

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 29
Issue 1
Sept. 2020

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

The 2021 SAS calendar and member photographers will be showcased at the September on-line only meeting



Red-naped Sapsucker
© Bob Cashen

2021 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar Birds of Eastern Washington and the Idaho Panhandle

The Spokane Audubon Society 2021 calendar “Birds of Eastern Washington and the Idaho Panhandle” is now available for purchase (see page 4) and will be showcased, along with the chapter members whose photos are featured, at our first on-line meeting Wednesday, Sept. 9, at 7 p.m.

The coronavirus pandemic restrictions on gatherings continue to keep us from conducting physical meetings, so we’re going to try an on-line, “virtual” meeting from our computers via the free-downloadable Zoom platform. All members with email addresses on file with the chapter are receiving a link to the meeting and other information on Zoom.

IF YOU’D RATHER NOT JOIN A ZOOM MEETING, read on here to learn about the calendar and your fellow members who captured the bird photographs featured.

Our vice-president Lisa Langelier led calendar judging with members Joyce Alonso and Sally English, photographer Bob Stephens, and retired Spokesman-Review outdoor editor Rich Landers. They selected from 67 photographs submitted by 19 members, without knowing who had taken the photographs. The 13-month calendar features 26 photos, one large and one small per month, by 14 members. Lisa wrote and Jenny Michaels edited the species information and Joanne Powell, our newsletter editor, developed the template and produced the calendar on her computer.

The cover photo and September feature is a Red-naped Sapsucker on Spokane County’s West Plains by **Bob Cashen**, who also photographed an American Avocet at Sprague Lake featured in April and a Chipping Sparrow at Mount Spokane State Park featured

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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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in May. Originally from Virginia, Bob resides in Veradale and says his interest in wildlife photography was piqued during various trips to Central and South America and the Galapagos Islands.

Bob's wife **Marlene Cashen** is also a photographer whose photo of a Cooper's Hawk on Spokane County's Saltese Flats is the December feature. Marlene's smaller photos of a Belted Kingfisher, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch, and Black-crowned Night Heron are also in the calendar. Marlene grew up in New Orleans and says her dad's interest in backyard birds inspired her own. The advent of the digital SLR camera initially helped her identify species, then improved cameras and lenses brought her desire to capture better images. To learn more about Marlene and Bob Cashen, see the "Board Profile" in last October's newsletter at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/pygmyowl/2019/9/27/the-pygmy-owl-october-2019>.

Patricia Ediger's photo of a Pileated Woodpecker at Mingo Mountain near Kettle Falls in Stevens County is the January feature. Her smaller shot of a Common Loon is also in the calendar. Patricia is a freelance photographer specializing in wildlife and landscapes. She has had a lifelong passion for the beauty of wild birds, learning their songs and habits, and capturing their beauty through her lens so that others may witness, appreciate, and help preserve the richness of our natural world. She and her husband built their home on a mountain top outside Kettle Falls, landscaping it for bird habitat. Patricia also works as a bookkeeper for the family business, Mingo Mountain Woodworking, Inc, a custom cabinetry shop. She travels throughout the northwest with her husband, exploring, kayaking, hiking, always with the hope to capture a snapshot of our incredible world.

Dave Kreft's photo of a Pygmy Nuthatch in Kettle Falls is the February feature. Dave lives with his wife in Kettle Falls and recently retired after a 39-year career with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. His last eight years was as statewide conservation easement program coordinator, working with land trusts on farmland preservation and with private landowners on wetland conservation easements and restoration. Dave earned his B.S. degree in Range Management from Washington State University. He recently formed a local birding group called Northeast Washington Birders with a group Facebook page @NEWAbirders that he welcomes anyone to join. Dave is particularly drawn to bird photography as an extension of his interest in birding and the science of ornithology.

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Tom Munson's head-on shot of a Northern Harrier in flight, taken in Spokane County, is the March feature. Tom's smaller photo of a Northern Flicker is also in the calendar. Tom is retired, lives in Spokane, and spends his time in Eastern Washington photographing birds, flowers, bugs and nature. He says we live in a wonderful area for these pursuits.

Lindell Haggin's photo of a Canyon Wren from Northern Spokane County is featured in June and her smaller photo of a Fox Sparrow is also in the calendar. Lindell says in addition to capturing some beautiful artwork, she finds photos are extremely helpful in identifying birds and seeing all the detail you might otherwise miss in a quick glance with binoculars. To learn more about Lindell, see the "Board Profile" in last November's newsletter at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/pygmyowl/2019/10/23/the-pygmy-owl-november-2019>.

Joanie Christian's photo of a Common Loon in Pend Oreille County is the July feature. Joanie is an award-winning freelance writer, blogger and photographer living in Colville, WA. She works by day as a Registered Nurse, and roams the countryside by night and weekend pursuing her passion for nature, wildlife and photography. In 2018 and 2020, she placed in the Top 100 of the International Audubon Photography contest. An advocate for conservation, she aspires to both inspire and educate others through her work. See more of her work at joaniechristian-photography.com.

Buck Domitrovich's photo of a Swainson's Hawk in Spokane County is the August feature and his smaller photo of a Sora is also in the calendar. He and his fellow birder wife Sandy live in Cheney WA, within 5-6 miles of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, so he's there a lot. Buck retired as a plumber at Eastern Washington University about 12 years ago, but at 77 he's still pretty active and gets out almost every morning looking for wildlife to photograph. Buck got hooked on wildlife photography when his long-time friend Warren Radcliff, a wildlife photographer from Idaho, lent him a camera for a trip to Alaska. Warren has since passed, he says, "but his legacy lives on through me." Buck and Sandy have been all over the continent birding and taking photos.

Betsy O'Halloran's photo of a Western Screech Owl in northern Spokane County is the October feature. She lives in northern Spokane County and is a former physician who left practice due to disability. She's always been fascinated by, and interested in, animals of all kinds, but particularly mammals and

birds because of their amazing intelligence and distinct personalities. She says photography helps one understand more about, and capture the essence of, other species, thereby reminding us of our interconnectedness. Wildlife photography can inform people that animals are not so different from us, and that we have an obligation to treat them, and their habitats, with respect.

Theo Goodwin's photo of a Pacific Wren at Benewah Lake in Benewah County, ID is the November feature. His smaller photos of a Nashville Warbler and a Common Redpoll are also in the calendar. At 12 years old, Theo is one of our youngest members. He lives on the South Hill in Spokane and attends Sacajawea Middle School. Theo loves the challenge of capturing an image of a bird in a natural setting. He also likes the "treasure hunt" aspect of birding, as well as all of the information he learns about conservation through birding.

Curtis Mahon's photo of a Song Sparrow at Bear Lake County Park in Spokane County is featured in January 2022, and his smaller photo of a Hammond's Flycatcher is also in the calendar. Curtis is 19 years old and has been birding for about four years. He's a senior at Eastern Washington University, working towards a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology and currently interested in studying nighthawks. He lives outside Deer Park, WA on a plot of forest where he gets a lot of his best photos. He says photography is what helped him become a better birder, using a camera as his main optical equipment to review what he saw and identify it later. One of his goals is to get photos of every bird he sees, and so far he's managed to photograph about 90 percent of his life list.

Sue Orłowski's photo of a Spotted Towhee is the smaller feature on the March page. Sister Sue lives in Spokane with three other Sisters of Providence. She has been interested in nature, including birds, all her life, even earning a birding badge when she was a Girl Scout. She started taking pictures about 20 years ago with a little point-and-shoot camera, then graduated to an 8 mm, 20 mm, and now shoots with 75-200 mm lenses.

Chuck Kerkering's photo of a Bullock's Oriole is the smaller feature on the August page. He's a retired mathematician for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and has taught philosophy and mathematics at area colleges. He recalls collecting rocks as a teenager and when his father received an overseas assignment, his rock collection had to stay. So he decided to

(cont on page 4)

photograph his collection, and since then has been photographing his natural history interests, including birds and insects. He says it's his way of collecting in an environmentally-friendly way.

Cathy Lee's photo of a Dark-eyed Junco is the smaller feature on the November page. Cathy became interested in photography, not of animals but of people, during her law enforcement career. She became the photographer for her children and their team mates in school sports. It's only been in the last 10 years that she's enjoyed nature photography, encouraged by her avid birdwatcher husband Gary. She's enjoyed learning more about the birds around us, and when an opportunity presents itself, to try to snap a few frames. The highlight of her photography experience so far was on the family's African excursions in 2018.

How to get your 2021 calendar

The SAS limited edition 2021 calendar is available for on-line, credit-card purchase through our website at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/> for \$12, plus \$2 for handling and mailing it to you. Or you can send a check to "Spokane Audubon Society" for \$14 per calendar, with your name and postal mailing address, to Spokane Audubon Society, P.O. Box 9820, Spokane, WA 99209-9820. Please allow 2-4 weeks for delivery for this option

You can also purchase it at Auntie's Bookstore, 402 W. Main Ave., (509-838-0206), for \$12, plus sales tax. Auntie's retains 30 percent (\$3.60) of each calendar sale for providing this service.

You can also make arrangements with SAS president Alan McCoy (ahm2352@gmail.com or call or text 509-999-9512) to purchase a calendar with cash or check and arrange for local (Spokane area) pickup.

Proceeds from calendar sales help fund the work we do to protect bird habitat and help secure public access to birding areas.



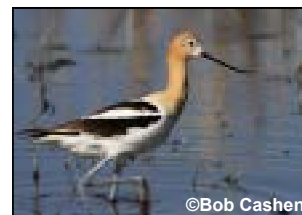
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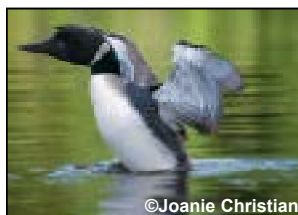
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The photographs in this calendar were taken by members of the Spokane Audubon Society.

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.

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



Spokane Audubon Society

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Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

It is HOT out there. Breeding season is over and during the next month the overwhelming majority of our migrant breeders will disappear. Following on their heels will be hordes of waterfowl, gulls, and maybe an unexpected rarity or two. We also seem to be in the early stages of a Red and White-winged Crossbill irruption, with reports from all over the region. Though Red Crossbills are “common,” birders taking recordings are finding record numbers of “Type 3-Western Hemlock” types, and Idaho, just this week, had its first-ever record of a “Type 10-Sitka Spruce” Red Crossbill. Of course, the White-wingeds generate excitement, too! Looking back, the summer season saw its share of surprises highlighted below.

Anna’s Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (6/28-MC);
Moscow (7/8-NP)

HUDSONIAN GODWIT: Boundary Creek WMA (6/29-
JR and SE)

Franklin’s Gull: Sprague (8/8-TL); Sandpoint (8/13-FF
and CL)

Common Tern: Calispell Lake (8/14-TL); Silver Lake
(8/15-JI)

YELLOW-BILLED LOON: Wolf Lodge Bay (6/5-eBird)

ALDER FLYCATCHER: Parker Ridge Burn (6/13-eBird)

Blue Jay: Harrison (6/9-KiD); Bonner’s Ferry (8/4-CP)

Pine Grosbeak: Salmo Pass (6/26-AH); Copper Ridge
(6/30-JI); Mt. Spokane SP (7/14-CM); Beehive Lakes
(7/23-NP); Saddle Pass (7/29-JI); Hope (8/2-NP)

White-winged Crossbill: Mt. Spokane SP (7/14-CM);
Shedroof Trail (7/22-SE and JR); Salmo Mountain
(7/24-eBird); Smith Creek (7/25-eBird); Priest Lake
(7/25-CL); Spruce Saddle (7/25-CL); Canuck Pass
(7/28-JI); Hidden Lake (7/29-eBird); Trestle Peak
(8/1-NP); Bunchgrass Meadows (8/7-TL); Sheep
Springs/Crystal Lake (8/15-CL)

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER: Washtucna (6/3-WB)



Hudsonian Godwit
© Mark Chappell



Yellow-billed Loon
© Andy Bankert

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; BB-Ben Bright; WB-Will Brooks; MaC-Marlene Cashen; SC-Stacy Crist; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; KiD-Kirsten Dahl; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JoE-Johnna Eilers; JE-Jacob Elonen; FF-Fred Forssell; MF-Marian Frobe; LH-Lindell Haggin; BH-Bea Harrison; AH-Alec Hopping; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-David Krefit; GL-Greg Lambeth; TLa-Terry Lane; TL-Terry Little; CoL-Courtney Litwin; CL-Carl Lundblad; BL-Becky Lyle; CM-Curtis Mahon; AM-Alan McCoy; JM-Jennifer Michaels; NM-Nancy Miller; SM-Stuart Muller; TO-Tim O’Brien; PO-Peter Olsoy; CP-Chris Pease; NP-Neil Paprocki; MR-Mary Rump; JR-Jethro Runco; MS-Mike Scott; SS-Sandy Schreven; BS-Bill Siems; KS-Katie Sorenson; CS-Charles Swift; ST-Susan Treu; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; DY-David Yake; MY-Matt Yawney

Save water!

Go native with backyard wildlife plantings this fall

by Madonna Luers

Fall is one of the best times to add plants to your landscape (as their root systems go into dormancy), and using native species helps attract wildlife and save water.

Our native birds, butterflies, bees and other wildlife evolved with plants native to the Inland Northwest. Those plants evolved with our region's relatively dry conditions, so they don't require supplemental watering once established.

With population growth and climate change, water can no longer be considered unlimited anywhere. Meeting demands for all uses of water – including fish and wildlife – requires water conservation practices, with or without drought.

One of the best long-term ways to both save water and attract wildlife is to “go native” by replacing thirsty, exotic landscape plants and bluegrass lawn with appropriate native, drought-tolerant plants that will thrive on rainfall alone. Their beautiful blooms, seeds and fruit are just as attractive in your landscape as any non-native species.

This shift to sustainable “xeriscaping” (from the Greek “xeros” meaning “dry”) will also save you time and money on maintenance and chemicals.

Try replacing a few plants or small spaces of lawn at a time, and remember that even a native, drought-tolerant species will require regular watering right after planting to establish a solid root system. The water savings will come later and for the long run.

More plant nurseries are carrying native and drought-tolerant stock, but you may have to shop around to find some species. More nurseries are also providing stock in the fall, although most still promote sales in spring when planting is traditionally on consumers' minds.

Look for some of the following, each which provide food in some form (fruits, nuts, seeds, nectar, etc.) or nesting or hiding cover (shade, thickets, thorns, etc.) for birds and other wildlife:

Deciduous shrubs: Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), Oceanspray (*Holodiscus spp.*), Mock-orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*), Ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*), Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), Golden currant

(*Ribes aureum*), Red-flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*), Wild rose (*Rosa spp.*), Sitka mountain-ash (*Sorbus sitchensis*), Cascade mountain-ash (*Sorbus scopulina*), Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*). Evergreen shrubs: Juniper (*Juniperus spp.*), Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), Tall Oregon-grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*).

Low shrubs, ground covers: Kinnikinnik (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Dwarf Oregon-grape (*Mahonia aquifolium* “Compacta”), Creeping Oregon-grape (*Mahonia repens*).

Flowering perennials: Yarrow (*Achillea spp.*), Nodding onion (*Allium cernuum*), Pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*), Aster (*Aster spp.*), Balsam-root (*Balsamorhiza spp.*), Campanula (*Campanula spp.*), Paintbrush (*Castilleja spp.*), California poppy (*Eschscholtzia californica*), Blanket flower (*Gaillardia spp.*), Scarlet gilia (*Gilia aggregata*), Wild sweet pea (*Lathyrus spp.*), Lupine (*Lupinus spp.*), Penstemon (*Penstemon spp.*), Goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*).

When you plant anything – native or not – remember to locate it in your yard where it is best suited and to minimize water use. Don't plant a shade-loving species in a full-sun location or you will be constantly watering it and it will likely never look at home.

If you're not ready to reduce that bluegrass lawn with native plantings, you can at least reduce watering. Lawn care experts say occasional, deep watering is best for grass, rather than daily light watering which doesn't allow deep root systems to develop.



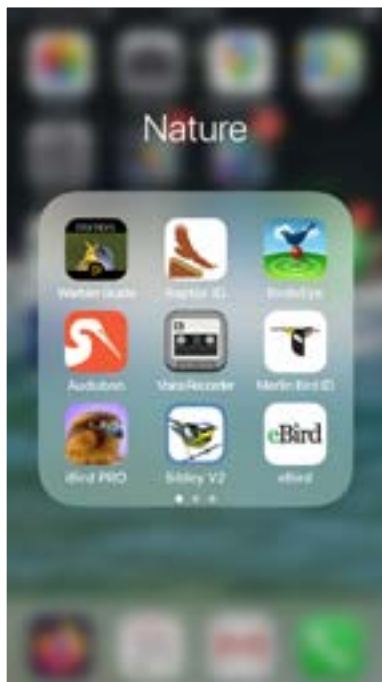
Birding During (and Beyond) a Pandemic

By Alan McCoy

Birding during this pandemic is one activity that can be pursued with pleasure and without much problem. You just gather your gear and go. Social distancing? No worries! The only folks you are likely to meet are a few other birders or others enjoying the outdoors. The unleashed dog may be the only issue you encounter.

But what if you are just getting interested in birds? You have a pair of binoculars and a bird book and plenty of interest and curiosity. But you don't really know where to go to find birds and if you find some birds, you may not be able to figure out what they are. This is normally the time you get in touch with the local Audubon society or bird club. When we are not all dealing with Covid-19, Spokane Audubon offers field trips that help to solve this issue. Our trips are led by knowledgeable folks who like to share the birding world with others who are interested. But we are not able to safely conduct field trips this year. So the folks either new to birding or new to the area are a bit stuck. Or maybe not.

Most of us have phones that we carry around with us all the time, right? But of course, they are really little computers that can also be used to call some-



rienced and human leader, but they offer us a work-around until such time as field trips can be safely resumed.

Here is a screenshot of the "Nature" folder of apps on my iPhone. Most of these are free.

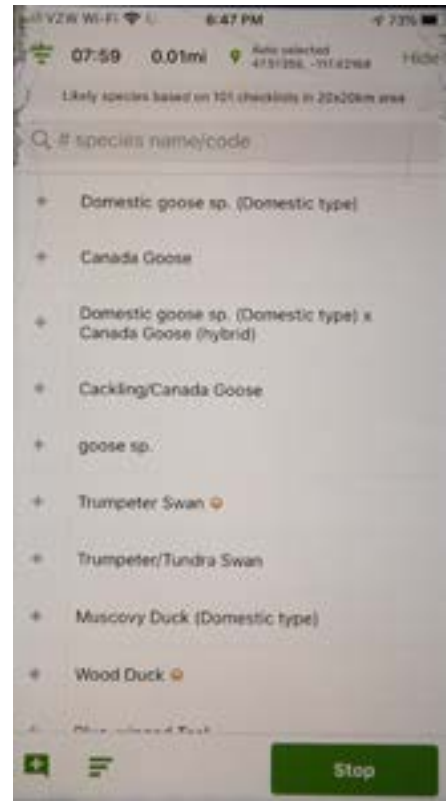
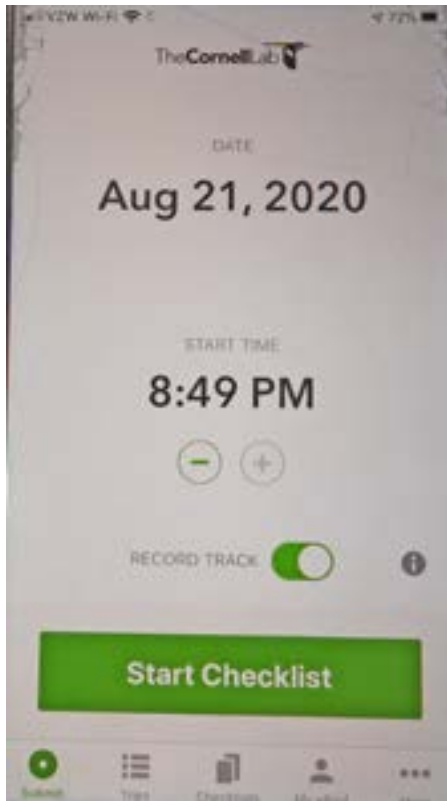
Let's start with eBird (<https://ebird.org/home>). Ebird is an on-line database containing millions of bird

sightings with photos and audio that are submitted by birders all over the world. It is a free service offered by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. This constantly-growing database serves as the source data for many of the apps that birders use. You don't need to sign up for an eBird account to make use of the data, but your birding experience will be much enhanced if you create an account. With an account eBird keeps track of the birds you have seen, as well as where and when you saw them. The database can be accessed on your computer, and once you set up an account you can customize it easily. For example, you can set it up so that you can get notifications in your email that will let you know what rare birds are being seen in your county and where and by whom they were seen. Or you can get notified about a bird that you have never recorded in your county. The notice tells you who saw the bird, as well as when and where it was seen (including a map). As you can see in the screenshot eBird is also available as an app and it is used to record your bird sightings in the field.

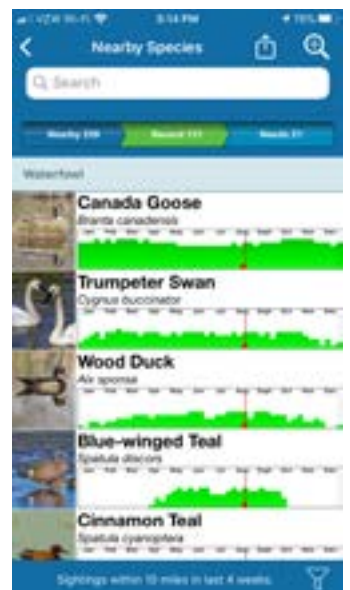
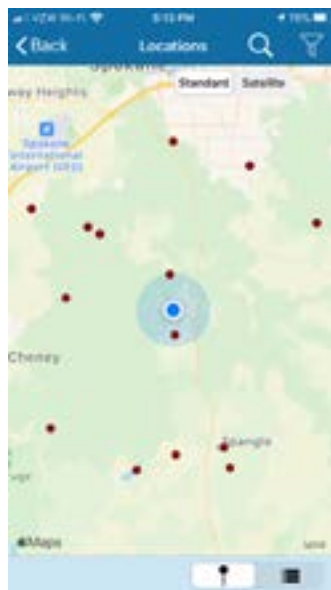
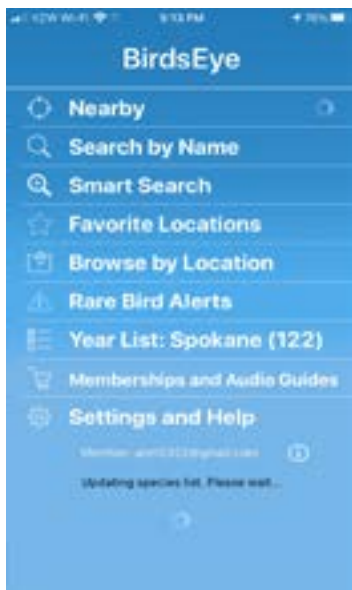
I think that knowing what birds to expect in an area at any given time is half of birding, right?! Ebird helps with that. The first screen below is what you see when you first start a birding trip with eBird. When you start the app, it knows the date and your location, and it creates a list of birds for you to choose from that are specific to that location. eBird does need to access the internet to create this list. But not to worry. If you are going to an area without internet service, you can download a list for that area while you do have internet, and use it offline while birding that area.

The next screenshot is a list it just created for my current location. So, by using ebird you have solved one of the major problems that you encounter in the field, namely what birds you might expect to see here at this time of year. In a way this serves in the same way as range maps do in the bird books we have used in the field forever. Only eBird doesn't go out of date because it is updated every day by the minute, all over the world.

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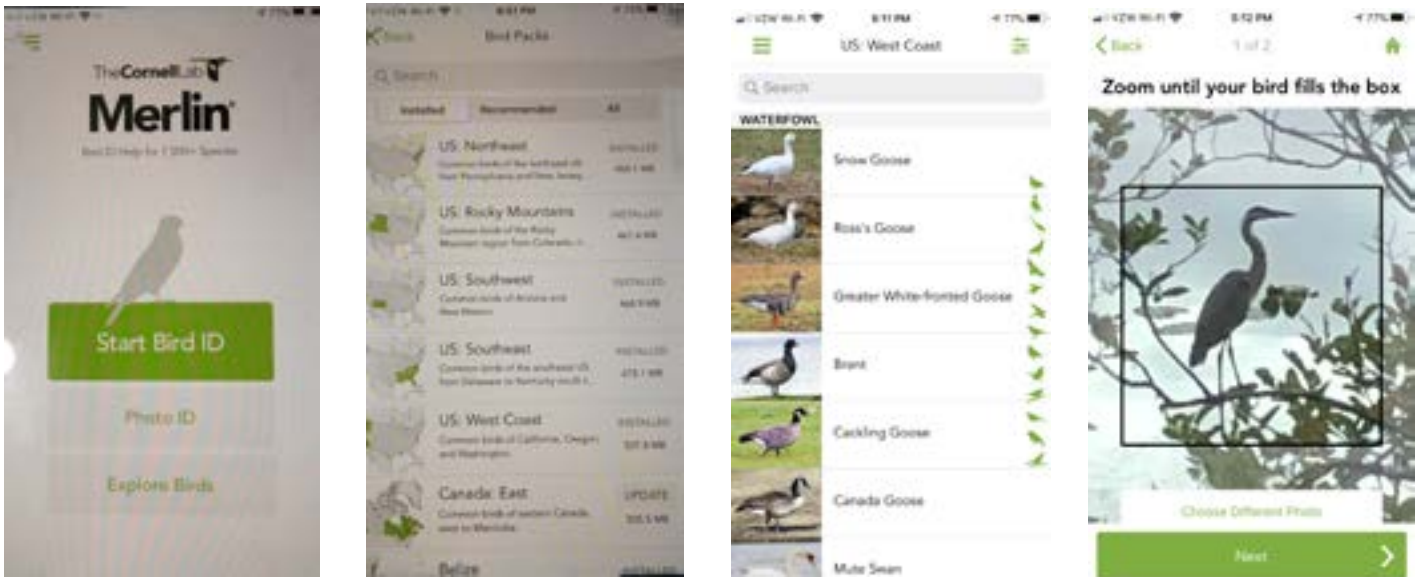


Another app that I use is by BirdsEye (<http://www.birdseyebirding.com/>). This app utilizes eBird data and displays it in a very useful way. Here are 4 screenshots that I think tell you all you need to know about the app. I use this app most often when I travel out of state or to any unfamiliar location. I can see at a glance what birds I might expect to see and when and where they have been seen and even an idea of how abundant they might be.

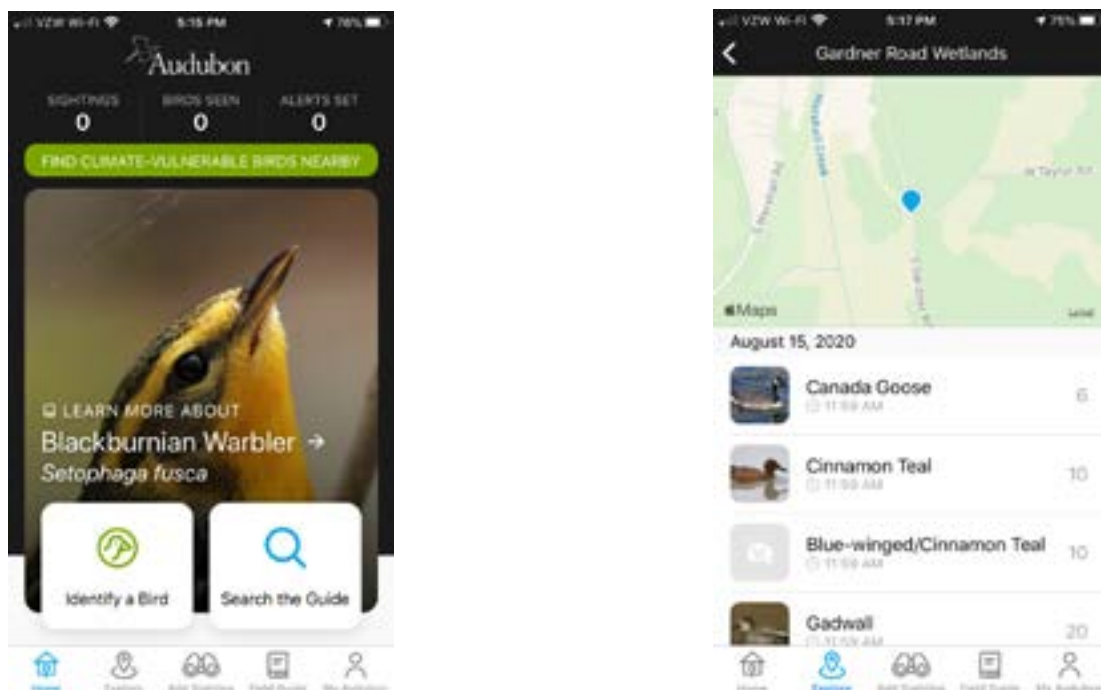


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Merlin (<https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>) is another app created by the Cornell team. It uses eBird data of course and it can be very helpful in assisting you in identifying birds you find. It recently incorporated a Photo ID tool. This allows you to use a bird photo you have taken and it will give you a short list of possibilities. Below are some Merlin screenshots. The Bird Packs are useful to filter the list of possibilities by area and are downloaded while you have internet. Then you can use them in the field regardless of internet service. The heron was taken with my phone camera. Even lousy photos can be useful, which is a good thing because I take a lot of lousy photos. But my lousy photos have often been critical in identifying a backlit or very distant bird. Using cameras for birding is another article waiting to be written.

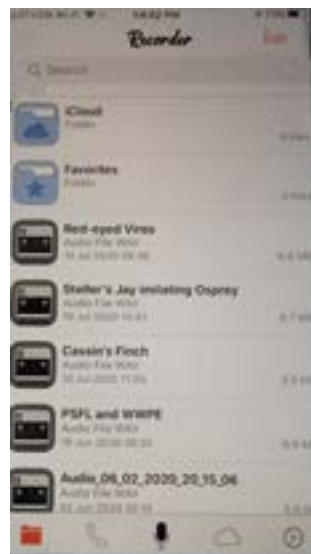


Audubon has an app too, of course. It has recently become much more robust and useful and it is free. The text in the Field Guide section is quite good and it also has a Photo ID tool. You can also locate birds in your area such as you see in the second screenshot below. The Gardner Road Wetlands are adjacent to the tiny town of Marshall. It has become a fruitful birding spot and this app will show you the location, what and when the birds were seen. The app uses eBird data. Are you noticing a theme here? eBird is the foundation for birding now and it is only going to get better as more people use it. eBird connects us with birds and their habitats and it serves to connect birders with one another too.



The last tool I want to highlight is the Voice Recorder. There are many such apps but I have landed on this one as effective and very easy to use. Look for the icon in the app store. I don't know about Android devices, but I am sure there is a similar app for those phones. You can name and save files and you don't need to use an external microphone. So much birding is done by ear that having a way to record what you hear is as useful as a camera in later identifying an unfamiliar bird.

For bird identification the recording of bird songs and calls in the field may soon be as compelling as taking photographs. For a few years a lot of effort has gone into developing a way to play a bird song recording into an app, have the app analyze the recording and create a list of possible birds. This is like the Photo ID tools in Merlin and other apps only it would be for audio files. But the difficulty of achieving this is high. When you take a photograph of a bird it is easy to isolate only the bird in question. But when you record a bird in the field when many birds may be singing at the same time, it is difficult for any software to isolate which song is the song you want to focus on. This is why photo ID is already here, while audio ID is just beginning to be accurate. Here is a website that has more information about this exciting development: <https://birdnet.cornell.edu/>.



All the good birding apps like Sibley, iBird Pro and the Audubon app have bird calls and songs for each species. iBird Pro is the only app that I am aware of that has the ability to compare bird songs between two different species side-by-side. These are great tools to learn to identify birds by their songs and calls or, if you are like me, to refresh your memory when you can't quite recognize a song that is familiar.

For those who enjoy the social aspect of birding with others, I believe it can be done safely during this pandemic. Being outside in and of itself is much safer than an indoor setting. But I would still advise wearing a mask if and when keeping a safe distance is not possible. For instance, there are times in densely wooded areas when the window for viewing a bird is tiny and one has to be in the right spot to view the bird. And of course, everyone wants to be in that spot at the same time before the bird takes

off! By keeping a mask handy you can just slip on the mask and share that spot. Other precautions apply as well. Keep the group small. Don't share food or equipment. Carpool only with family. When walking keep a proper distance from each other. Talk only when necessary and softly when you do. After all listening is a primary tool for finding birds. Observing these simple rules keeps everyone safe and makes for an enjoyable, fruitful and shared trip!

Rest assured that our field trips will restart soon but, in the meantime, consider using these digital tools for your next birding adventures. Also keep in mind that just because you don't have a leader doesn't mean that you can't have fun puzzling over the birds you see and hear. In fact, in my time in the field the birds I know the best now are often the ones I spent the most time puzzling over. And it is quite alright to mis-identify a bird. I have, many times.

Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps Good from July 1 to June 30 each year.



Available for purchase from July through mid-February each year.

Spokane Audubon is again offering Duck Stamps! While these stamps can be purchased at many locations, we decided to make them available at our meetings and on our website as a convenience to our members and others who want to contribute to the conservation of wetlands.

Why Do Duck Stamps Matter?

Produced annually since 1934 by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Duck Stamps are vital tools for wetland conservation. Ninety-eight cents of every dollar generated by the sale of Federal Duck Stamps goes directly to buy or lease wetland habitat for protection in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Besides serving as a waterfowl hunting license and a conservation tool, a current year's Federal Duck Stamp also serves as an entrance pass (for the whole year) for national wildlife refuges where admission is charged.

Our Pricing:

Each stamp is \$25. The online fee covers our cost of providing them on our website. Normally the stamps are also available at our meetings, but of course our meetings are temporarily on hold due to concerns over Covid-19. To avoid the online fee, it may be possible to purchase a stamp by arrangement. Please contact us at info@audubonspokane.org.

# Stamps	Online Fee	Total
1	\$2.25	\$27.25
2	\$2.50	\$52.50
3	\$2.75	\$77.75
4	\$3.00	\$103.00
5	\$3.25	\$128.25

Hope and a Red-winged Blackbird

by Tom Bancroft

The black eyes glared right at me, a penetrating stare that seemed to pierce my flesh. He then opened his mouth while flexing up his shoulders and leaning toward me. His red epaulets glowed in the sun as his song rang out, a sharp two whistles followed by a trill that lasted about a half-second and then another whistle. At the same time, he expanded his tail and flared his wings slightly, all the while those eyes scowled.

I stood only twenty feet from him, amazed that this male Red-winged Blackbird seemed to be threatening me as if I was an intruder into his world. He sat on the top of a cattail, his feet gripping the brown cylindrical spike that had been the plant's flowers. It was early June and one of my first trips to a suburban park since the Governor asked folks in March to stay at home. The COVID19 pandemic had gripped the country. It had been ten minutes since I walked over to this marsh at Union Bay in Seattle, and he initially paid me no heed. By now, his females would have produced their first brood, and he might be courting ones for a second attempt.

He looked over his right shoulder and back across his marsh. Males defend a territory, and if their area has good nesting sites and suitable food sources, they may attract more than one female. Scientists have found males with as many as fifteen females in their harem, but two to five seems much more common. Females' reproductive success doesn't seem to be hurt by joining a harem, and anyways, they may go elsewhere to fertilize their eggs. What appears critical in their choice is that it's a good place to build their nest, one that is protected from predation and disturbance.

The male's primary job is to defend a patch of cattails from other male blackbirds, from predators, from critters like me that might disturb the nesting females. The word "defend" ran through my mind. It seemed appropriate right then. Washington state had begun to open back up from the coronavirus lockdown. I needed a plan to start moving outside my house without catching the virus. But countering the despair that had filled me seemed equally important. The lockdown had meant isolation, no face to face with friends, no plans to see family, canceled

dreams for the coming months. The seclusion had zapped my motivation, my enthusiasm for much of anything. Much of my time had been spent staring out the window or watching the same movie over and over again.

This red-wing stood tall on the cattail, looking one way and then another. He was exposed to the open and yet didn't seem afraid. Not a quarter-mile away was an active Cooper's Hawk nest. These hawks specialize in capturing birds, and this blackbird would make the perfect meal. The red-wing must protect himself but also keep an eye out for his females. Male blackbirds in an area work together in watching for predators. Ornithologists have discovered that they change their calls when they see danger, and then all the males will take up that new call. It is the change that signals the threat and not the call itself.

Males will mob an American Crow or Red-tailed Hawk until they chase it out of the area, and attack Great Blue Herons. All these birds represent threats to adults, nestlings, or eggs. It is a joint effort that helps each be successful. He left his perch and flew a low circle over his marsh. The blackbird landed on a far cattail, and there, he let out his conk-la-ree song, while looking over his wetland. Content and assured was how he appeared to me.

A sense of hope welled up in me. This male looked confident about the future. Perhaps if he can beat the odds, so can I. With some diligence and help from others, we can defend ourselves from the virus and the despair that it has brought to our lives.



Red-winged Blackbird
CNC-TV

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.



Yellow Warbler
© Alan McCoy

Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status May 20 through August 19, 2020:

Welcome to our new members: Flora J Way, Cierra Grove, Theresa Ottosen, Tiffany Bowcut, Carol Floren, and Marc Lewis!

Many thanks to our returning members: Sherry and Craig Lee, Debbie Stempf, Kaye Bartholomew, Jerry and Jennifer King, Hans and Katie Krauss, Mary and John Benham, Brian and Beth Miller, and Ted Williams.

You can help us reduce our costs and energy use and save paper by switching to our electronic publication. Please send your 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>.

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual Membership:

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.

Joining

Renewing

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: Alan McCoy
615 W Paradise Rd
Spokane WA 99224

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

<https://www.audubonspokane.org>.

Click "Support Us" or "Join Us" We accept PayPal, credit/debit cards or Apple Pay.

Receiving duplicate newsletters? Errors or other changes needed on your mailing label? Contact Alan McCoy: ahm2352@gmail.com



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

Sept. 2020

To:

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

Visit our website: <https://audubonspokane.org>

At this time we are not offering any field trips. Our hope is that by early spring 2021 we can resume a full schedule of field trips.

We always encourage and enjoy carpooling on birding field trips to save fuel, lower our carbon footprint, and share sighting information more easily.

But with the current need for “social distancing” to help minimize the spread of coronavirus, we need to shift gears. Please consider the following on your next birding field trip:

- Carpool only with people you live with or at least feel comfortable and confident with in the close quarters of a motor vehicle.
- Don’t share binoculars, scopes, cameras, or mobile units with birding apps; if you need or want to share, clean equipment with disinfecting wipes between users.

- Maintain the Centers for Disease Control and other public health official “social distancing” guidelines of staying at least six feet away from each other when you reach a birding site where you leave your vehicles.

These steps may seem extreme, but they are simply part of our collective, responsible pre-emptive action to slow the spread and impacts of this virus and disease. We’d all rather be safe than sorry. Happy birding!