two years, cooperating weather and participant desire made the Winter Lake and Wetbelt trip a reality. The event was organized into two parts. First, several Spokane Audubon members assisted a family of boy scouts and another car with home-school families to identify the various birds hanging out at Beauty Bay on Lake Coeur d' Alene. The eagle population was way down, perhaps due to recent planting of kokanee in Lake Pend Oreille; but there were enough to admire and they cooperated by flying, fishing and acting regal while perched. We also saw a kingfisher, many Double Crested Cormorants, small rafts of Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye. There were some not-very-wild turkeys, chickadees, and super-hyper Golden Crowned Kinglets at the parking lot area.

Parents and kids found a morning sufficient exposure to the winter birding experience and retreated to Spokane for... hot chocolate, perhaps. Four of us adults decided to make a day of it and pointed the car toward Harrison. We had good weather and pretty fair birding, though not as varied as in previous years. Highlights were 200 Bohemian Waxwings, a distant group of Tundra Swans, a gaggle of Cackling Geese, the always beautiful Hooded Mergansers, and a Bewick's Wren. We logged at least 27 species, not bad for December and an area populated with active hunters!

Citizen Science Initiative: Hummingbirds at Home

National Audubon is spearheading an initiative to track the number of hummingbirds visiting our yards:

"There is a growing mismatch between flowering times and the arrival of hummingbirds in their breeding areas and we don't know how this is going to impact hummingbirds. Hummingbirds at Home collects data on how hummingbirds interact with nectar sources so that we can begin to understand – the first step towards ensuring the survival of these miraculous birds in the face of climate change. We also hope to gain insight into what effect providing nectar feeders has on hummingbirds."

Participation costs nothing more than some time, and you can submit sightings at any time of year. You may observe a patch in your yard (or just outside your window, or in a park), and you can report data from feeders or from nectar sources. Hummingbirds at Home is an ongoing project. Each participant can define and report on up to six patches.

Visit www.hummingbirdsathome.org/ for more information.

Don't forget the ***Annual Friends of Turnbull Auction***, March 14th at Cheney's Wren Pierson Community Center!

1) Purchase tickets (\$35 per person, includes dinner and music) through Brown Paper Tickets: <http://2015wildrefuge.bpt.me/>

2) To donate auctionable items, call Joyce Alonso (939-0120) or Donna Burt (448-0659) by March 10th.

Inland Northwest Land Trust Deep Creek Preserve Public Tour

**Audubon Lake, Reardan
Saturday, March 28
9 to 11 am**

Inland Northwest Land Trust will sponsor a tour of the newly purchased Deep Creek Headwaters property. This 151-acre parcel is adjacent to the WDFW Reardan Audubon Lake Preserve. It provides varied habitat for wildlife including two ponds and vernal pools. INLT plans to transfer the property to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife later this year.

We will meet at the WDFW Audubon Lake south parking lot and caravan to the adjacent Deep Creek Preserve. (Note: a Discover Pass required to park in the lot.) This tour will be lead by Spokane Audubon volunteers Jim and Bea Harrison. Come explore this never before open-to-the-public space. There should be plenty of waterfowl to observe—maybe even a swan!

There is trail space for up to 30 participants. Please register with Garry Schalla, gshalla@inlandnwlandtrust.org, or Catherine Greer, cgreer@inlandnwlandtrust.org, or call the office at 509-328-2939 to reserve your spot.

April Newsletter Deadline:

Thursday, March 19th

Please e-mail material to
Carmen Yount at

carmen@floreo.com

Field Trip Report: Snowy Owl Trip

by Fran Haywood

February 7th was raining, foggy... and *warm*. We ended the day at +50°F. We were pinching ourselves, with a reminder that, *technically*, it's supposed to be winter. We were looking for Snowy Owls, and fortunately, they were out and about, ready to be seen!

The Snowy Owls were at the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Refuge, just as reported. We saw our first one at 9:23am on Schuster Road, sitting on the very top of a power pole and the second along the Swanson Lakes Road, north of Schoolhouse Road, near the well drilling equipment. It was one of the whitest owls I've ever seen! Who would have believed that in a winter without any snow, in sagebrush habitat, we would find Snowy Owls?

The second owl was perched almost on the ground and flew up, hovered and hunted while we watched. So OK, we thought, maybe it *is* winter? But just as we started to think that, Jim spotted a flock of pintail ducks flying into Swanson Lake, joining several mallards. It was ice-free and there were several Horned Larks feeding on the muddy shoreline, imitating shorebirds. I found the whole scene so confusing that I started to look for buttercups.

Other species we saw on the trip included Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel and Northern Shrike. A flock of Tundra Swans in a flooded field on Coffepot Road was a surprise. Flocks of Robins, Canada Geese, House Finch, Magpie, and, of course, Starling, Rock Pigeon and Collared Dove added to our tally. Red-winged Blackbirds were singing. A Great Horned Owl was in the city park in Davenport, exactly where Chris Janett said to look.

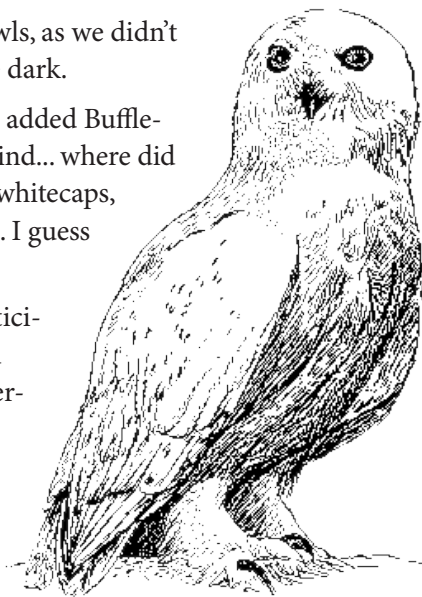
We tried very hard to turn the many flocks of Horned Larks into buntings, longspurs, or Rosy Finch, but they just wouldn't cooperate. We also dipped on Falcons, but all in all couldn't complain. I remember past trips when snow plowed along Detour Road was so high that we couldn't see out side windows and had to climb up and over snowbanks to see into fields; and sometimes, after all the effort, we didn't see any owls.

We didn't stay late looking for Short-eared Owls, as we didn't want to drive on muddy, clay bed roads in the dark.

We finished at Audubon Lake in Reardan, and added Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye, in a roaring wind... where did that come from? While we were scanning the whitecaps, a Merlin whipped over and flew towards town. I guess we did see falcons, after all.

My thanks to the eight great, enthusiastic participants, including my wonderful husband, Brad who was willing to spend our wedding anniversary driving and leading a birding trip.

Illustration by Robert Savannah, US Fish & Wildlife Service.



Speaking of Snowy Owls... Project SNOWstorm

Researchers track and study Snowy Owls to better understand their ecology and behavior.

Last winter, in the east, there was an unprecedented irruption of Snowy Owls. To help make sense of it all, an ad hoc group of owl enthusiasts, including scientists, bird banders, veterinarians and researchers formed under the name Project SNOWstorm.

The team trapped and tagged 22 owls between Minnesota and Massachusetts. The transmitters allowed researchers to track the owls while they were within range, and saved data every 30 minutes so that the team could gather the information when or if the owls returned from the Arctic.

Some of the Snowies moved hundreds of miles up and down the coast over the course of their winter stay.

Several owls wintered on the frozen surface of the Great Lakes, mirroring recently discovered behaviors of adult Snowies, who hunt sea ducks that seek out open water during the Arctic winter.

A few owls seem to have a penchant for airports. One of last year's visitors was relocated to Lancaster, PA from the Philadelphia International Airport; but the owl returned to the airport and was, unfortunately, struck by a jet.

One of this year's returning Snowies had to be relocated from LaGuardia Airport in New York City. She seems to have a penchant for city living, and has been moving between Brooklyn and Bayonne, NJ.

The researchers continue to tag new owls, and are working with USDA to study the behavior of the airport owls, hoping to better understand their preferences in order to dissuade them from settling near the runways.

www.projectsnowstorm.org

Columbia Plateau Songbird Survey Takes Flight!

Have fun while contributing to avian science.

Spokane Audubon, Audubon Washington, and six eastern Washington chapters, in collaboration with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, are developing a new community science conservation program on the Columbia Plateau: a long-term sagebrush shrub-steppe avian census. Exploring sites you can't normally visit, we are targeting three sage obligate species: Sagebrush Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, and Brewer's Sparrow, which will function as "umbrella" species for other birds with similar habitat associations.

The breeding songbird presence data we collect will be housed in eBird, used to validate current distribution models, and to update the WDFW Priority Habitat Species database. Ultimately, survey data will help wildlife values become incorporated into multi-state land use, transportation, conservation and energy planning. Our on-the-ground efforts to improve our understanding of the distribution of sagebrush songbirds will help us track and respond to climate change in the shrub-steppe avian community.

How do you get involved? Join volunteers from Spokane Audubon and Palouse Audubon for a jam-packed day of learning, fun and camaraderie!

The one-day training consists of both classroom and field instruction.

- Songbird identification class by Gary Blevins, Former Spokane Audubon President
- Free Larkwire software to practice learning birdsongs
- Field training at Riverside State Park to practice our protocol and record observations
- Learn to navigate to the survey sites using GPS units with Lower Columbia Audubon's Ivar Husa.
- Practice entering your field data into eBird
- Form teams to sign up for survey sites and dates. Volunteers will choose one morning per month to perform a field survey in April, May and June.

Details for the Spokane Audubon training:

Date/Time: Saturday, April 4, 9:30am-3:30pm

Location: Spokane Falls Community College, Science Bldg. 3410 W Fort Gorge Wright Dr. Spokane 99224
(Additional workshops held in Richland, March 7, and Wenatchee March 21.)

RSVP: lindell4118@comcast.net or cnorman@audubon.org

"One of the best parts of my spring birding! I can tell you that because of this project, I now have a much improved ear for shrub-steppe sparrows." – Cynthia Easterson, PSBO

Come look and listen with us! For more information, schedules, and to RSVP: Email Lindell Haggin, Spokane Audubon, lindell4118@comcast.net or Christi Norman, Audubon Washington, cnorman@audubon.org. Watch for Sagebrush Songbird Survey updates at wa.audubon.org.



Brewer's Sparrow by Denny Granstrand

SAS Field Trips for March, April (and early May)

March 21, 2015, Saturday

Bluebird Trip

Leader: Marian Frobe

This is a family friendly half-day trip and a great way to greet spring. We will drive a route on Paradise Prairie to see returning favorite birds. We'll probably end up at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. The trip usually ends around 2 p.m. We will meet at Spokane's Coeur d'Alene Park at 7:00 a.m. Call leader Marian Frobe at 328-0621 by March 15, if you plan to attend.

Target Species: Migrant ducks and geese, raptors, woodpeckers, Say's Phoebe, Western Bluebird

March 28, 2015, Saturday

Turnbull NWR Beginning Birder Basics Trip

This trip has been canceled.

March 28, 2015, Saturday

Kids & Family Trip

Leaders: Joyce Alonso and

Ann Brinly

Joyce Alonso and Ann Brinly will lead a half-day trip specifically for Scouts of both genders and/or families interested in introducing their children to birds. The destination will be determined by weather conditions (advancement of Spring). The most likely possibility is Reardan's Audubon Lake and surrounding area. Meeting time will be 8:00am. Place to be determined. Call Joyce Alonso (939-0120) for more info and to register.

April 18, 2015, Saturday

Sprague Lake Field Trip

Leader: Fran Haywood

This is a half-day trip to the Sprague Lake area open to all birders. We will look for migrating and early resident species, especially ducks. We may drive through Miller Ranch, stop at Sprague Cemetery, and Cow Lake. We hope to find Swainson's Hawks, American White Pelicans and if we get lucky, Long-billed Curlew. We will meet at Spokane's Coeur d'Alene Park at 6:30 a.m. Contact Fran Haywood (484-8666, birders13@gmail.com)

Target Species: Migrant ducks and geese, American White Pelican, Swainson's Hawk, American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Caspian Tern, Say's Phoebe, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-crowned and Savannah Sparrows, Long-billed Curlew

April 23-28, 2015, Thurs. - Tues.

Point Reyes, California Field Trip

Leader: Kim Thorburn

Limit: 6 Birders

This six-day trip is for intermediate and advanced birders. Kim Thorburn will provide lodging for up to six participants and lead field trips on Bolinas Lagoon and beach, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Point Reyes National Seashore, Mt. Tamalpais State Park, and the Marin Headlands. This region is a year-round birding hot spot, site of the filming of Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds," and home of elite birder and artist Keith Hansen. There is a variety of pelagic and other waterfowl, migrating shorebirds and warblers, and lots of land natives that we don't often see here. Participants will be responsible for their own air travel to Oakland and we'll split the cost of land transportation and food. We'll need to coordinate arrival and departure in Oakland. Contact Kim Thorburn by April 1 if you're interested in learning more. 465-3025, kthorburn@msn.com.

Target Species (examples): Acorn Woodpecker, Nuttall's Woodpecker, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Wrentit, Allen's Hummingbird, Whimbrel, Snowy Plover, Western Gull, Common Murre, Red-throated Loon, Red-shouldered Hawk, White-tailed Kite, Rufous-crowned Sparrow.

April 26, 2015, Sunday

West Plains Early Migrant Trip

Leader: Alan McCoy

Limit: 15 Birders

This all-day trip is for all levels of birders. We will stop at Reardan's Audubon Lake where we will look for waterfowl and shorebirds. We will check out the Davenport Cemetery, which can be great for migrants. Then we will go north to the Little Falls Dam, follow the Spokane River upstream and finish up at the Indian Canyon Springs area. We will meet at 6:00 a.m. at the Rosauer's parking lot in Browne's Addition (near 2nd Avenue and Sunset Highway) and plan to return about 6:00 p.m. Contact leader Alan McCoy at 448-3123, 448-8861 or ahm2352@gmail.com by April 20 to reserve your place.

West Plains Early Migrant Trip Target Species: Migrant ducks, raptors, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Bewick's Wren, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Red-necked Grebe, Calliope Hummingbird, Orange-crowned, Nashville and Yellow warblers, Say's Phoebe, Western and Mountain Bluebirds

May 4, 6, 8;
Monday, Wednesday, Friday evenings
Bird Identification Workshops
Leaders: Gary Blevins and
Kim Thorburn

May 9, 2015, Saturday
Bird Identification Workshop Field Trip
to Turnbull NWR
Leaders: Gary Blevins and
Kim Thorburn

OK. Novices and beginners, this is your chance. Two instructors will teach a series of three classes on beginning birding and bird identification by sight and sound. Workshops will be held at a site to be determined, from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. Slides and computer programs will be used to introduce you to many of the bird species commonly observed in the Spokane area. A \$20 donation to Spokane Audubon is requested. A field trip for workshop participants to Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge will be held on International Migratory Bird Day, May 10. For more information or to reserve your place for the workshop, contact Gary Blevins at (533-3661 or GaryB@spokanefalls.edu) by May 1.

Come celebrate International Migratory Bird Day by birding. Although the trip is specifically designed for the Bird Identification Workshop participants, other birders are welcome. We will meet at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, near Cheney, in the parking lot across from Pine Lake at 7:00 a.m. and bird the refuge until 2:00 p.m. Contact leader Gary Blevins at (533-3661 or GaryB@spokanefalls.edu) by May 3 to register for the trip.

Target Species: Wilson's Snipe, Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds, Virginia Rail, Marsh Wren, American Bittern, various waterfowl, Great Horned Owl, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Cassin's Finches

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Local Membership Dues:

Individual: \$20/year _____

Couple & Family: \$25/year _____

Student: \$10/year _____

Lifetime: \$300 _____

National Membership Dues: \$35/year _____

Individual + National Dues: \$55/year _____

Couple + National Dues: \$60/year _____

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____



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

Audubon Membership
Attn: Dave Plemons
1224 W. Riverside #1101
Spokane, WA 99201

Current members may renew memberships from our web site::

<http://spokaneaudubon.org>

Receiving duplicate newsletters? Errors or other changes needed on your mailing label? Contact Dave Plemons at davep_nublado@me.com, or 413-1524.



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March 11th Program:
Owls of the Little Pend Oreille
Wildlife Refuge,
with Michael Munts
7:30 p.m.

To:

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

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

Directions to the General Meeting:

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

To get to Riverview Retirement Community:

From West Spokane & South Hill

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

From Spokane Valley

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

From North Spokane

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

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

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

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

