

WILLAPA WHISTLER

A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society

Volume 41 // Issue 1

Spring 2014



Acorn Woodpecker seen in November 2014 in Longview Image by Rob Kedenburg

Annual Membership Dinner and Meeting coming March 29

Come join us for food, fun, and fellowship. The annual membership dinner meeting and program for members, family, and friends will be held on **Sunday, March 29th** with dinner at 5:30 at the **Kelso Senior Center**. The address is 106 NW 8th, Kelso, WA. This year will be a **potluck**. WHAS will supply coffee, tea and water. Please bring a potluck dish to share that would feed 8 to 10: salad, dessert, casserole, bread, appetizer, or your own specialty. Let's make it a green event and bring your own tableware too. The first 40 families to arrive will receive a Charles Kingsland Print. Also there will be other door prizes for those who come. Doors open at 5:15.

If you have questions, call Carol at 360-849-4324 or email carver.exum@gmail.com or contact Gloria at 360-636-3793 or email Jgnt@comcast.net.

At 7:00 keynote speaker, Larry Schwitters, will present his program on the Vaux's Swift monitoring project he manages for Audubon.

Larry Schwitters to speak on Vaux's Swift Migration

In this fast paced PowerPoint Presentation, Larry Schwitters of Issaquah, Washington, will examine Audubon's ongoing citizen science project, Vaux's Happening, launched eight years ago to gather the data necessary to make a compelling case for the preservation of what has proven to be one of the most significant Vaux's Swift communal migratory roost sites in North America.

Vaux's Happening quickly expanded into an attempt to locate, raise awareness of, and hopefully preserve the important roost sites used by this species all along their migratory path.

In the last fourteen migrations the project has documented over seven million Vaux's Swift roosting events from San Diego to the Yukon.

Schwitters will also share images and information captured by the project's chimney surveillance cameras and precision temperature recorders.

...continued on page 6

A Message to Our National Members

By Margaret Green

Please become one of the National Audubon Society (NAS) members in our area who annually sends \$20 to join and support our local chapter, Willapa Hills Audubon Society (WHAS). This additional \$20 provided directly to the chapter, is a very significant contribution toward local conservation work and education programs, which benefit our communities. We provide speakers and field trips open to all members of our communities free of charge.

Your membership donation to WHAS also allows us to send you a copy of our quarterly Willapa Whistler newsletter which includes project updates and event announcements.

We know donations are discretionary and appreciate whatever level of giving you choose. You will find more details on our member form on page 2.

Christmas Bird Counts 2014 Recap

The three local 2014 CBC were again well attended with about 70 volunteers counting and observing the winter bird population.

Check page 3 to see the details for WHAS sponsored counts in Cowlitz, Wahkiakum and Pacific Counties.

In this issue of the Whistler:

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Support our mission, join WHAS today!

Check type of Membership:

- New Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$20 check for annual membership)
- Renewal Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$20 check for annual membership)
- I would like to support the work of Willapa Hills Audubon Society.
Enclosed is my additional donation of \$_____

Membership includes 4 issues of our newsletter *WILLAPA WHISTLER* annually.
We are a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation. All dues and donations are tax deductible
For membership in National Audubon Society visit <http://www.audubon.org/>.

Please make your check payable to:
WILLAPA HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY or **WHAS** and mail to:
WHAS-Membership, PO Box 399, Longview, WA 98632.

Name _____ Telephone _____
Address _____ Email _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Thank you for supporting your local Audubon chapter -- Willapa Hills Audubon Society!

We will not share your contact information with anyone.

*) To announce **occasional** reminders and to communicate last minute changes due to weather or other issues for WHAS programs and field trips.

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Please indicate any **new** information:

I prefer you contact me by:

- Phone
- Email
- Mail

Other options:

- I prefer to receive the *WHISTLER* by email
(Add your email address below)
- Contact me about volunteer opportunities
- Add me to your announcement email list*

Othello Sandhill Crane Festival

March 27-29, 2015, Othello, WA

Experience the beauty and wonder of the natural world, highlighted by the return of sandhill cranes to the Channeled Scablands of Eastern Washington. Columbia National Wildlife Refuge is one of many field trip destinations. The three-day community event includes wildlife tours, lectures on the area's natural and cultural heritage, an art contest and children's activities.

<http://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/>

Olympic Birdfest

April 10-12, 2015 in Sequim, WA

A bird watching vacation for beginners to experts, from leisurely strolls to active hikes. Bird for a few hours, or all day; from the dawn chorus to the evening owl prow. Enjoy guided birding trips, boat tours, silent auction, gala banquet, and more. Our featured speaker: Lynsy Smithson Stanley, "Climate Change as a 'Bird Issue'."

BirdFest program information and registration can be found at www.olympicbirdfest.org.

Also this year! Stay on for a three-day, two-night birding/sightseeing cruise of the San Juan Islands, April 12-14, 2015. Register separately at www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon.

Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest

May 14-17, 2015

Check <http://www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com/> for the program.

Wenas Campout

Memorial Weekend

Check <http://www.wenasaudubon.org> for more.

WFO Conference

June 1—14, 2015 Billings, MT

Check <https://www.westernfieldornithologists.org> for details.

Christmas Bird Counts 2014 Recap

Wahkiakum CBC

By Andrew Emlen

December 30, 2014, was the Wahkiakum Christmas Bird Count. The count circle straddles the lower Columbia River, including Puget Island, Cathlamet, Skamokawa, and the Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge in Washington and Westport, Nicolai Mountain, Brownsmead, Knappa and the Lewis & Clark National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon.

The day dawned clear and 28 degrees F, with a light east wind. Twenty-five volunteers found 120 species plus two additional count week species, equaling our highest previous total. The most abundant species in the circle, for the third straight year, was Cackling Goose, with over 16,000 found. This was a new high count for this species.

We had high counts for ten other species, most notably Double-crested Cormorant, European Starling, and Horned Lark. Whites Island is our local breeding area for the endangered (and recently federally listed) "Streaked" Horned Lark, and the count of 45 more than doubled our previous high count. New to the count this year was a Barrow's Goldeneye found by Mike Passmore on the

Cowlitz Columbia Christmas Bird Count

By Bob Reistroffer

23 field observers and eight feeder watchers joined and spent the cool sunny day finding 17,172 birds with 98 species recorded during the 33rd Cowlitz Columbia Christmas Bird Count. The temperature ranged from 21° to 41°. Also during count week an additional 7 species were reported.

We had several high counts: 54 Pied-billed Grebes, 430 Northern Shovelers, 225 Buffelheads, 78 Hooded Mergansers, 4 Cooper's Hawks, 2 Red-shouldered Hawks, 72 Red-tailed Hawks, 22 Bald Eagles, 264 Mourning Doves, 24 Kingfishers, 24 Downy Woodpeckers, 11 Red-breasted Sapsuckers, 23 Common Ravens, 70 Chestnut-backed Chickadees, 22 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 946 Oregon Dark-eyed Juncos, 175 White-crowned Sparrows, and 510 Golden-crowned Sparrows.

Leadbetter Christmas Bird Count

By Suzy Whittey

I want to thank the 23 property owners who live around Willapa Bay and other key locations that granted the 42 birders in 8 sectors access to count birds on December 20, 2014 for the 115th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. The information gathered in the Christmas Bird Counts that happened all across North America is invaluable to ornithologists who monitor bird populations.

The hardy birders, some who traveled over 100 miles to have the opportunity to count birds in Pacific County braved a wet and windy day with posted high surf advisories that did not allow the Pacific beach to be counted this year. But the stormy weather brought species like Red Phalaropes, Western Sandpipers and Snowy Plovers inland to be seen in puddles along

Wahkiakum ferry trip to Westport. A Redhead was in Net Rack Slough. The Northern Mockingbird that was at 80 North Welcome Slough on Puget Island on last year's count spent the entire year there and was seen on this one as well.

Other species that have been expanding their range northward, Black Phoebe and Red-shouldered Hawk, continue to remain established here. Seven Trumpeter Swans flew over the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge. We missed Virginia Rail for the first time in the Wahkiakum CBC's seventeen years. The Snowy Egret reported on Sunday was not relocated. Thanks to all volunteers!



Nashville Warbler, seen April 2013 in Kelso
Image by Royce Craig

Seen during count week: Green Heron, Rough-legged Hawk, Long-billed Dowitcher, Horned Lark, Pygmy Owl, Saw-whet Owl, and Gray Jay.

Not seen for many years: 1 Hutton's Vireo, 4 Brown-headed Cowbirds.

Thank you all for a great job. Hope to see you all next year on Friday, Jan 1, 2016.

G Street in Surfside and the Beach Barron Field on Sandridge Road. The Bay Center Group saw 7 Snow Geese and 16,000 Dunlin in Willapa Bay. But, their highlight was a rare sighting of a Townsend Solitaire. Other groups documented a Barred Owl, Wilson Snipe, Canvasback Ducks, Eurasian Widgeon, White-winged Scoter, Trumpeter Swans and Spotted Sandpipers just to mention a few.

Even though the number of birds and the number of species were down this year, most of it can be attributed to the stormy weather. Thank you birders for your time and expertise in making the Leadbetter Christmas Bird Count a huge success. I also want to thank the Berry Patch Restaurant in Ocean Park and the Hunters Inn in Naselle for serving us breakfast and dinner.

Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey yields seven

By Darrel Whipple

We parked my Prius on the old Toutle River Bridge (yes, that bridge in the video with the house crashing into it during the 1980 mudflow from Mt. St. Helens), and walked to the railing to scan for eagles. James Caldwell opted for the upstream side while I took the downstream.

When I eventually gave up and looked for James I saw him gesticulating energetically with his binocs and signaling for me to look up above where he was standing.

Sure enough, one of the Bald Eagles that is known to hang out around there was perched about thirty feet above him on a branch close to the north end of the bridge.

A beautiful sight, and our first eagle of the day! It was January 24th, 2015, and we were conducting the 37th Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey sponsored by WHAS, using a vehicle route that was prescribed in 1979, when WDFW and other agencies kicked off a ten-year eagle population study in the state. After the first ten years I couldn't quit – trained to the plow, as they say.

In what looks like a replay of last year's survey, we turned up five official eagles in the two latitude-longitude blocks along the Cowlitz and Columbia rivers between Toledo and Kalama. Two additional adults were located outside the designated blocks during the survey. Each block is about eight by twelve miles in size, and the route covers approximately 120 miles. The survey hours were 7:30 am to 3 pm, with some fog in the early hours.

As it happened, we ran into Russ Koppendrayner at the mouth of the Kalama, where he was busy boosting his 2015 county list. During our chit-chat Russ looks out on the Columbia and says, "Oh, here comes an immature Bald right now!"

Happily we check off the immature – just like last year in the southern block. And that was our last eagle of the day.

Thirty other species were tallied – for the fun of it -- including Northern Harrier, Northern Shoveler and Cackling Goose.

WHAS Partners with Lower Columbia School Gardens for Bird Box Workshop

By Margaret Green

On January 22, 2015, WHAS, in partnership with the Lower Columbia School Gardens, conducted a bird box building workshop at the Montecello Middle School. WHAS member, Barney Wheeler graciously volunteered to cut boards to the correct lengths, pre-drilled holes for nails and screws as well as the entry hole. John and Margaret Green, WHAS members, helped Barney assemble kits of materials for every child. Home Depot generously supplied 50% of the wood purchase. Americorps helpers, parents and other adult volunteers including WHAS members Pat and Bob Reistroffer, assisted during the workshop. For 2 hours the shop was filled with intent and happy activity. 23 students assembled their bird nest box, which they proudly took home along with information on nesting birds, maintenance tips, and instructions for making additional boxes at home.

These students took great pride in their handiwork, even autographing and decorating their bird box. All volunteers were satisfied as well. It was a great day.



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<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Willapa-Hills-Audubon/1386609461578276>

Local Bald Eagles build nest next to Lewis & Clark Bridge

By Darrel Whipple

A new eagle nest has appeared in the local area – this one at the Oregon end of the Lewis & Clark Bridge. Residents of Rainier and Clatskanie traveling to and from Longview now regularly watch for the pair of Bald Eagles perched at their nest, which was built in a cottonwood tree about 50 feet from the northbound lane.

The eagles have a good view of the Columbia River, and if they raise a couple eaglets, it will be a relatively short haul to bring fish, ducks and mammals up to the nest.

The best and safest place to view the nest and the resident eagles through binoculars is from Dike Road on the upstream side of the bridge.

Commercial fisherman Gary Soderstrom was one of the first to notice the new nest going up, and tipped me off to it in December. He also is convinced that the Bald Eagle population on the Columbia has grown significantly in recent years.

Amateur photographer Marvin Kellar of Rainier, who maintains a blog called Sauntering Oregon, has documented the nest with photos on February 10 – 11.

If not already doing it, the birds should begin incubating one to three eggs in late February or March, which will hatch in May or early June. Eagles are very sensitive to disturbance, especially during the early stages of incubation, so keeping a respectful distance from the nest is a must.



Marvin Kellar of Rainier, Oregon, captured these shots of the new resident Bald Eagles at their nest alongside the Lewis & Clark Bridge on February 10-11.

Earth Day

Earth Day at the Cowlitz County Fairgrounds is scheduled for **Saturday, April 18, 2015**. Yes, it is fast approaching. In the past we have made bird feeders out of TP rolls, peanut butter, and bird seed. They are extremely popular with the kids and their families. If anyone has a different idea please come forward and let me know.

We need 2 people at the booth: one to help with the bird feeders (or whatever project we have for kids) and another one to talk with the adults and share information. There will be some handouts.

We need help to staff the booth most of the day. **Please consider volunteering** to work in the booth for one or two hours on Saturday. Just let me know what times (am or pm) and how much time you could donate to the day.

Contact Charlotte Persons by email at cpeople2u@gmail.com or phone at 360-431-1174



New Ideas on Bird Phylogeny

By Larry Turner

A reorganization of bird relationships is suggested by recent research on bird genomes that was published in *Science* (Dec 12, 2014, p 1275-6 & 1307-1334). Eight different research papers in *Science*, and 20 others published in other journals involved 200 researchers from 80 different laboratories. They sequenced 48 bird genomes, representing nearly every order of modern birds.

One team identified the genes involved in complex singing by birds, and interestingly found it is the same gene complex that is involved in human speech. The whole effort really began when a Duke University researcher wanted to know how many times the ability to imitate sounds had evolved in birds. But he did not trust the existing family trees which had been based only on a few genes. So he decided build a database, and family trees, based on whole bird genomes. And he obtained help from others who were also sequencing bird genomes to compare birds with other vertebrates and some invertebrates. After some very tricky and extensive analysis of both genes and non-gene parts of the chromosomes, they came up with a new avian tree.

The new tree puts existing birds into three groups. The ostriches and tinamous are the most primitive and called Palaeognathae, while waterfowl (Anseriformes) and landfowl (Galliformes) comprise a second primitive group. All the numerous other birds, called modern birds, are in the third major group. Many of the relationships in our current bird books still exist, but flamingos and doves appear to be closely related to grebes as the earliest of these modern birds, with cuckoos, swifts, and hummingbirds somewhat akin.

Another related subgroup, as might be expected includes the herons, cranes, pelicans, and cormorants; but perhaps surprisingly includes also loons and penguins.

The third subgroup includes owls, accipiters and eagles at one end, with trogons, bee-eaters, and wood peckers in the

middle, and songbirds, parrots, and (surprise!) falcons at the other end.

We need to remember that they looked at many aspects of the genomes, and they did not always produce the same results. Of course, there will be much debate before any new arrangement reaches our bird books in a decade or two.

As to vocalizations, it has been shown that humans,



Yellow Warbler Image by Royce Craig

songbirds, parrots, and (another surprise) hummingbirds all use the same part of the forebrain for learning vocalizations, and all are capable of “imitative” singing. They also studied doves and quail which do not learn songs (as differentiated from “calls”) and they do not use these same parts of the brains in the same way. In Zebra Finches, more than 2700 genes in four parts of the forebrain were involved in learning and singing.

Certainly there will be more to be said on avian phylogeny and on vocalizations. It is an exciting time for avian researchers.

Continued from page 1 Annual meeting keynote speaker



Larry Schwitters holds a Master's of Science degree and spent 30 years in the trenches of public education, mostly as a Middle School Science Teacher and Coach in the Seattle area.

He spent four years tracking down Black Swifts at Washington State's waterfalls for the American Bird Conservancy before his involvement with Audubon Vaux's Happening.

Willapa Hills Audubon Society (WHAS) is sponsoring this presentation. For several years, members have participated in the annual count of migrating Vaux Swifts. This fall WHAS will plan a gathering to observe the migrating swifts, to be announced at a later date.

The program is at 7:00 PM, **Sunday, March 29**, at the **Kelso Senior Center**, 106 NW 8th, Kelso, WA.

The event is free and open to the public.

Primal Warblings

By Carolyn Norred

My Saturday In a Car of Ex-Texas Birders

<p>“...like a blind dog in a meat house” John leads To a slough of swans, Bunches of gregarious American coots, And the sound of robins on the right.</p> <p>A red-breasted sap-sucker taps A tall tree trunk, Geese call through the mist And moss-covered bare branched trees stand surrounded by winter’s straggling Blackberry briars.</p> <p>“Gadwall on the left of car one.” -no parking at the outhouse short-billed dowitchers feed</p>	<p>Behind the tall, brown grass, And a female northern harrier scans The field as a great egret stalks The ditch.</p> <p>Swans fly Above the red-tail hawk Lurking in the treetop. Widgeons on the right, Tree swallows ahead, A beaver has chewed a tree Down, duck box intact.</p> <p>Swans call and respond Divers dive Dabblers dabble</p>	<p>We count feet and divide By 2; 1,114 pintails on a pond. As a group, herons stand claim To sky high real estate. A cloud of starlings buzz sandhill cranes, Harmonizing with redwing blackbirds.</p> <p>An occasional merganser sails by And lesser scaup raft up on the Columbia. Kestrels decorate power lines, But, “shucks, no white-breasted nuthatch.” And Margaret keeps the count.</p>
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A Week in Browns Canyon - Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge

By Carol Carver

Last spring John and Margaret Green, WHAS Board members, had an article in the Whistler about birding in southern Arizona and staying in a remote canyon near the border in southwestern Arizona. It sounded so good to us we decided to follow in their footsteps. We made reservations long in advance and were surprised when we arrived to see that Green’s entry in the cabin journal was the last one before our arrival.

To back up, arriving at the cabin involves meeting a ranger at a mile marker about 20 miles from the refuge headquarters in Sasabe, and being led into Browns Canyon. The road in is gated near the highway, so there’s no unexpected traffic—in fact, no traffic at all except occasional visits from the refuge’s wildlife officer. There are border patrol everywhere outside of the canyon, outnumbering private cars it seemed by 2:1, but we saw none in the canyon itself. The escort had three purposes: the ranger could assess if our car would make it back out again, could warn us that we were on our own and would need to drive out in the event of an emergency, and could assess if we were up to the isolation. Our van made it in (although George had to repair the driveway for us to get out!) and we assured the ranger that isolation was something we appreciated.

The silence that surrounded us when the ranger left was our first impression and constant company for the next week. The cabin is off the grid, with propane fridge, wood heat stove, and solar lights and water pump. There’s a well-equipped kitchen and a bathroom with shower. A substantial first aid kit. No mechanical noise at all; propane fridges are totally quiet compared to electric ones that are perhaps the noisiest appliances in our houses when TV’s and music are off. No human noise unless we made it. And we reveled in the silence.

December isn’t the best time of year for birding in Arizona. Several mornings were frosty. The first time we hiked to the natural bridge at the head of the canyon it rained all day. Yet we saw a few birds that were supposed to be migratory only

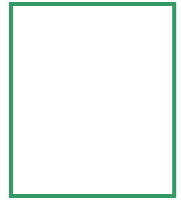


(Townsend warbler, Black throated gray warbler, Painted Redstart), Mexican Jays, a Canyon wren that joined us daily for lunch on the cabin porch, Montezuma quail, and 35 plus typical winter residents of southern Arizona. Our daily hikes were enriched by many butterflies, cottontail rabbits, deer, a 4 foot gopher snake that got our blood circulating faster until we saw no rattles, in-cabin gecko, scorpion-part of the road repair, and ever changing beautiful views of Boboquivari Peak, above the Canyon. The Baboquivari Mountains are the western-most of the sky island mountain ranges in southern Arizona.

We hope to return in the future during one of the migration months in the spring or early fall. For more information, contact the Buenos Aires NWR. The \$50/night fee for the cabin goes to Friends of the Refuge to help support their work. See link below for more information on the Canyon.
<http://friendsofbanwr.homestead.com/Natural-History-of-Brown-Canyon.html>



PO Box 399
Longview, WA 98632



The *Willapa Whistler* is the quarterly publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society (WHAS), a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Complimentary copies are available for free on our website.

TEMP -- RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Most WHAS activities and programs are open to the public.

Send in your stories & photos

Articles, information, wildlife sightings and artwork are most welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the 15th of February, May, August and November. Send your contributions to:

WHAS Whistler, PO Box 399, Longview WA 98632

or email them to

newsletter@willapahillsaudubon.org.

The *Willapa Whistler* is printed on recycled paper using soy based ink.



Please recycle your *Whistler* or pass it on to a friend.

WHAS Programs and Field Trips

WHAS events are free and open to the public (Unless otherwise noted). Check the website calendar for the latest information and updates.

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Larry Schwitters to speak on Vaux's Swift Migration

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See page one for all the details.

This event is free and open to the public.

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WHAS Alert/Announcement e-mails

Willapa Hills Audubon has set up an email list to facilitate occasional communications with members and friends and to help communicate last minute schedule changes for programs or activities due to weather closures or other issues.

If you are not receiving these occasional emails yet and would like to be included, please send an email to whasalert@gmail.com with "subscribe" in the subject line and we will add your email address. Of course, we will not share your contact information.

The Mission of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society is to support ecologically responsible ways of life, to help maintain biologically diverse habitats, and to promote environmental understanding and enjoyment of nature.

Check out our website at www.willapahillsaudubon.org, or