

The Pygmy Owl

Volume 32
Issue 2
Oct. 2023

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



October 11, 2023 7:00 p.m.

This meeting will be a “hybrid” – you can attend in-person at the Finch Arboretum, 3404 W. Woodland Blvd. (off Sunset Hwy., just west of downtown Spokane), in the Willow Room of the Woodland Center, or you can attend virtually on-line via <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82674520659?pwd=KzBsQVdiMDM4djRpNHBMcGpIVWRGdz09>
Meeting ID: 826 7452 0659 Passcode: 884410

Updating Washington state’s conservation efforts to help rare species and how to get involved

Presented by Wendy Connally

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) soon will be updating its comprehensive plan for conserving the state’s fish and wildlife species and their habitats, particularly its “Species of Greatest Conservation Need.”

WDFW’s newly-appointed State Wildlife Action Plan coordinator Wendy Connally will talk about status reviews and protective listings for these species and current and future conservation and restoration efforts to help them, including landscape scale habitat protection. She’ll also explain why it’s important for wildlife enthusiasts to get involved and how to participate in the plan update.

State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) are part of a nationwide effort by all states, supported by federal grants. Washington’s first plan was completed in 2005 and was updated in 2015 with changes to the list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The list currently includes 44 mammals, 52 birds (from American White Pelican to Sharp-tailed Grouse), 12 reptiles, 14 amphibians, 51 fishes, and 96 invertebrates. Plan updates are scheduled to be completed by October of 2025.



With a Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Management from Texas A&M University, Wendy has more than 25 years experience in conservation, which she says is all about working with people. Her career, which includes working for The Nature Conservancy and other state management agencies, spans Texas Hill Country, remote west Texas, Oregon, and both sides of the Cascades in Washington.

Wendy has been with WDFW for nearly 10 years and will bring deeper public engagement and more accessible, useable information to the plan updating process. She says she takes the “long view,” knowing that taking the time to lay a good foundation with stakeholders makes all the difference.



Washington Department of
FISH & WILDLIFE

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Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and 9 © Jan Reynolds.



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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status August 21, 2023 through September 20, 2023:

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

Individual: Toivo Mykkanen, Colleen Curtis

Family: Cheryl Jones

Supporting: Geness Reichert

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Nita Hamilton, Cheryle Jones-Johnson, Debbie Stempf

Family: Ina & Martin Ward, James & Mary Prudente

Supporting: James Patten

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>



Pygmy Nuthatches
© Alan McCoy

Possible expansion of Riverside State Park!

by Shenandoah Marr

As we know, the population of the Inland Northwest has grown considerably over the last few years. A big reason many people come here is for our abundance of outdoor activities. The increase in population is putting stress on our trails, parks, and navigable waterways. A new land acquisition of 1000 acres adjacent to the Little Spokane River by the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy and the Spokane Tribe called "Glen Tana" is being considered by Washington State Parks to expand Riverside State Park. An expansion would allow for more recreational opportunities as well as environmental protection. Washington State Parks is asking for public feedback during the planning process of this proposed park expansion. To provide feedback:

Take a 5-minute survey at <https://www.research.net/r/GlenTana>

To provide additional comments or to ask questions [Provide comments](#)

From Washington State Parks:

Washington State Parks is beginning a public planning process to consider expansion of the long-term boundary for Riverside State Park so it can incorporate a new property acquired by Inland Northwest Land Conservancy (the Conservancy) and the Spokane Tribe of Indians known as 'Glen Tana.'

Glen Tana is just over 1,000 acres, including a large stretch of habitat along the Little Spokane River and a large upland area. It's home to wildlife habitat for many species and connects existing recreational and conservation areas with Riverside State Park.

Through a unique partnership between Washington State Parks, the Conservancy and the Spokane Tribe of Indians, Glen Tana presents opportunities for environmental stewardship of riparian and upland habitat, expanded recreational access in a high-demand, near-urban location and support of salmon reintroduction efforts.

For more information on this exciting expansion opportunity for our beautiful Riverside State Park, visit https://parks.wa.gov/1268/Riverside-State-Park-Expansion-Opportuni?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=

Or:

<https://inlandnwland.org/glen-tana/>

Riverside State Park
by Washington State Parks



DIY Seed Cakes

by Alan McCoy

For years I have put out suet in the winter for birds. But recently starlings have discovered the suet and because they are pigs, I stopped putting suet out. But I then discovered seed cakes. Starlings will come to it, but they are not as interested in it as they are suet (and peanut butter but that is another story). I bought seed cakes for a while but then started doing the math and decided that it was too expensive to buy ready-made cakes. I consulted Dr. Google and found a recipe for seed cakes that seemed like a good one. Having tried it, I can attest to the fact that it works. Woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees really love it! Actually, squirrels do too so you may have to figure out a way to thwart them or they will eat a cake in half a day! Here is my recipe, plus a couple photos. The container pictured originally came with suet. I saved them for a year or so thinking I would make my own suet cakes. But any container that is about the same size as your suet/ seed cake feeder will do. Also, this recipe can be altered in many ways except that the first 5 ingredients are the “glue” that hold the cake together so the only change you should make to the “glue” would be to use only 1 ½ C flour (or maybe use only 1 ½ C cornmeal).

Ingredients: (makes enough for 7 of the plastic containers)

- 1 C cheap all-purpose flour
 - ½ C cornmeal
 - 1 C water
 - ¾ C light corn syrup
 - 2 pkt gelatin
- } “Glue”

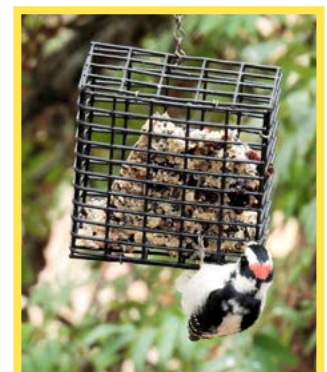


- 2 C Costco bird seed (or use your own blend)
 - 2 C safflower
 - 2 C black oil sunflower
 - 1 C raisins (or other dried fruit)
 - 1 C nuts (peanuts, other tree nuts) or mealworms
- } You can substitute and change the seeds, fruit and nuts but maintain the total amount (8 cups).

Instructions:

1. Mix flour, cornmeal, water and corn syrup in a large bowl. Add in the gelatin packets. Stir well.
2. Add all the other ingredients and mix well so that everything is coated with the “glue.”
3. Press the seed mix into your container. Depending on your container you might need to line it with waxed paper in order to get it out when it is done. The cakes pop right out of the plastic containers I use.
4. Refrigerate or put the cakes in a freezer. Leave them for at least an hour. I use my freezer and leave them in there until needed.
5. Remove the seed cake from the container and put it in the feeder.

Note: You do not need to use boiling water for the gelatin. This recipe works with tap water and the cakes are quite hard when you take them from the freezer after just an hour. However, an hour may not be long enough if you use your refrigerator. If you use nuts in the mix and squirrels gain access to your seed cake, they will eat the entire cake in half a day! The Costco blend has black oil sunflower, white millet, chipped sunflower seeds, and peanuts.



We Stand Corrected!

by Alan McCoy

We are pleased to include in this newsletter a letter written by Jim Acton. Jim has been birding a long time in eastern Washington. Not only that but he has a mind like a steel trap, has been keeping detailed notes on his bird sightings for decades and has extensive knowledge of the birds of eastern Washington. And he is just a delightful person! Below is his letter pointing out an error in our January newsletter. This is not the first time he has caught an error in the Pygmy Owl but I think it is the first time that even the photographer misidentified the bird. Thank you Jim for your careful reading of our newsletter and for taking the time to write and educate us.

8/10

Good day Alan:

Well, I have been waiting for months to see if anybody had a problem with that photograph of a alleged Purple Finch that appeared in the January issue of the Pygmy Owl.

If not, they should have because it is a Cassin's Finch.



Purple Finch
© Sergey Pavlov

The brightest feature of Cassin's is the bright crimson red crown and it owns a trait that specifically identifies Cassin's from Purples.

Cassin's can raise/lower the frontal portion of the crown feathers to send a message to others. We can only guess that it is done to impress a nearby female or it could be a aggressive signal directed to a close rival.

The picture has the crown fully deployed. (Frontal) (Facial markers are true Cassin's)

Next comes the PRIMA FACIE marker. Cassin's has a white eye-ring. Purples are all black.

Use a magnify glass or the eye piece of a binocular and hold it close to the eye of the bird in the photo. You will see minute white feathers developing around the eye. (Objective lens view)

Case closed. Purple overruled.


Rouncer out!

Ref: STOKES FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS -WESTERN REGION

(Cassin's can have clean undertail coverts too. Bill looks like it has a straight culman: however, a subspecies of the Purple (Californicus) also has a fairly straight culmen so we'll set that aside. So also with the primary projection. Wrong angle.)

Over here, House Finch numbers are fine - Cassin's are in major decline based on my experience..



Cassin's Finch
Misidentified as Purple Finch
© Harry Trombley

Cassin's Finch Life History

Habitat

Cassin's Finches breed throughout the conifer belts of North America's western interior mountains, from central British Columbia to northern New Mexico and Arizona. They breed mostly between 3,000 and 10,000 feet of elevation. They often live in mature forests of lodgepole pine and ponderosa pine, but are also found in Jeffrey pine, Douglas-fir, limber pine, Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, grand fir, red fir, pinyon pine, brittlecone pine, and quaking aspen. Some Cassin's Finches breed in open sagebrush shrubland with scattered western junipers. They winter at lower elevations throughout much of the same range as well as farther south into Baja California and mainland Mexico.

Food

Cassin's Finches eat mostly seeds, as well as some insects. During spring up to 94 percent of their diet consists of quaking aspen buds; they also eat buds of cottonwood and green manzanita. During the summer Cassin's Finches eat larvae of Douglas-fir tussock moths and other moths and butterflies. In late summer and early fall, they gather into foraging groups with crossbills and other mountain birds,.

Nesting

The female chooses the nest site while the male accompanies her. The nest is usually near the top of a conifer tree or on a side branch away from the trunk, 15 feet or more from the ground.

Behavior

Cassin's Finches fly with an undulating pattern, rising when they flap and dipping when they glide. When the female starts looking for a nest site in the spring, her mate starts chasing other males from the area. By the time the pair is incubating their eggs, the male will tolerate other nest-building pairs nearby (within several feet). Cassin's Finches form one-on-one pairs to tend the nest, but they probably mate outside the pair bond as well. After the breeding season, they join foraging groups of Red Crossbills, Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, and other finches.



Purple Finch Life History

Cornell Lab: All About Birds

Habitat

In summer, Purple Finches are primarily birds of moist, cool evergreen forests. You'll also find them in mixed forests, along wooded streams, and in tree-lined suburbs. In winter they're more widespread, using forests, shrubby areas, weedy fields, hedgerows, and backyards.

Food

Purple Finches eat mainly seeds of coniferous trees and elms, tulip poplars, maples, and others. They also eat soft buds, nectar (extracted by biting the bases off flowers), and many berries and fruit, including blackberries, honeysuckle, poison ivy, crabapples, juniper berries, cherries, and apricots. In winter you may see Purple Finches eating seeds of low plants like dandelions, ragweed, and cocklebur. They eat some insects, including aphids, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and beetles.

Nesting

Look for Purple Finch nests far out on the limb of a coniferous tree or, particularly to the south of its breeding range, in deciduous trees such as oaks, maples, and cherries. Occasionally it nests in shrubs or among vine tangles. Nests can be 2.5 feet up to 60 feet off the ground and are often built under an overhanging branch for shelter.

Behavior

Aggressive Purple Finches show their agitation by leaning toward their opponent, neck stretched out and bill pointed at the other bird. This can intensify to standing upright, opening the beak or pointing it downward at opponent, and sometimes results in actual pecking attacks. During disputes at food sources and in flocks, females usually win out over males. Courting males sing softly while hopping and fluffing feathers in front of the female, often holding a twig or grass stem in the beak.



Carlene's End of Summer Turnbull Travels

Last Saturday, I headed out to Turnbull to see the swan family since I have not been out to the distant lake (Cheever) to see them since July. On the way I spotted a squirrel in a tree. It glanced at me and then off it went, but not before I got a few pictures!



On Ice Pond, a moose was kneeling in the grass and grazing. Moose are so tall that they have difficulty bending down to eat grasses but they will work hard to keep their bellies full. So sometimes they gingerly bend one knobby front knee, and then the other, to establish support on the ground so they can lower their head within grazing range.



When moose want to move on, or in this case, lie down, the process gets reversed. She slowly pushed up one leg and then the other and returned to a standing position. Soon after I started taking pictures, she (I think it was a female) first stood up and then lay down to rest in the exact same spot where she was just grazing.

Further down the dirt road to Cheever, I heard some very beautiful bird songs, looked up and saw four Western Meadowlarks high up in a tree! Were they singing to attract a mate or defend their territory? Or just singing for joy? Their melodic overture was so enjoyable to listen to!



Finally! I made it to Cheever and after waiting for one and a half hours while they rested, the Trumpeter swan family got off their well-hidden nest and headed out to the middle of the lake to eat. On their way out, one of the cygnets did a wing stretch and I saw that its feathers are nicely filled out. These two should be ready to start practice flying sometime soon (when they are 14 to 17 weeks old). I noted that I did not see the third cygnet this trip!



All-in-all, it was a lovely walk.

Enjoy the cooler weather!

Carlene

All photos by Carlene Hardt

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

So far, the brink of fall has been temperate, thankfully with little smoke or other unusual weather events. We're just past the peak of migration and as usual, some nice fall vagrants showed up around the region. An exceptional two BAND-TAILED PIGEONS graced our region in the past month. And migration isn't over yet! Surprises can still be found for the patient birder willing to go through every Yellow-rumped Warbler and White-crowned Sparrow with a fine-toothed comb. Especially rare birds are in all caps.

Harlequin Duck: Ritzville (9/9-eBird)

BAND-TAILED PIGEON: Washtucna (8/20-BF); Hooper (9/2-RB)

Anna's Hummingbird: Rice (9/10-TD); Sandpoint (9/12-RDC); Barstow (9/18-DB); Sandpoint (9/19-JR)

Sanderling: Sandpoint (9/6-eBird)

WANDERING TATTLER: Hatton Coulee (9/18-JI)

Sabine's Gull: Sandpoint (9/8-RDC)

BROAD-WINGED HAWK: Spokane (9-15-MW)

Williamson's Sapsucker: Central Ferry HMU (8/26-eBird)

Blue Jay: Priest River (9/6-eBird); Kootenai NWR (9/9-eBird); Bonner's Ferry (9/11-eBird); Sandpoint (9/13-RDC); Dover Bay (9/19-JR);

Lesser Goldfinch: Saltese Flats (8/22-eBird); Paradise Prairie (8/24); Airway Heights (9/7-eBird)

Clay-colored Sparrow: Palouse (8/30-RB)

White-throated Sparrow: Ritzville (9/2-eBird); Washtucna (9/16-eBird)

Golden-crowned Sparrow: WSU Campus (9/2-eBird); Potlatch (9/2-GL); Liberty Butte (9/13-CH); Kootenai NWR (9/16-JR)

Lapland Longspur: Clark Fork (9/15-RDC)

TENNESSEE WARBLER: WSU Campus (8/21-eBird)

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER: Washtucna (8/25-eBird)

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER: WSU Campus (9/1-eBird)



Band-tailed Pigeon
© Paul Fenwick



Chestnut-sided Warbler
© Gary Fairhead

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; RyB-Ryan Bart; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; MC-Marlene Cashen; JC-Jeffrey Colburn; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; Jacob Elonen; BF-Bob Flores; LH-Lindell Haggin; BH-Barb Hubbard; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; 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; WY-Will Young; MW-Michael Woodruff

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.



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

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<https://audubonspokane.org>

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