

The Pygmy Owl

Volume 31
Issue 5
Jan. 2023

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



January 11, 2023 general meeting

This meeting will be on-line only via Zoom, starting at 7 p.m. through the Zoom link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88406734449?pwd=ZThCVU1peWxPdDk2UkdDVEhOT0JvQT09>

(Meeting ID: 884 0673 4449 Passcode: 221771)

We plan to return to in-person and on-line (“hybrid”) meetings this Spring.

Birding in Southern Chilean Patagonia

Presented by Mason Maron

Spokane Audubon Society member Mason Maron is an undergraduate student at Washington State University majoring in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Sciences and minoring in Forestry. He has spent the past four years researching Buteo ectoparasites and establishing a Nocturnal Flight Call station at the university, as well as birding on the Pullman campus and in the surrounding area of the Palouse.



King Penguins
© Mason Maron



Chilean Flamingos
© Mason Maron

In Spring of 2022, Mason spent his semester studying abroad in the Southern Chilean Patagonia region of South America. There he was able to encounter a wide variety of both familiar and foreign bird species while traveling through many beautiful austral ecosystems. In his presentation at the Jan. 11 on-line via Zoom meeting starting at 7 p.m. he will be showing his photos of those southern hemisphere birds and their habitats



Austral Pygmy Owl
© Mason Maron

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Spokane Audubon Society

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Owl illustrations on pg. 1, 11 and 12 © Jan Reynolds.



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Save-A-Bird Team

Bea Harrison

Madonna Luers

Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status November 21, 2022 through December 20, 2022:

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

Individual: Rod Peterson, Sara Boggs, Annette Rogers, Ellie Emmanuel

Supporting: Bob Richardson

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Carla Joyal, Sherry Ennis, Mary Jean Porter, Ruth Daugherty, Scott Hall, Darcy Varona, Donna Pickens

Family: Terry & Linda VanHoozer, Mary Kay Eddy, Paul Lindholdt, Marlene & Bob Cashen

Supporting: Vicki Egesdal, Linda Jovanovich, Jane Beaven & Dan Finn, Jan Pochis, Michael Shauvin, Bud & Roxanne McCormack, Travis Scott, Lori Pegg

Contributing: Jenny Emerson

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>.



Northern Harrier, juvenile
© Alan McCoy

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Well... with arctic temperatures and a deep freeze buried under a real snowpack, there aren't a lot of birds around right now. However, quality has made up for quantity, as Riverfront Park has been graced with a very rare BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER. Approximately one hundred birders have made their way to Spokane to see this bird, which stuck around for at least three weeks. Found on November 24 by Chad Crouch, this is just the 4th record for the state of Washington. Interestingly, the first state record was found in Spokane County on Browne's Mountain in July 1975! As of now, winter finch reports have been non-existent but that could change any time, so keep eyes and ears out! Other notable sightings are listed below:



Black-throated Green Warbler (female)
© Michael Woodfull at Riverfront Park

Anna's Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (12/19-MC)

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Harrison (11/25-JI); (12/4-DW)

Glaucous Gull: Harrison (11/25-JI)

Pacific Loon: Bonner's Ferry (11/25-JR)

Black-backed Woodpecker: Newport (12/1-eBird)

Blue Jay: Bonner's Ferry (12/7-JR); Sandpoint (12/9-eBird)

Lapland Longspur: Sprague (11/29-eBird); West Plains (12/2-AT); Reardan (12/16-eBird)

Lesser Goldfinch: Saltese Flats (11/23-eBird); Hayden (12/3-DW); Paradise Prairie (12/8-AM); West Spokane (12/10-eBird)

PURPLE FINCH: Hayden (11/30-DW)

Harris's Sparrow: Rathdrum Prairie (12/18-DW)

White-Throated Sparrow: Spokane (12/13-MW)

Orange-crowned Warbler: Spokane (12/3-eBird)



Purple Finch
© Harry Trombley

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; RyB-Ryan Bart; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; MC-Marlene Cashen; FC-Forrest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JE- Jacob Elonen; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koebler; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; 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; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff

Save-A-Bird Team members recognized

Members of our chapter's Save-A-Bird Team, who respond to requests for help with injured birds, were recognized at last month's meeting at The Hive. Team leader Bea Harrison, who gave a presentation on the project at our November meeting, awarded some team members in attendance with specially-made Spokane Audubon Society ball caps and mileage reimbursement checks. Bea's husband, fellow Spokane Audubon board member, and Save-A-Bird Team member Jim Harrison helped make the presentations.

Most of the team's efforts since last March – which totaled at least 180 hours and at least 2,240 miles to help owls, hawks, crows, robins and other birds – were made by the Harrisons, Tina Penny, Alice Moravec, Margo Wolf, Therese Nielsen, Mary Marsh, Madonna Luers, Shenandoah Marr, Mike Borysewicz, Nan Berger, Wanda Peters, Joyce Alonso, and Tina Wynecoop.

Although none of the team volunteers sought mileage reimbursement when they made trips to WSU's Wildlife Ward in Pullman or other travel to local cooperating veterinarians, compensation (at a federal government rate for non-profit volunteers of 17 cents a mile) was approved by the board with use of money raised from the sale of donated second-hand bird books and other items at the November and December meetings.



Madonna Luers



Joyce Alonso



Tina Penny



Bea & Jim Harrison



Mike Borysewicz

Northern Harrier

American Bird Conservancy

The Northern Harrier, also known as the “Marsh Hawk” for one of its favorite habitats, is a slim raptor with long wings, legs, and tail. The sexes appear different: The male is bluish-gray above with white underparts, a distinctive coloration that earns it the nickname among birders of “Gray Ghost.” Meanwhile, female and immature birds are brown with streaked undersides. All have a distinctive white rump, an excellent identifying field mark that can be seen even at a distance.

A Northern Harrier’s low, buoyant flight style while hunting — somewhat like a [Short-eared Owl’s](#) — also helps to identify it: While searching for prey, this nimble raptor slowly flaps and glides just above the ground, holding its wings in a shallow V, known as a dihedral.

A closer look at the Northern Harrier reveals another owl-like feature — a “radar dish” of short feathers forming a ruff around its face and neck. This attribute, known as a facial disk, amplifies a bird’s hearing, and is more often seen in owl species such as the [Northern Hawk Owl](#). The Northern Harrier uses its augmented sense of hearing as well as its sight to help locate prey.

Breeding and Feeding

The Northern Harrier also has unusual mating habits for a bird of prey. Although many pairs are monogamous (one male/one female), others employ a polygynous breeding system, where one male will mate with several females. A polygynous male can have a “harem” of up to five females, although most have only one or two mates at the same time.

The male harrier advertises his territory to females through a swooping, twirling “sky dance” display of U-shaped dives. Interested females will move into the territory and claim a nest site. The female builds a platform nest of sticks and vegetation on the ground, with the male also contributing material. Nests are usually located at or adjacent to rich hunting grounds, often in a wet meadow or freshwater marsh, and sometimes in a farm field or on a prairie.

Female harriers lay three to six eggs, then incubate them for roughly a month. The male brings food to his mates and young during incubation and for the



Male Northern Harrier
© Kenneth Rush

first few weeks after the eggs hatch. After that, the female takes over the food provision

During the winter, the Northern Harrier roosts in groups — another behavior similar to that of the Short-eared Owl. These two species often share the same winter habitats, the Northern Harrier active on the “day shift,” while the Short-eared Owl takes over the same hunting territory as night falls. The harrier and the owl often interact during their overlapping “shift change” at dusk — dive-bombing and harassing each other.

The Northern Harrier’s diet consists mainly of small mammals, such as voles, rats, and ground squirrels. This versatile hunter may also snatch open-field birds such as the [Horned Lark](#) and [Grasshopper Sparrow](#), or reptiles, amphibians, and large insects. It mainly forages while in flight, sticking low to the ground as it systematically quarters to and fro. It can also hunt on foot, and has been known to use its long legs to drown large prey by holding it underwater

Region and Range

The Northern Harrier has a wide distribution throughout North America, breeding from northern Alaska and Canada to southern California and northern Baja California, Mexico. Some migrate as far south as northern South America.



Northern Harrier range map by ABC

The Winter Raptor Survey Project

by Bea Harrison

Several members of Spokane Audubon Society spend time each winter month driving rural roads with their eyes peeled for hawks, eagles, falcons, and owls. Driving 80 plus miles a month on sometimes sketchy roads, these volunteers are doing their part to gather data on our native raptors.

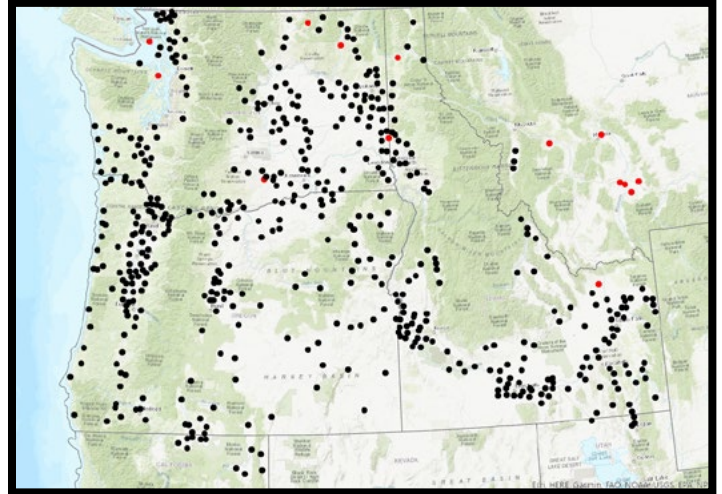
The Winter Raptor Survey Project, sponsored by the East Cascades Audubon Society based in Bend, Oregon has been gathering this data for over 18 years. They have established survey routes throughout all of Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and parts of northern California, northern Utah, and southwest Montana. The project started in Oregon with only 79 routes. There are now over 527 routes with 430 primary volunteers conducting once a month surveys on 31,000+ miles of transects. Volunteers in this citizen science project conduct surveys during November through March on established route transects, under the guidance of project coordinator, Jeff Fleischer, who furnished the information for this article.

To get a better understanding of the biology of wintering birds of prey this extensive survey project is designed to reveal population levels, distribution, and densities for raptor species that choose to winter in the project area.

A digitized route map is being developed and is scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2023. More information will be available soon on East Cascade Audubon's website which is currently undergoing a major revision.

In just the month of January 2022, volunteers on Washington State routes counted: 3,204 Red-tailed Hawks, 926 American Kestrels, 246 Northern Harriers, 2,035 Bald Eagles, 26 Golden Eagles, 348 Rough-legged Hawks, 99 Cooper's Hawks, 16 owls, and 106 falcons!

With the uncertainty of the effects of climate change and other threats to our native birds of prey, our local Audubon Chapter continues to volunteer their time monitoring birds for this worthwhile project to better understand the dynamics of birds of prey populations in the Pacific Northwest.



This map shows the extent of the project area. Black dots are established routes. Red dots are new routes this year.



Bald Eagle near Reardan
© Bea Harrison



Northern Goshawk
© Alan McCoy

NAS Name Change Survey Results

In the November issue of the Pygmy Owl (<https://www.audubonspokane.org/pygmyowl/2022/11/the-pygmy-owl/>) Madonna Luers wrote a brief article summarizing the issue now brewing in many organizations including, National Audubon, namely how to be more inclusive especially of people of color. In National Audubon's case, this has to do in part with the very name of the organization.

Although the Spokane Audubon Society board is not currently considering a chapter name change, last month we sent our 250 members a survey about the name change idea being considered by National Audubon Society.

The NAS board of directors plans to consider this potential change in February. If NAS does change the name, no chapters are obligated to change.

We will send the exact text of the survey along with all responses (unedited and anonymous) to National Audubon for their consideration as they wrestle with the issue. For anyone interested in reading our members' thoughtful comments, please contact Alan McCoy via email and he will send you a pdf copy of the survey and responses.

We received 61 responses (a 24% response rate). Below is a numerical summary of the response

Tally of Responses: Number (Percent of total)

1. Don't change the name: 22 (36%)
2. Mixed feelings about the issue: 14 (23%)
3. Do change the name: 23 (38%)
4. Indifferent about the issue: 2 (3%)

2023 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar Still Available!

We are pleased to share the 2023 Spokane Audubon Society Birds of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho calendar with you. Despite increased paper costs, calendars are still a bargain at \$12.00. They are still available for purchase on-line, with an additional mailing cost charge of \$2.50 per calendar mailed, at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/>. They will also be available at our in-person meetings this fall and at Auntie's Bookstore in downtown Spokane.

Twenty-one of our SAS members submitted 76 bird photographs, and 14 of those images are featured in the calendar. On our panel of judges were photographer Bob Stephens, retired Spokesman-Review outdoor editor Rich Landers, and SAS members Joyce Alonso, Sally English, and Gary Lee. They had a difficult job selecting 28 images to include in the calendar, from a Great Gray Owl to a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. For the second year, the calendar also features phenology notes that alert birders of bird species to watch for throughout the year



Great Gray Owl
© Tina Penny

2023 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar
Birds of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho



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

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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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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.

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