

# WILLAPA WHISTLER

*A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society*

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**Black-throated Gray Warbler** -- Image Royce Craig

## Bird Report From a Summer in Alaska

**By Larry Turner**

I know many others have been to Alaska, even spending summers. But this is our first trip on land (an inland waterway cruise does not count). The trip was about Alaska, and birds were just one of the things we focused upon. But our binoculars were out at most scenic stops, as well as when we were actively searching for birds. Also keep in mind that we are only casual birders. We left home in late May.

Our first unusual bird (for us) was Barrow's Goldeneye along the Fraser River in BC. We also came across typical waterfowl such as Ruddy Ducks, many Scaup, Canvasbacks, Cackling and Canada Geese, along with Red-winged and Yellow Headed Blackbirds together, all before we reached the "official" start of the Alcan Highway in Dawson Creek. The "usual suspects" continued along the Alcan, but were accompanied by a number of black bear, bison, and Stone (Dall) sheep. And I cannot help but mention a very pleasant stop at Liard Hot Springs.

It was a little more mesic as we came across the "top-of-the-world" highway (not recommended for the queasy) into the town of Chicken, so named because they wanted to name it Ptarmigan, but nobody knew how to spell it. As we headed for and into Fairbanks we saw a variety of typical birds; many Cliff, Tree, and Violet-green Swallows (to eat a few of the VERY many mosquitoes and other insects), Pine Grosbeaks, White and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Juncos, Magpies, our first Redpoll, Harriers, and the usual waterfowl – but the Horned Grebes were particularly striking. We saw one pair of Trumpeter Swans, but many Whistlers (now known as Tundra Swan, but old name kept in tribute to our newsletter).

*Continued on page 3 ... Alaska*

## Swift Watching in Portland

Every year in September, one of Portland's most spectacular natural events begins: Thousands of Vaux's Swifts gather in the city as they prepare to migrate to Central America and Venezuela. Migrating swifts often use chimneys as roosts (places to sleep), and they are likely to return to the same roost year after year. One population has been returning to Chapman since the 1980s, and it is one of the largest known roosting sites of migrating Vaux's Swifts.

Check out Portland Audubon's website at <http://audubonportland.org/local-birding/swiftwatch> for viewing times and directions.

## Birdfest in Ridgefield

Join the Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge and the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge staff on October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> to celebrate the coming of fall and the wildlife that make the Refuge their home.

BirdFest is an opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds of fall migration. Program events include Sandhill Crane tours, photography workshops, kayak tours, bird language workshops and other events.

Check out the full program at [www.RidgefieldFriends.org/birdfest](http://www.RidgefieldFriends.org/birdfest)

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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 6 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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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 schedule changes due to weather or other issues for WHAS programs and field trips.

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\*

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### OTHER

## Annual Washington Audubon Council

This one-day meeting will be held on Saturday, October 5th, at Bellevue College, just off I-90 in Bellevue, WA. Kathy Dale, Director of Citizen Science for National Audubon Society, will be the key note speaker for the event. Her presentation will focus on the role of citizen science in the Audubon network and demonstrate what Audubon citizen science programs have accomplished towards bird conservation to-date and how they will be used in the future, including an introduction to the new Climate Meeting details. More information and map may be found on the Audubon Washington website at <http://wa.audubon.org/events/audubon-council-washington-2013>.

## Bird the Trail by SmartPhone

Found yourself with an unexpected free afternoon or out-of-town weekend company? Of course you are going birding! But where will you find the nearest and best habitat? What sites could you combine for fabulous sightings?

If you have an iPhone, you can download the free new app for the Great Washington State Birding Trail at <http://ow.ly/nH8g7>. For over a decade, Audubon Washington worked with local chapters and other experts to describe nearly four hundred birding locations along seven driving loops, covering every habitat from Neah Bay to Newport, from the Blue Mountains to the mouth of the Columbia River – and everywhere in between.

The free app includes six stops on each loop (42 in total). You can access remaining stops for \$1.99 per loop, or just \$9.99 for all seven loops!



## ... continued from page one -- Alaska

It was very warm throughout most of June, with temperatures reaching 95 in Fairbanks, where we went to their June 21 "Midnight Sun" festival. It is strange to have Joanne taking sunset pictures at 11:30 and being able to read outside even at 2 AM.

It was both smoky and cloudy in Denali National Park. We saw only a few wildlife, but decent variety including a wolf, Dall sheep, fox, and our first caribou and grizzly. (I wrote a poem about the insect-tormented caribou.) Birds seemed to be sparse, but we did see a Gray-cheeked Thrush (we think, possibly Swainsons) in addition to some of the more common ones. We then wandered south of Denali only to have the weather turn gloriously sunny when we took a flight around Mt. McKinley. Beautiful.

In the Mat-Su valley, we found that Spruce Grouse are just as tame as elsewhere, and we saw abundant Moose with young. We stayed with a lady we met who has a number of bird feeders bringing in typical backyard birds, including Downy Woodpeckers and even hummingbirds this far north. Her house is on a bluff overlooking a state game refuge with Sandhill Cranes, many other birds including Red-necked Grebes, and a great mountain view.

Then we headed to Nome where our primary quest was family history, since my grandfather was there in the gold rush. It was a rainy three days, but being so far north on the Bering Sea, it brought us a number of interesting birds: Parasitic and Long-tailed Jaegers, Arctic Terns, Golden Plovers, Northern Wheatears, Red-necked Loons, Lapland Longspurs. There was a great pair of young Semi-palmated Plovers that looked like puffballs on legs and hid under mama's wings. We did not get to

see the musk ox, but we found as we were leaving that they had been right at the edge of town, but not when we were there.

Back into more populated Alaska, we headed through Anchorage to Seward where we took a boat tour of the Kenai Fjords area. The Marbled Murrelets were exceedingly abundant, but there were also a number of other seabirds (many of which are in our home area): Horned and Tufted Puffins, Common and Thick-billed Murres, a couple of Pigeon Guillemots along with many Bald Eagles and a variety of sea mammals: Dall's Porpoises (colored like miniature Orcas), humpback whales, Stellar's sea lions, harbor seals, and sea otters.

Prominent gulls throughout the trip have been Mew Gulls, Glaucous and Glaucous-winged Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and several days ago, the world's largest Herring Gull breeding colony. Now on the Kenai peninsula we looked for a breeding colony of Aleutian Terns, but they may have left early because of the warm and sunny weather. We found some nice shorebirds together: Long and Short-billed Dowitchers, and Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, which really made the differences easy to see. Most of the Peeps have left. It was really helpful to have run into the head of the local Audubon Society while out birding. (Earlier, we got some nice clues from the state coordinator for the Alaska Game Refuges, whom we met in Wasilla).

Now we are headed for Homer, where we should see more shorebirds and possibly Kittlitz's Murrelet, among others. Then it is over to the Copper River and home through the Kluane Mountains and Cassiar Highway. We should be getting home as this Whistler comes out.

## Photo Impressions from the WHAS Annual Picnic

All Photos by Suzy Whitley





## “HE” Hope & Endurance

By Suzy Whitley

I for one have looked at species that are not immediately identifiable by sex such as Canada Geese, American Robins and Chickadees and instinctually called it a she or a he. I am not sure at the moment what logic I use to determine its sex but once I give it a gender, I tend to stick with it.

So, when in July of 2012 a feisty black-capped chickadee with a white spot on the top of its head appeared for the first time at my feeder, I decided it was a girl. And from that moment on when it appeared at the feeder, I would remark to my husband “here she is again”. No one can resist the spunk and joy that these tiny birds bring to our lives.

She came every day four or five times with others of her kind to feed and bring a smile to my heart. So, in early October when she appeared with a dangling broken left leg my soul hurt. Not only for her but also, for me. I didn’t think she would survive more than a day or two.

I knew that chickadee’s would have plucked a sunflower heart from my platform feeder and zip to a branch, place it between their feet and peck it into bite size edible pieces. So, how was a chickadee with one leg going to feed itself? I figured I had seen the last of her.

But, that is just the beginning of the story. I have place many small perch branches around my feeders for the birds to use as they approach the feeders. She would fly in grab a branch with her one good leg, hanging upside down then let go and flop down into the platform feeder, grab a kernel and off she would go to the cover of the trees.

She came to the feeder over the next few days dragging this leg and trying to balance and perch and eat. I named her Hope.

Six days after she broke her leg, I was stunned to see that her leg was no longer there. It had been broken where it met her body and had fallen off and was now completely gone. I still did not hold out much hope for Hope.

As the days and weeks passed and I waited anxiously to see if this teaspoon sized bird could survived another day, I found that each day she returned she was giving me strength and endurance. And that was when her name changed from Hope to Hope and Endurance “HE” for short, is that a funny name for a girl? Is it a girl, right?

Each day as she came to the feeder she would perch on her belly wobbling back and forth among the seeds and when she



decided on one that suited her she would pluck it into her beak and off she went to the trees to consume it. Then return again a few minutes later for another.

In January she surprised me again. She started using her left wing to balance herself. She would open her wing just a little and set the elbow down to hold herself upright. I was amazed at this new behavior she had learned.

She has been sharing her life with me now, for over a year. She has gone through a breeding season and appears with another black-capped each day. I look for her and her companion and marvel at the lessons this bird has reminded me of. Don’t give up, adapt, be persistence, never complain. Enjoy life and above all, do it with zest just like “HE”.

For over thirty years I have been a strong, content, independent nature observer and birder. So, a few years ago and way before I thought old age would catch up to me, when I was diagnosed with a chronic lung condition I found myself struggling not only physically but also mentally with my new limitations.

Hope, endurance along with encouragement are sometimes found in the most unlikely places. You just need to pay attention to the lesson life is trying to teach you. Thank you, my little black and white ball of feathers for sharing your life with me and being such a good teacher.

Oh, and by the way, I have a few more chickadees this summer with white spots on their heads.

## DVD Review

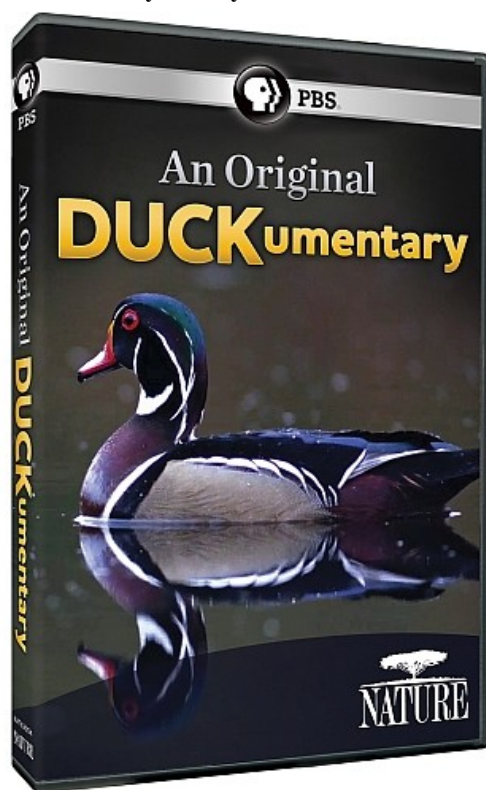
By Carolyn Norred

### *Nature: An Original DUCKumentary* PBS DVD

During a recent trip to the Longview Public Library, I noticed a DVD that looked interesting, a PBS TV Nature series installment titled, *An Original DUCKumentary*. Here, in Longview, WA, we are fortunate to have a lovely little Lake Sacajawea that is home to a variety of water fowl and a fine stopping point for even more ducks during the annual migrations. In addition, we have the good fortune to have a dedicated birder, John Green, who generously shares his time and scope every second Saturday of the month to lead walks around the lake and help identify our feathered fellows. His trips begin again on September 14th at 8:00 a.m.

Having enjoyed a number of these walks, myself, I am in the process of learning to recognize by name the ducks on our lake, so instead of my usual bird book, I checked out this video. It was a pleasure: beautiful photography, including some hilarious shots of dancing males and females shaking their booty in an effort to impress each other in the fall when they choose their mates for the next breeding season.

The piece opens with some spectacular shots of fledgling wood ducks diving 70 feet from their nest in a tall oak, to meet up with their Mama in the pond below. I was surprised



to learn that although these females lay one egg a day, the eggs all hatch on the same day.

The babies begin to feed on their own the moment they hit the water. Although in this video, this lucky batch of eight survived to adolescence, the narrator of the film reports that usually nine of ten of these delightful delicacies will be a meal for any number of predators way before they reach adulthood.

Although these water creatures often appear sort of clumsy as they waddle on the land, they are almost as at ease in the air as they are in water.

Of the 120 species many fly more than 1,000 miles in a year as they migrate with the seasons, and some, such as the green-winged teal, have been clocked at nearly 100 mph. Of the two types, divers and dabblers, divers will need a runway to lift off the water while dabblers can lift almost straight up. Studies have shown that as they migrate in flocks, they take turns serving point

and can rest in each other's slipstream.

The poetry of these dinosaur descendents is not all in their design, color, diversity, and familiarity (everyone has had his/her rubber ducky, right) but these creatures are also inclined to begin their amazing migration feats just at dusk letting the stars guide their way.

These Tree Swallows nested in the bird house off Russ and Ann Kastberg's deck this summer. They moved in on March 26th and their young fledged around July 14-15th. It was fun to watch the little ones launch out of the house and take their first, awkward flight. They hung around the house hoping to get fed by their parents, but, finally, within a day they had all fledged and left the area.

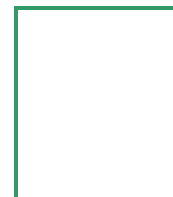


On July 16th, a juvenile Black-throated Gray Warbler appeared at Russ and Ann Kastberg's pond to take a bath. It stayed around that one day and then moved on. The picture was taken after he had a bath, and looks kind of scruffy.





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The *Willapa Whistler* is the bi-monthly publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society (WHAS), a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

TEMP -- RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Complimentary copies are sent to organizations and prospective members. All WHAS activities and programs are open to the public.

Articles, information, wildlife sightings and artwork are welcomed. The deadline for inclusion of material in the *Whistler* is the 15<sup>th</sup> of each even-numbered month. Send your contributions to:

WHAS *Whistler*, PO Box 399, Longview WA 98632

or email them to

[newsletter@willapahillsaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@willapahillsaudubon.org).

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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.

Willapa Hills Audubon Society will conduct a field trip to **Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge** on **September 7, 2013**. We will leave Longview at 8:00 AM from the Green's home at 1318 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue, returning around lunch or shortly after. We will do the auto tour route and hope to catch the last of the shorebird migration, see Bitterns, Bald Eagles and other birds which stay year round at the refuge. Bring snacks and water as well as binoculars, we will have a scope along as well. "Please email [jgreen2317@aol.com](mailto:jgreen2317@aol.com) or call 360-575-9238 John Green to sign up.

Our **Lake Sacajawea bird walks** will resume on **September 14<sup>th</sup>**. We will meet at Hemlock Square at 8:00 AM and spend one and one half hours walking the lake to check out the birds and other wildlife which inhabit the lake this time of year. Be sure to dress for rain in spite of the beautiful weather we have had lately. It won't last forever.

*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](http://www.willapahillsaudubon.org)**