

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 32
Issue 6
Mar. 2024

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

March 13, 2024 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 Ponderosa Room of the Woodland Center, or you can attend virtually on-line via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82332355425?pwd=KzQvTDRlVjhyRVJSSUxRSDIYKzhDZz09>

Meeting ID: 823 3235 5425

Passcode: 743847

What's going on at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge?

presented by Molly Dixon, Turnbull Wildlife Biologist

Before Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge was established in southwest Spokane County in 1937, the land had been altered heavily. Wetlands were drained, forests were logged, and grasslands were heavily grazed.

Since then, refuge staff and partners have worked to restore the refuge to functional habitat for the benefit of wildlife and people. But there is still much to do!

Molly Dixon, who has been the refuge wildlife biologist for almost two years now, will provide an update on some of the major wildlife monitoring and habitat restoration projects going on at Turnbull. She also will discuss the importance of monitoring and research for successful adaptive management, including waterfowl monitoring and wetland restoration, terrestrial LiDAR monitoring and forest restoration, and more.

Molly has worked in conservation, research, and land management for about eight years. She received her B.Sc. in Zoology from Ohio State University and her M.Sc. in Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology from Eastern Michigan University. Her master's thesis was entitled, “The relationship between population dynamics and dietary preferences within two snake genera (*Storeria* and *Thamnophis*)”.



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

Spokane Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9820
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Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and 11 © Jan Reynolds.



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Molly Dixon

Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status January 20, 2024 through February 20, 2024:

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

Supporting: Elaine Edwards

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Ellen Imsland, Ruth Daugherty, Scott Hall, Darcy Varona, Gail Stewart, Marya Nowakowski, Peggy Anderson

Family: Marilyn & Douglas Lloyd, Linda & Ed Joy, Lori Pegg, Ann Hurst, Karen Edwards, Elizabeth Collins, Susan Terjesen, David & Lloyd Jensen, Surender Bodhireddy

Supporting: Bud & Roxanne McCormack, Pam McKenney & Mike Regan, Mike Borysewicz & Nan Berger

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>.

Free Spring bird presentations and field trips are a great way to introduce your family and friends to birding

Spokane Audubon Society is offering a series of presentations and field trips this Spring that are free to anyone interested in learning more about local birds.

- **Saturday, March 9, 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.,**
Spring waterfowl watching at Reardan Audubon Lake Wildlife Area, 350 E. Railroad Ave, Reardan
- **Tuesday, March 19, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at Cheney Library, 610 First St., Cheney
- **Saturday, March 23, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.,**
Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge Bird Walk, 26010 S. Smith Rd., Cheney
- **Thursday, March 28, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at North Spokane Library, 44 East Hawthorne Rd.
- **Saturday, March 30, 8 – 10 a.m.,**
Waikiki Springs Natural Area Bird Walk, 12515 N. Fairwood Dr.
- **Thursday, April 11, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at Spokane Valley Library, 22 N. Herald Rd., Spokane Valley
- **Saturday, April 13, 8 – 10 a.m.,**
Saltese Flats Wetlands Bird Walk, Doris Morrison Learning Center, 1330 S. Henry Rd., Greenacres
- **Saturday, April 13, 10:30 – 12:30 p.m.,**
Spring waterfowl watching at Reardan Audubon Lake Wildlife Area, 350 E. Railroad Ave, Reardan
- **Tuesday, April 16, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Attracting Birds To Your Yard” presentation at Argonne Library, 4322 N. Argonne Rd.
- **Thursday, April 18, 5 – 6 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at Deer Park Library, 208 S. Forest Ave., Deer Park
- **Monday, May 6, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at Medical Lake Library, S. 1386 Lefevre St., Medical Lake
- **Saturday, May 11, 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.,**
Spring waterfowl watching at Reardan Audubon Lake Wildlife Area, 350 E. Railroad Ave, Reardan
- **Monday, May 20, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Attracting Birds to Your Yard” presentation, Moran Prairie Library, 6004 S. Regal St.



A complete list and details about all events are available at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/upcoming-events>

2025 Spokane Audubon Calendar Photograph Contest Guidelines

Submission Period: April 15 – May 15, 2024

Submit photos to: calendarspokaneaclubon@gmail.com

Requirements

- All photographs must be submitted by a Spokane Audubon Society member in good standing (i.e., a current member).
- A maximum of four photographs can be submitted per person.
- Photographs must be submitted electronically via email to calendarspokaneaclubon@gmail.com
- Each photograph must be submitted in jpeg format, be in landscape orientation with dimensions of 9.25" wide by 6.75" high, have a resolution of at least 300 pixels per inch, and be no larger than 10MB in size.
- Submitted photographs shall not have the © symbol with the photographer's name or other inserted script.
- For images selected for the calendar, the photographer maintains copyright and agrees to provide perpetual use of the photograph(s) to Spokane Audubon Society for the calendar and other promotional and educational purposes.
- All photos must be of wild birds and must be taken in Eastern Washington (East of the Cascades) or Northern Idaho. Please include the species name(s) and location where each photograph was taken.

Call for Entries

Photographers may submit entries starting Friday, April 15th. The deadline is Sunday, May 15th; no entries will be accepted after that date.

Judging and Selection

- Selection will be made by a panel of three to five impartial judges, at least one of whom is a Spokane Audubon Society board member. At least some panel members will have moderately advanced bird identification skills and experience with bird photography.
- Photographers who submit entries will not be judges.
- The bird in a natural setting must be the focus of the photograph. Preference is given to interesting behaviors, unusual or hard-to-see species, and eye-catching compositions. Habitat and artificial features should not overpower nor draw attention away from the bird(s).
- Judging criteria are photo composition, technical excellence, artistic merit, and overall impact. Normal processing is allowed but over-processed or altered photos will be rejected.
- Submissions must comply with the specified size requirements.
- Following selection, all entrants will be notified of the decisions.

Publication

Each photograph will be published with the common name of the bird species and © with the name of the photographer.

Special Note: Photographers whose images are selected for the calendar may need to provide a TIFF version of the photograph for printing purposes.

Why We Need Zero-Emission School Buses In Washington

The Spokesman Review GUEST OPINION

by Will Merg

Routines don't change much for me during the school year. Each day after school I walk past a long line of school buses to find my bus as diesel fumes wash over me from the idling buses. I am strangely comforted by the smell, because it signals that I'm going home, but I'm also deeply alarmed because I've learned what the impacts of fossil fuels can be.

Diesel pollution causes cancer, contributes to lung and other chronic diseases, and triggers asthma attacks. It is especially harmful to kids with still-developing lungs, and the air pollution inside a school bus can be 4 to 12 times higher than outside. Yet, almost all of the 12,000-plus school buses in Washington currently run on diesel fuel.

As one of the youngest members of the Spokane Audubon Society, I also think a lot about the impact of air pollution on birds and wildlife. When I was 4 years old, I watched a Northern Shrike on a lilac bush spearing mouse parts on the sharp, frozen branches. I always consider it my "spark bird," even though I didn't officially start birding until I was 8, when my grandparents gave me my first bird book.

Everything has a role in nature, from the tiny mosquito to the towering moose. We are not excluded from this, despite living differently from our animal neighbors. I believe it is our job to try to better the environment so we can give back to the land and animals we have had the pleasure of enjoying. It is our turn to protect what we hold dear.

When I learned about a bill (House Bill 1368) that aims to convert all our school buses to zero emissions, I instantly recognized its potential to improve the health of school kids like me across the state, as well as reduce the climate impacts affecting the survival of birds and wildlife.

This is a big bill in a short legislative session, and its passage would make an outsized impact. The legislation provides clear direction and funding through the Climate Commitment Act to flip our fleet of buses from largely diesel-powered to fossil fuel-free. Last year, 182 electric school buses were wait-listed

for federal grants, and with this bill, the state can step in to fill the gap.

The Legislature can and should ensure all Washington kids can get a clean and healthy ride to school. Zero-emission school buses are being manufactured right now and are at the ready. Five other states have transitions in law – we can too.

Investing in zero-emissions school buses will reduce health risks associated with air pollution and improve the quality of life for all residents, especially kids like me who deserve safe and healthy transportation to school. The transition to zero-emissions buses isn't just a symbolic gesture; it's a tangible step toward curbing climate change and protecting the health of our communities.

In this brief legislative session, our decision-makers have an opportunity to embrace practical solutions that promote cleaner air, healthier communities, and a more sustainable future for Washington state. Let's encourage them to seize this opportunity and pass the Clean School Bus bill.

Will Merg is an eighth-grader at the Odyssey Program at the Libby Center and is one of the youngest members of the Spokane Audubon Society.

Highland Electric Fleet



Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Following the severe cold snap of last month, we are back to seasonal temperatures, with more rain and a little snow to go with. Some signs of Spring are on the horizon with small numbers of waterfowl showing up in various locations with open water. Like last month, it's been a boring winter in terms of winter finches and allies (Bohemian Waxwings, etc.), with the exception of Pine Grosbeaks, which are still making a nice showing in the region. By next month, we should see the first signs of migration in action, which should liven things up for birders. This month's noteworthy sightings are below; especially rare sightings in all CAPS:

Snow Goose: Moscow (1/31-eBird); Sandpoint (2/3-RC); Chewelah (2/4-eBird); Heyburn SP (2/6-CH)

Cackling Goose: Canyon Road Marsh (1/31-JE)

Long-tailed Duck: Coeur D'Alene (2/4-JE); Almota (2/15-RB)

Red-breasted Merganser: Turnbull NWR (1/28-BH); Evans Campground (2/5-eBird)

Iceland Gull: Coeur D'Alene (1/22-DW); Lower Granite Dam (2/9-RB)

Glaucous-winged Gull: Lower Granite Dam (2/4-AS)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER: University of Idaho (1/20-eBird)

Red-breasted Sapsucker: Boyer Park (2/9-RB)

Blue Jay: Pullman (1/23-eBird); Bonner's Ferry (2/10-JR); Moscow (2/12-CS); East Moscow (2/17-eBird)

Pine Grosbeak: 49 Degrees North (1/23-eBird); Valley (1/28-eBird); Deer Park (2/2-eBird); Naples (2/3-eBird); Idler's Rest (2/3-eBird); Steptoe Butte (2/4-CH); Elmira (2/4-eBird); Viola (2/10-eBird); Bonner's Ferry (2/12-eBird); University of Idaho (2/13-eBird-MC); Spokane Valley (2/15); Pullman (2/16-eBird)

Gray-crowned Rosy-finch: Mondavi (2/9-BH)

Common Redpoll: Garfield (1/21-CH); (Coeur D'Alene (2/4-eBird); Bonner's Ferry (2/10-eBird)

Lesser Goldfinch: Gonzaga University (2/14-eBird); West Spokane (2/16-MW)



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Male
© David Turgeon



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Female
© Simon Boivin

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; BB-Ben Bright; MC-Marlene Cashen; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JE-Jacob Elonen; MG-Micah Grove; LH-Lindell Haggin; BH-Bea Harrison; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; CL-Casey Lowder; AM-Alan McCoy; CM-Curtis Mahon; WM-Will Merg; TO-Tim O'Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; AS-Alex Sowers; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; DW-Doug Ward; MW-Michael Woodruff

Conservation Updates

By Shenandoah Marr

Northwest Forest Plan

The public had an exciting opportunity this year to comment on proposed changes to the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). The NWFP, implemented in 1994, is a landmark series of federal policies and guidelines governing uses for federal land in parts of Northern California, Oregon, and Washington. The catalyst for the NWFP was overharvest of old-growth forests and the decline of Northern Spotted Owls. Most conservation groups consider it to be a good, science-based forest management plan that has been successful in protecting large areas of public lands for wildlife habitat.

However, certain parts of the NWFP have been weakened and a lot has changed in the last 30 years. Climate change and its effects on wildfire severity, water quality, and wildlife habitat was hardly mentioned in the 1994 plan. Tribes in the regions covered by the NWFP were not consulted or involved with the development of the original plan. The range and population of Barred Owls, which compete with Northern spotted owls for resources, has expanded since the original plan was written. Some proposed amendments to the plan take these factors into account, but with varying levels of clarity and specificity. The final updated plan will shape the future of land management in our region. Whether or not the mature forests that are unprotected under the current plan are allowed to be logged depends on the details of the final plan.

This first stage of proposed amendments to the plan is called the “scoping phase,” where individuals and groups submit their opinions on proposed changes. In June 2024 the Forest Service will publish a draft environmental impact statement with responses to comments, some changes, and initiate another 90 day comment period. Spokane Audubon Society will be watching closely for this next phase and submitting another comment letter advocating for birds and their habitats.

A copy of the scoping phase comment letter submitted by the Spokane Audubon Society can be found [here](#).

Washington State Legislation

The 2024 Washington state legislative session will end March 7, 2024. I have been closely following Washington Audubon’s priority bills and signing in or submitting comments on behalf of Spokane Audubon Society for

bills that would ultimately benefit birds and other wildlife. This year is a “short” session - meaning it’s only 60 days long, making it tough for a lot of bills to get through. Unfortunately, two of Washington Audubon’s top priority bills (bottle deposit/return and extended producer responsibility for packaging) failed to make it out of the House by the deadline so they have died for the year. However, one bill, HB 1368, transitioning to fully electric school buses, passed through the House and is currently in the Senate. Next year the legislature will return to a “long” session of 105 days when the bottle deposit/return and extended producer responsibility surely will be reintroduced.

A few other bills that Adam Maxwell, Senior Policy Manager with Washington Audubon, has asked us to support, are still alive (as of the time of writing).

SB 6120: Wildland urban interface bill-would make improvements to the wildland urban interface code. The improvements would protect trees and align with the best available science on protecting communities from wildfire.

SB 5972: restricts the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, meaning only licensed applicators can purchase these pesticides.

HB 2293: convenes a work group to come up with remedies for avian predation on salmonids. When introduced, this was a potentially harmful bill. We worked with the prime sponsor to make significant changes that required better process and better science, while also including avian conservation stakeholders.

SB 5934: another pollinator bill that fosters improved pathways for permitting authorities to encourage pollinator habitat. This bill was initiated by a Girl Scout from Mead!

If you are interested in advocating on behalf of Washington’s birds, sign up for [action alerts](#) from Washington Audubon. Most actions only take a few minutes.

See Sandhill Cranes this month in Columbia Basin

The annual Othello Sandhill Crane Festival is March 22-24 this year. Registration is still open for the many tours, hikes, presentations and other events offered to celebrate the return of nearly 35,000 Sandhill Cranes to the Columbia Basin area.

For over two decades the Grant County Conservation District has coordinated the Festival in Othello every March during the big birds' stopover in their migration north to their breeding grounds in Alaska. The Festival offers an incredible opportunity to view the cranes up-close, with tours led by local experts.

The Festival also boasts other specialty tours of the flora, fauna and geology of the area, and many lectures by scientists and other experts, as well as children's activities -- all made possible by the generous contributions of dedicated volunteers, board members, and sponsors, including our sister chapter, the Central Basin Audubon Society.

It was initiated by the Greater Othello Chamber of Commerce and the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge in 1998. Since its beginning, the Festival has been financially supported by the City of Othello through tourism development funds (hotel/motel taxes) and logistically supported by Othello Community Schools, reimbursed by Festival registration fees.

The Grant County Conservation District provides additional financial support and administrative staffing. The Festival has grown over the years, with returning participants attending from across the country.

General admission has been reduced to just \$10 at the door. Pre-registration for specific tours should be made now at <https://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/>.

If you can't attend the festival, you can make your own trip out to the Columbia National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding farmland area this month when the largest concentration of Sandhill Cranes migrating in the Pacific Flyway is attracted to the area's rich croplands and wetlands for a feeding and resting stopover.

After their few week's stop in the Othello area, the Sandhill Cranes continue their migration north to their breeding grounds in south-central Alaska, specifically in the Matanuska River Valley and Bristol Bay areas. In the fall, the Sandhill Cranes will migrate through Eastern Washington again, back to their wintering grounds in California's Central Valley.



Sandhill Cranes
© Dave Drum

BIRD OF THE WEEK

American Bird Conservancy

American Robin

The American Robin is one of North America's most widespread, familiar, and well-loved songbirds. Although homesick settlers named it after the European Robin because of its reddish-orange breast, the two species are not closely related. The American Robin is a thrush, related to the [Wood Thrush](#), [Swainson's Thrush](#), and [Varied Thrush](#), while the European Robin is an Old World flycatcher.



A Widespread Success

Seven American Robin subspecies are recognized, based on differences in body size and plumage color. Northern populations are short- to medium-distance migrants, and two nonmigratory subspecies are resident in Mexico.

The American Robin has a very large breeding range, encompassing a wide variety of open woods and edge habitats from northern Alaska, across Canada, down through the lower 48 United States, and into mountainous areas of Mexico. It is very scarce in winter in Cuba and the Bahamas and has occurred as a rare vagrant to other parts of the West Indies, as well as Europe.

Migratory populations spend the winter from extreme southern Canada south to central Mexico. Although originally a bird of forest clearings, this species adapted particularly well to the widespread settlement and clearing of forest and grassland that occurred over the last few centuries.

American Robins are social birds, especially during the winter, when they gather in large night roosts of up to 250,000 birds. During short winter days, smaller groups break off to forage for food, rejoining the roost in the evening.

All-Around Omnivores

This species has a wide-ranging diet. Robins feed on fruits and berries (especially in fall and winter), earthworms, snails, spiders, and insects such as grubs, caterpillars, and grasshoppers. Most people are familiar with the sight of American Robins hopping busily to and fro on lawns and in other open spaces, pulling up earthworms. Although they mainly glean food from the ground, robins also perch in trees while feeding on fruit and can catch flying insects in midair.

Flexible, Frequent Nesters

This adaptable bird nests in a wide variety of suburban, urban, rural, wooded, and shrubby habitats close to open areas. Breeding begins in early April, and the robin is one of the first songbirds to begin laying eggs each spring. If conditions allow, a robin pair will raise two or three broods per season. American Robin pairs remain together for that year's nesting. The female chooses the nest site and builds the cup-shaped nest, making a new one for each



clutch of three to four sky-blue eggs. Nests are most often built 5 to 15 feet off the ground in a tree fork, in a densely foliated shrub, or on a window ledge or other sheltered structure.



The American Robin is one of the species that is clearly showing northward shifts in its distribution as a result of global warming. It now occurs and breeds in areas of the Canadian and Alaskan tundra where it did not previously occur.



Range Map ABC

Conserving a Well-Loved Species

Unlike many other birds, the American Robin seems to have benefited from urbanization and agricultural development. Although its populations are increasing, it remains vulnerable to many of the same factors threatening less adaptable species.

Pesticide poisoning remains an important threat, since American Robins forage on lawns and other open spaces that are often sprayed with toxins. Although DDT has been banned in the United States, other toxic chemicals such as neonicotinoids, chlorpyrifos, and glyphosate (used in the familiar weed-killer Round-Up) are still in use. Pesticides can also affect populations of earthworms, a major food source for this bird.

Since American Robins forage and feed on the ground, they are especially vulnerable to predation by outdoor cats. Collisions with windows, communications towers, and car strikes are other common hazards.

Attracting Robins to Your Property

A stretch of green grass is all that's needed to attract robins. In particular, pesticide- and herbicide-free gardening and lawn care practices create a healthy environment and worm-hunting grounds for robins. A rich garden mulch not only benefits your flowers or vegetables; it also invites lots of wrigglers. These in turn provide a bountiful source of food for the birds. Robins also love to splash in water, so you're bound to have visitors if you maintain a shallow bird bath, fountain or simply a puddle.



Courtesy BirdFiles

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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P.O. Box 9820
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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>

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual Membership and Donation:

Student (under 21): \$10 per year _____

Individual: \$20 per year _____

Family: \$30 per year _____

Supporting: \$50 per year _____

Contributing: \$100 per year _____

Lifetime: \$500 _____

Other: _____

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

Name: _____

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

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

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Contact Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com or (509) 999-9512.