

Volume 20
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June 2013

The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



Floods, Flowers & Feathers 2013: Fun at the Festival

by Joyce Alonso



Just for those who might be unaware...a lot of the work that Spokane Audubon does is accomplished with partner organizations. One long-standing relationship is with Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. In addition to helping with Point Counts, Bird Banding, Tree Planting and Environmental Education, some of our members were part of the team that put on the Second Annual Floods, Flowers and Feathers Festival at the Refuge on May 18th.

Although the weather was a bit chilly, we were thankful for the absence of wind and rain. So were the participants... all 400+ of them! That's 30% more than last year! Families enjoyed a great variety of activities offered by about 30 different local organizations. Kids actually could test a fire hose and blast the horn with the help of the Refuge Fire Crew. They made casts of animal tracks under the direction of other Refuge staff, inspected a revolutionary design in beehive (sans bees), learned about geology with the Ice Age Floods Institute, talked with volunteers from the West Valley Outdoor Learning Center about Sadie, their American Kestrel, and Alberta, the Great Horned Owl, and dissected owl pellets under the supervision of Friends of Little Pend O'Reille Refuge volunteers.

Spokane Audubon put on three activities... a Bird Walk, led by Fran Haywood, a Citizen Science booth about reporting bird observations, staffed by Lynn Cunningham and John and Sally English, and a Bird ID Scavenger Hunt, staffed by Sandy Sollie and Carmen Yount, that traced a course through a stream-side meadow. (See Carmen's observations of the scavenger hunt on page 6.) Since we were opposite the Water Quality (ie. bug) Studies, a wildly popular event run by Audubon member Jan Reynolds and Sandy Rancourt, we had many more participants than last year.

There was food available too... a choice between Jamaican Jerk offerings and Guatemalan tacos, burritos, etc. It was hard to choose. There was Kettle Korn too. We really appreciated the vendors who fed us instead of the hordes at the Lilac Festival.

Last but not least, Brad Haywood and Ed Reynolds were instrumental in putting up our projects and taking them down...and doing anything that the rest of us needed.

Thanks to you all! Can't wait until the next one!

The Pygmy Owl

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

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Officers

President

Kim Thorburn kthorburn@msn.com 465-3025

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Brad Haywood birders13@gmail.com
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Field Trips

Jon Isacoff isacoff@gonzaga.edu

Programs

Kim Thorburn kthorburn@msn.com 465-3025

Education

Joyce Alonso jbalonso3@msn.com 448-2447

Lindell Haggin lindell4118@comcast.net 466-4118

Conservation

Greg Gordon

Hospitality

Jan Strobeck jandeerpark@aol.com

Membership

Dave Plemons davep_nublado@me.com 413-1524

Publication

John English jhe230@yahoo.com 624-6256

Publicity

Kim Thorburn kthorburn@msn.com 465-3025

Pygmy Owl

Carmen Yount carmen@floreo.com 590-5295

Volunteer Coordinator

Joyce Alonso jbalonso3@msn.com 448-2447

Website

Alan McCoy spokanaudubon.org 448-3123

Letter from the Editor

This issue wraps up volume 20 of *The Pygmy Owl*... another year, come and gone. In the last ten months, SAS has accomplished quite a bit:

- We published a beautiful calendar.
- We've held a huge number of field trips, many of which have been recapped in the PO, thanks to participants and leaders. (There's more! See pp. 4 - 6.)
- We had a successful Christmas Bird Count.
- We were treated to nine informative programs, running the gamut from owls to ants.
- Some of our members spent time in schools and libraries giving programs about local birds. (We also added a beautiful taxidermied specimen of a Snowy Owl!)
- Most recently, Spokane Audubon was a significant presence at the Turnbull Spring Festival.

We should take a minute to be thankful for all of the people who made these accomplishments possible. It's no small feat to keep this organization active and vibrant.

The only constant in life is change, and as we head into another beautiful summer, we say good-bye to our outgoing president and program coordinator, Kim Thorburn, and vice president, Joyce Alonso. One of our board members, Melissa Cummins, is moving away from the Spokane area. We are thankful for their contributions and we wish them well.

At the same time, we welcome Greg Gordon, as Spokane Audubon's new conservation committee chairperson, and Gary Lee as a new board member.

Over the summer, the board will continue the business of Spokane Audubon. Together with our very talented photographers, we'll create the 2014 calendar. There will undoubtedly be some educational programs. And hopefully all of us will continue to enjoy our birds, whether we're working on conservation initiatives, gardening or landscaping our backyard environments, or birding in the field.

Whatever you do this summer, enjoy it. Have a lovely break and we'll see you in the fall. Our next program will be on Wednesday, September 11.

~ Carmen

September Newsletter Deadline:

Friday, August 23

Send material to
carmen@floreo.com

A Tale of Two Cities (in one week): Birding New York City and Spokane

by Carmen Yount

Birding The Ramble, Central Park, NYC Wednesday, May 1

This spring I had the opportunity to spend a few days in New York City, my home before Spokane. I spent one of my mornings birding The Ramble in Central Park.

An 800+ acre greenspace smack dab in the middle of one of the most densely populated cities in the world, Central Park is an important birding site. Migratory birds stop over and, from April until early June, it has the potential to be a birder's paradise. The Ramble, in particular, is a great place to see birds because of the dense foliage and less formal nature of the plantings. It is not unusual to go for a walk in the park in the morning and run into birders, instantly recognizable because of their deliberately slow pace and binoculars in hand. (Last year HBO produced a documentary, *The Central Park Effect*, about some of NYC's birds and the Park's inveterate birders. It's worth a watch.)

I went on a bird walk with ornithologist Dr. Robert DeCandido, aka "Birding Bob." With bird photographer Deb Allen, Bob leads daily walks in the park.

The weather in Manhattan on May 1st was perfect: 65 degrees and sunny, with low humidity. On my way to the walk, I saw a Red-tailed Hawk soaring overhead.

Eleven of us, a combination of New Yorkers and tourists, met at 9 a.m. at the dock at the turtle pond. Our first birds were Common Grackles, Boat-tailed Grackles and Blue Jays.

During the walk we were treated to a Pine Warbler, a cooperative Prairie Warbler and Northern Parula. White-throated Sparrows are fairly common in the Ramble, as are Red-Bellied Woodpeckers. American Kestrels, in decline in many parts of their range, are doing well in New York City, and we saw one hovering high above the trees. An Eastern Towhee was flushed from his scratching ground by a couple looking for a place to sit. He hung out on a branch overlooking his spot as he waited for the interlopers to leave. Song Sparrows, American Goldfinches, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Black-capped Chickadees rounded out our day. Our Swedish companion hadn't seen a Red-winged Blackbird so our sighting was a special treat for him.

As a Westerner, the Blue Jays and Northern Cardinals seemed exotic to me, though to New Yorkers they're practically junk birds.

I was a little bit too early for the explosion of warblers, so the birding wasn't spectacular. But it was a great day for a walk and an opportunity to see some birds I hadn't seen before, so I'd still call it a wonderful experience.

Slavin Ranch Field Trip, Spokane Sunday, May 5

The weather was glorious, and because the field trip was happening at the same time as Bloomsday, we practically had the place to ourselves. Our group met in the parking area, where we were greeted by a Killdeer, who was joined by another. We watched while they mated (apparently, there is no shame in the bird world) and then went their separate ways.

We hiked down to the water, where we were met with large numbers of waterfowl, including Cinnamon Teal, Northern Shovelers, Ruddy Ducks, Common Mergansers, Coot and the ubiquitous Canada Geese and Mallards. We saw a couple of Great Blue Herons fishing at the water's edge, and were treated to some American Avocets.



Bald Eagles, Osprey and a Red-tailed Hawk soared overhead. One of the Bald Eagles dropped down onto the water's edge, possibly to raid somebody's nest for eggs.

A late Junco chipped at us from the trees, and some chickadees challenged us with their calls: Mountain or Black-capped? (Mountain Chickadees, we decided.) A Yellow-rumped Warbler toyed with us for a while; as we circled a tree to see it, it expertly moved out of sight.

The biggest challenge of the day came in the form of birds we heard but didn't see: a Sora and a group of Virginia Rails. For all of our keen interest, sharp eyes and recorded calls, they refused to show themselves.

While we didn't see the rails, we did have a fascinating mammal sighting: a snoozing porcupine, curled up in a tree.

We were fortunate to have a terrific walk on a gorgeous morning with a great leader and wonderful company. Good birding!

Field Trips & Events, June through December

June 2, 2013, Sunday Little Spokane Natural Area Trip Leader: Lindell Haggin

All levels of birders are welcome to join us for a half-day walking trip along the Little Spokane River Natural Area. This is the peak of breeding season. Over 80 species have been recorded in this rich riparian, forest, and rock habitat. Meet at 6:30 am at the Spokane River Boat Launch parking lot less than one mile north of Nine-Mile Dam on Rt. 291. Contact Lindell Haggin, 466-4118 or lindell4118@comcast.net by May 26 if you plan to attend.

Note: A WA Discover Pass is required for parking on this trip. Purchase online or at REI.

Target Species: Common and Hooded Merganser; Osprey; woodpeckers; Pacific-slope and Willow Flycatchers; Warbling, Cassin's and Red-eyed Vireos; White-breasted Nuthatch; Bewick's and House Wrens; Gray Catbird; Black-headed Grosbeak; Bullock's Oriole

June 8, 2013, Saturday Liberty Lake Trip Leader: Joyce Alonso

This is a mostly easy walking half-day trip. Liberty Lake hosts some of the best habitat diversity in Spokane County, with breeding grebes on the lake, extensive wetlands and prairie, old second-growth Ponderosa pine, and some of the best wetbelt mixed conifer forest in the area. Contact Joyce Alonso (448-2447) by June 5 if you plan to attend.

Target Species: Red-necked Grebe; Wilson's Snipe; Virginia and Sora Rails; woodpeckers; Hammond's, Dusky, and Willow Flycatcher; Cassin's, Warbling, and Red-eyed Vireos; Marsh Wren; Yellow, MacGillivray's, Orange-crowned, Townsend's, and Nashville Warblers; American Redstart; Common Yellowthroat

June 15, 2013, Saturday Swanson Lakes Trip Leader: Kim Thorburn

This full-day trip for all levels of birders will yield a bounty of sagebrush specialties in the heart of Lincoln County shrub-steppe. The Lake Creek drainage, which includes the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, has been nominated for an Important Bird Area, with documentation of over 60 species of concern. Contact Kim Thorburn at 465-3025 or kthorburn@msn.com by June 8.

Note: A WA Discover pass is required for some parking areas. Purchase online or at REI.

Target species: Loggerhead Shrikes, Sage Thrashers, lots of sparrows, Horned Larks, Mountain Bluebirds; pothole residents like Willow Flycatchers, Bullock's Orioles, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal. We'll try to locate some Swainson's Hawk nests and enjoy other raptors, as well.

June 16, 2013, Sunday Palisades/Indian Canyon Trip Leader: Lindell Haggin

All levels of birders are invited to explore the Indian Canyon area immediately west of town. Come outfitted with binoculars and field guides, water, and shoes or boots for walking one or two miles. We will meet at 6:30 am at the Rosauer's at 1808 W. 3rd Ave. The field trip will end at approximately 10:00 am. Contact Lindell Haggin (446-4118 or lindell4118@comcast.net) by June 10 if you plan to attend.

Target Species: Raptors, woodpeckers, White-throated Swifts, Western Wood-pewee, Dusky and Hammond's Flycatchers, Cassin's and Warbling Vireos, breeding sparrows and finches, Black-headed Grosbeak

June 21 to 24 Washington Ornithological Society (WOS) Conference Omak, WA

See www.wos.org for more information

June 22, 2013, Saturday Mount Spokane Subalpine Birds Trip Leader: Jim Hudlow

This is a half-day hiking trip for all levels of birders. The grade is very gentle but we will walk four to six miles. Be prepared with plenty of snacks and water. You may retreat at any point. Mt. Spokane is the primary (and only publicly accessible) site for subalpine breeding birds in Spokane County, making this a popular and exciting annual event. Meet 7:00 am **SHARP** at Foothills Community Church, 11100 N. Peck Road. Contact Jim Hudlow (flyz4free@yahoo.com or 509-926-2186) by June 15 if you plan to attend.

Note: Discover Passes required for all vehicles in Mt. Spokane State Park. Purchase online or at REI.

Target Species: Dusky and Ruffed Grouse; Accipiters; Northern Pygmy Owl; woodpeckers; Hammond's Flycatcher; Warbling and Cassin's Vireos; Gray and Steller's Jays; Chestnut-backed Chickadee; Swainson's, Hermit, and Varied Thrushes; Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warblers; Fox Sparrow; Cassin's Finch; Red Crossbill

June 28-June 30, 2013, Friday-Sunday Field's Spring State Park Camping Trip Leader: Joyce Alonso

Come camp out with Spokane Audubon birders for a multi-day birding extravaganza. This Blue Mountain paradise

hosts a variety of montane songbirds and woodpeckers. Contact Joyce Alonso (448-2447, jbalonso3@msn.com) by June 21 if you plan to attend.

Note: There is a \$22/night fee for camping at Field's Spring State Park.

Target Species: Accipiters; owls, Williamson's Sapsucker, Hammond's and Dusky Flycatcher, Warbling and Cassin's Vireos, Gray and Steller's Jays, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Swainson's Thrush, Yellow-rumped and Townsend's Warblers, Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbill

July 13, 2013, Saturday
Little Spokane River Canoe Trip
Leader: Gary Blevins

Enjoy an early morning float trip down the Little Spokane River designed for beginning, intermediate, and advanced birders. We usually see the common riparian bird species that breed along the river. Although it's helpful to have a kayak or canoe, we will also help match you with other folks who have boats. The trip usually takes about three hours. For more information or to reserve your place for this field trip, contact Gary Blevins (533-3661 or garyb@spokanefalls.edu) by July 6.

Target Species: Common and Hooded Merganser; Osprey; woodpeckers; Pacific-slope and Willow Flycatchers; Warbling, Cassin's and Red-eyed Vireos; White-breasted Nuthatch; Bewick's and House Wrens; Gray Catbird; Black-headed Grosbeak; Bullock's Oriole, Black-chinned and Calliope Hummingbirds; Cedar Waxwings.

August 24th, 2013, Saturday
Biking & Birding
along the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes
Leader: Cindy McCormack

Interested in covering lots of ground without a car? Or just combining birding & a little exercise? The wetlands along this section of the trail can be great for migrating shorebirds, cranes, pelicans, and waterfowl. Expect a fun, easy 10-20 mile ride on a paved flat trail for all level of birders. Bring your bicycle/helmet, lunch, water, snacks, and optics and meet at the Harrison Marina trailhead at 7:30 am. After the ride, we can sit at the marina and have an ice cream cone as a reward! Contact Cindy at nwbirder@gmail.com by August 17 for more information or for carpooling. (Adverse weather may force cancellation or rescheduling).

August 31, 2013 Saturday
Summer Migrant Trip
Leader: Jon Isacoff
Limit: 3 Cars

We'll check the area mudflats and migrant traps for migrating shorebirds and passerines, primarily in Lincoln County. Depending on conditions, we will either explore the Rear-

dan-Davenport corridor and then down to Sprague, or go to famed Basset Park in Washtucna and then explore our way back via Sprague. This trip is an all-day affair and geared toward intermediate or advanced birders but beginners who enjoy the challenges of migrant birding are welcome! Contact Jon at Isacoff@gonzaga.edu by August 20 if you plan to attend.

Target Species: All migrant shorebirds, flycatchers, vireos, warblers, and sparrows. This is a great time for rarities to show up.

September 7, 2013 Saturday
Philleo Lake Special Access Trip
Leader: Ivan Lines

Join Biologist Ivan Lines to see Philleo Lake up close as you've never seen it before! Philleo Lake is private property and Spokane Audubon Members have the privilege of this one-day access as a guest of Ivan who has permission to bring people onto the property. Early and mid-September is the peak time to see migrant shorebirds on the expansive mudflats of Philleo Lake. This is also the best location and time to see Great Egrets and Peregrine Falcons in Spokane County. Contact Ivan Lines at ivanlines@gmail.com by September 1 to sign up.

Note: The ownership is changing hands. Access will be dependent on permission of the new owners.

Target Birds: Great Egret; Peregrine Falcon; Solitary Sandpiper; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; all peep species; Spotted, Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers; Long-billed Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope

October 26, 2013, Saturday
Grant County Late Fall Migrant Trip
Leader: Gary Blevins

This is a beginning, intermediate and advanced birder-oriented trip to look for specialty birds, such as Arctic Gulls, Lapland Longspurs, and other hard-to-find and see northern visitors. There may be some down time, with little action in between bird sightings, but potential for rarities is high. It is a full-day trip from sunrise to sunset. Contact Gary Blevins (533-3661 or garyb@spokanefalls.edu) by October 20 if you plan to attend.

Target Birds: Loons and grebes; scoters and rare wintering waterfowl; wintering raptors; Glaucous, Thayer's, and Glaucous-winged Gulls; Snowy Owl; Northern Shrike; Snow Bunting; Lapland Longspur; Gray-crowned Rosy Finch

November 23, 2013, Saturday
Douglas Plateau Northern Visitors Trip
Leader: Kim Thorburn

The Waterville Plateau is a challenging but high-quality destination for rarities during the late fall and winter months. We will work the rolling steppe of the Plateau in search of

unusual raptors, owls, and passerines and also bird along the Columbia River in hopes of finding rare Arctic Gulls and saltwater waterfowl, such as scoters, Long-tailed Duck, and Pacific Loon. If attendees are interested, we will spend the night of November 22 in Brewster for an earlier start with the birds during this short daylight season. Contact Kim Thorburn (465-3025 or kthorburn@msn.com) by November 16 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

Target Birds: Loons and grebes; scoters and rare wintering waterfowl; wintering raptors; Glaucous, Thayer's, and Glaucous-winged Gulls; Snowy Owl; Northern Shrike; Snow Bunting; Lapland Longspur; Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. We will hunt for elusive rarities, including Gyrfalcon and Northern Hawk Owl.

**December 14, 2013, Saturday
Winter Lake and Wetbelt Trip
Leader: Joyce Alonso**

This trip takes us around Beauty Bay on Lake Coeur d'Alene, where the Bald Eagles feeding on spawned-out salmon are always a sight to behold. Weather permitting, those interested may drive down to the Thompson Lake/Harrison region where a variety of birds winter in a slightly warmer zone. Probable particulars: 8:00 am start at Liberty Lake Albertson's parking lot. Contact Joyce Alonso (448-2447) by December 9 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

Target Species: Bald Eagles, several duck and grebe species, American Dipper, Pacific Wren, Pileated Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Tundra Swans, Northern Pygmy Owl

**December 29, 2013, Sunday
2013 Spokane Christmas Bird Count**

All SAS members as well as new birders are always welcome to join the Christmas count, which encompasses the Spokane Count Circle Center: 47° 43' N by 117° 25' W (approximately Division St. and Francis Avenue). Please contact Alan McCoy (509-448-3123) for information about the Spokane CBC.

There will be no general meeting in June.

Enjoy your summer!

Spokane Audubon's next meeting will be on
Wednesday, September 11

Using a Bird ID Scavenger Hunt To Teach Kids (and Adults) about Birds

by Carmen Yount

One of the activities at the Turnbull Spring Festival was a bird ID scavenger hunt. Put in place by Joyce Alonso and Brad Haywood, the hunt consisted of 20 bird photos; each photo was placed in a spot that matched the bird's habitat. Participants were given a sheet on which to record their finds and a guidebook to assist in their search.



*How can this photo teach kids to be birders?
photo via Wikimedia Commons*

As an adult, your first thought might be, "We're at a wildlife refuge. How is it helpful to search for cardboard birds?" (You should be forgiven. After all, that was *my* first impression.) I was completely unprepared for how much interest kids—toddlers to tweens—and *their parents* showed in this activity.

Here's the thing, and it's something even new-ish birders forget: birds move, quickly and often. Recognizing field marks, size and posture when you're unfamiliar with the birds you're seeking, or with birds in general, is next to impossible especially when you're looking for... say... a warbler that flits about the tops of trees. Posting bird photos in the habitat of the bird, however, gives an inexperienced birder the opportunity to observe and note visual identifiers in a static environment.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology gives the following hints for bird identification from visual cues:

- What **color** is the bird?
- What **size** is the bird? (Is it bigger than a sparrow? a

crow? This requires that the participant know what a sparrow is and what a crow is...)

- What is the **shape** of the bird?
 1. Is it chunky or slender?
 2. Does it have a crest?
 3. Is its tail long or short?
 4. How long is the bird's beak in relationship to its head?
 5. What is the bird's posture like?
- Does the bird have **field marks**?
 1. Does the bird have an eyebrow? A cap?
 2. Are there streaks, spots or stripes?
 3. Are there wing bands? Tail bands?
- **Where** do you see the bird?
 1. Is it perched in a tree or standing on the ground?
 2. Does it live or forage near water?

Of course visual cues aren't the only way to identify birds; birders also learn to identify sounds (songs and calls) and behaviors, and those can't be learned from photographs. But photos in habitat are a good start.

The kids who were engaged in the Turnbull Festival course spent 60 - 90 minutes hiking around the meadow, trying to find all of the photos. Ironically, some of the most obviously placed birds were the most difficult to find. The Black-capped Chickadee, in particular, placed in a small pine tree at eye level, over the course of the day proved to be one of the most challenging.

One of the most surprising things about the scavenger hunt was the number of parents who were just as engaged as the kids. Young parents with toddlers seemed to take the opportunity to teach their kids about being outside in nature while they looked for the birds.

So, if you're having a family reunion, or you have the opportunity to work with kids this summer, consider a bird ID scavenger hunt. Chances are, you'll have a bunch of interested kids, and maybe even some adults.

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: _____

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<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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Spokane Audubon Society
 P.O. Box 9820
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Visit our website: <http://spokaneaudubon.org>

New Field Trips!

Butterfly Walks, led by John Baumann

with trips sponsored by Inland Northwest Land Trust and Spokane Audubon

For those new to “butterflying,” these creatures may be observed with close focusing, compact binoculars (e.g., Pentax Papilio), or by netting them and showing them to others in observation jars before releasing them again unharmed. John will also share tips on butterfly photography for the shutterbugs in our midst, and be assured that even pocket cameras with a “macro” mode can produce nice results. **For question or to register for trips, call John Baumann at 327-4827, or email jpb6_18_56@yahoo.com.**

McKenzie Conservation Area Butterfly Walk, with Inland Northwest Land Trust

Date: June 15, 2013

Time: 10:30am

Join us at this beautiful little protected habitat on the northwest shores of Newman Lake for a good introduction to bog loving and boreal butterfly species of the Inland Northwest. See Swallowtails, the Greenish Blue, Northern Crescents, Tortoiseshells and maybe the uncommon Long Dash skipper. If lucky, we may catch a glimpse of the Silver Bordered Fritillary, a Washington State species of concern; the lovely day-flying Elegant Sheep Moth also finds a haven here. The hike, relatively short and flat, will take us to the lake shore where we can share brown bag lunches at Turtle Rock. Total distance is perhaps a bit over 2 miles round trip. Park-

ing at the Trailhead is limited so we will need to work together to arrange some carpools for a group of 16 to be there.

Audubon Butterfly Observation Field Trip to Mt. Kit Carson

Date: Saturday, July 13, 2013

Limit: 20 participants

Join our first Audubon butterfly walk! Regional higher elevation species reach their peak numbers in our area on the lush, flowered meadows of Mt. Kit Carson, a two mile hike (one way) in from the Upper Loop Rd parking lot. Look for abundant Clodius Parnassians, Pale and Tiger Swallowtails, Edith's and Blue Coppers, several species of Blues and all three of our local Anglewings. Greater and Lesser Fritillaries are common. Best of all, the trails leading in to the alpine meadows themselves are flowered with spreading dogbane that draws numbers of the now uncommon and pretty little West Coast Lady, where she appears in numbers from mid to late summer.

We'll meet at 10:30am at the Kit Carson Upper Loop trailhead and slowly meander up the trail to spend time for a sack lunch (you provide) at the CCC Cabin picnic area where hikers will be able to decide how much of the remaining 1.5 mile trek they want to make: only the last .5 mile climbs very steeply, but those who make the effort will be well rewarded by beautiful vistas and opportunities to sight more than 20 butterfly species in one day. We should return by 4:30pm at the latest.