

# The Pygmy Owl



Volume 31  
Issue 3  
Nov. 2022

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society

**Nov. 16, 2022, 6:30 p.m.**

Our November meeting is the **THIRD** Wednesday of the month, the **16th**, not our usual second Wednesday, because our new meeting space at The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague Ave., is available then.

This meeting will again, like last month, be a “hybrid” meeting – you can attend in-person starting at 6:15 p.m. for our usual meet-and-greet, or you can attend virtually on-line, starting at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom link (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83649488130?pwd=RElms0I5VTlrUHJmRTg4SWZaZmZ0dz09>) (Meeting ID: 836 4948 8130 Passcode: 372029). See our hybrid meeting protocol on page 8.)

The in-person meeting will feature a fund-raiser to help cover “Save-A-Bird Team” expenses. There will be bird-related items like books, posters, compact discs, feeders, scope pack, shoulder harness for binocs/camera, etc. for sale at bargain prices. Bring cash (or checks) and start your holiday shopping.

## Save-A-Bird Team reports on helping injured birds at the November program

by Bea Harrison

One never knows what tomorrow will bring when you set out to be a conservationist with Spokane Audubon....When it came to our attention that young hawks, eagles and other birds were abandoning their nests during last year’s record heat wave, and there were no local wildlife rehabilitators to help them, Spokane Audubon devised a plan to transport injured birds to Washington State University (WSU) Wildlife Ward in Pullman.

We needed to start a bird Uber! Of course, most Uber drivers don’t have to contend with passengers who have sharp beaks and talons!

For the November 16th general meeting, Spokane Audubon Society (SAS) “Save A Bird Team” leader Bea Harrison will provide an update of volunteer efforts to assist injured birds.

In coordination with the Spokane office of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the team started fielding calls for help with sick or orphaned birds last March. Since then, the team has grown and matured into a well-oiled machine, not only transporting birds, but also giving advice to individuals who find themselves with a wild bird in crisis.

Bea’s presentation will include many photos of rescued birds and lots of interesting and sometimes humorous stories about team efforts to save birds.

Bea is a self-taught naturalist and avid conservationist. She was formerly with The Nature Conservancy and has worked for the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington State Parks, and Smithsonian Institute. She and her husband, Jim, volunteer for local non-profits and conservation groups. They are both on the Spokane Audubon board and leaders on the Save-A-Bird initiative.

Bea Harrison holding Owlet  
by Jim Harrison



Jim Harrison holding Bald Eagle  
by Bea Harrison



# The Pygmy Owl

Volume 31 Issue 3 Nov. 2022

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

Spokane Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 9820  
Spokane, WA 99209-9820

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



## Officers

### President

Alan McCoy

### Vice President

Lisa Langelier

### Treasurer

Vacant (see page 9)

### Secretary

Madonna Luers

## Elected Board of Directors

Bob Cashen  
Marlene Cashen  
Jenny Emerson  
Lindell Haggin  
Bea Harrison  
Jim Harrison  
Gary Lee

### Field Trips

Jim & Bea Harrison

### Programs

Gary Lee

### Education

Lindell Haggin

### Conservation

Shenandoah Marr

### Membership

Alan McCoy

### Publicity

Madonna Luers

### Pygmy Owl

Joanne Powell

### Website

Jenny Emerson

### Save-A-Bird Team

Bea Harrison  
Madonna Luers

# Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

## Update of Members' Status September 21, 2022 through October 19, 2022:

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

**Individual:** Kayli Gimarc, Paula Prather, Judith Kotar, Donald Sommer

**Family:** Peggy Endres, Martin Ward, Elizabeth Collins, Steve Scordino

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

**Individual:** Sydney Fowler, Mary Jokela, Peggy Goodner-Tan, Pam Wolfrum, Cindy Bunnell, Carla Brannan, Ellen Bower, Joe Sykes

**Family:** Linda & Ed Joy, Patricia & Gerald Johnson

**Contributing:** Margo Wolf & Leonard Shields

If you change your email address, please send your new email address to me, Alan McCoy at [ahm2352@gmail.com](mailto: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>.



**Killdeer**  
© Alan McCoy

# Should Audubon change its name?

by Madonna Luers

By now you've likely heard concerns about National Audubon Society's (NAS) association with the apparent racist history of its namesake, long synonymous with birding.

The relevance of John James Audubon (1785-1851) to a changing country has undergone scrutiny the past few years, coinciding with a national reckoning over race in U.S. history.

The societies named for Audubon were formed after his death. He was known for his paintings and descriptions of U.S. bird species in his seminal work, "The Birds of America." Less known are Audubon's history of buying and selling Black people as slaves, his contributions to white-supremacist thought and policy, and opposition to abolition, as well as his appropriation of Black and Indigenous observations of bird species.

If you subscribe to the NAS magazine, you may have read the Spring 2021 article, "What Do We Do About John James Audubon?" by J. Drew Lanham, a Black American ornithologist, who suggests that, because the founding father of American birding soared on the wings of white privilege (even though he was of mixed ancestry himself, with a possibly Haitian Creole mother), the birding community and organizations that bear his name must grapple with this racist legacy to create a more just, inclusive world.

This past summer our sister chapter in Seattle made headlines by becoming the first large chapter in the NAS network to publicly declare its intention to remove "Audubon" from the organization's name "to continue its path toward a more inclusive and antiracist future." Seattle's Board of Directors unanimously passed the resolution, noting the name change will follow a thoughtful and inclusive process, with no deadlines or candidates for a replacement name.

NAS leaders say that, while they respect the Seattle chapter's autonomy to serve its community, just as every Audubon chapter can and does, they have not made a decision about the name at a national level.

The NAS board has a task force examining the issue as part of the organization's mission "to root itself in equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging and the need to interrogate our present decisions through the prism of the Audubon that we would like to become in the future." That task force is looking at historical research, engagement data, and legal and financial analyses. They plan to listen to where people are, gather feedback, and understand the impact of any potential decisions from staff, donors, members and volunteers.

Recognizing that this decision will affect every single chapter, the task force is committed to taking the time to gather input and analysis from all parts of the Audubon network through December, 2022. The task force will present its recommendation to the full NAS board at the February 2023 meeting when the board will start a decision-making process regarding the Audubon name.

Your Spokane Audubon Society board currently is not considering any name change ourselves. However, we have discussed developing and distributing a survey of all chapter members to learn what you think about this issue at the national level. We at least would like to send our collective input to NAS since, as their task force notes, a national decision will affect us all.

Look for a brief survey coming your way via email soon.



John J Audubon  
© Getty Images



# Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

We are finished with likely the warmest, driest October on record, at least to this point. As I write, the “big change” is forecast to come with 10 days of rain and temperatures in the 40s. After a big September with many regional rarities, things have quieted down a bit. It’s still early for unusual winter arrivals so this is what some birders call the boring “in-between” time. However, we did have a couple of mega-rarities: an ANCIENT MURRELET found by River Corcoran at McArthur Lake WMA, only the 5<sup>th</sup> record for the State of Idaho. Also, yours truly located an Adams County, WA first record RED KNOT at Sprague Lake. These and other interesting sightings below:



**Red Knots**  
© Jon Isacoff

Surf Scoter: Spring Valley Reservoir (10/8-BM)

Sandhill Crane: Saltese Flats (10/19-eBird)

RED KNOT: Sprague Lake (10/2-JI)

Clark’s Grebe: Clear Lake (10/13-MS)

ANCIENT MURRELET: McArthur Lake WMA (9/25-RC)

Broad-winged Hawk: Steptoe Butte SP (9/21-RB)

Black-backed Woodpecker: Mt. Spokane SP (9/22-SJ);  
Calispell Lake (10/7-eBird)

Blue Jay: Sandpoint (10/7-FC); Gamlin Lake  
(10/13-eBird)

Lesser Goldfinch: Spokane (9/30-AM)

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Washtucna (9/23-eBird)

White-Throated Sparrow: China Bend Vineyard  
(9/26-eBird); Roman Nose Lakes (10/1-SE and JR);  
Samuels (10/3-eBird); Little Pend Oreille NWR  
(10/7-eBird); Sandpoint (10/8-eBird)



**Ancient Murrelet**  
© Enric Fernandez

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; RyB-Ryan Bart; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; Marlene Cashen-MC; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JE-Jacob Elonen; NE-Norm Engeland; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; LF-Louie Johnson; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; CiM-Cindy McCormick; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; WM-Will Merg;; TO-Tim O’Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; BP-Brian Pendleton; MR-Maxine Reid; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark Selle; KS-Katie Sorenson; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; WY-Will Young

# Cheney Wetlands Field Trip

Saturday October 15, 2022

by Alan McCoy

On one of the last of the warm days of October, eight of us gathered at the trailhead of the Cheney Wetlands for a walk around the lakes. The first wildlife to greet us was a “raft” of five river otters that were breakfasting on fish. They seemed to enjoy being watched because as we walked to another vantage point a couple hundred yards farther on, they swam over to show off some more.

I didn’t expect us to see a lot of birds or numerous species on this day because, well, it is October, neither breeding season nor winter. And I was right. But it was a fantastic day for a walk in this open Ponderosa pine habitat. We started at 7:30 am and it was a bit cool, but we knew it would warm up quickly. It was cool enough for a while that, when we stumbled upon this garter snake, it was not moving at all. I picked it up and placed it in the sun on a boulder. It seemed to appreciate the warmth.

The water was covered with a mat of green organic matter but this didn’t seem to bother the ducks. There were lots of American Wigeon, Gadwall, Ring-necks and Ruddy Ducks as well as Mallards, of course. I was expecting the waterfowl to be in bright and fresh plumage, but I was off by a month or so. When I go back in November, they will surely be brilliantly and freshly colored.

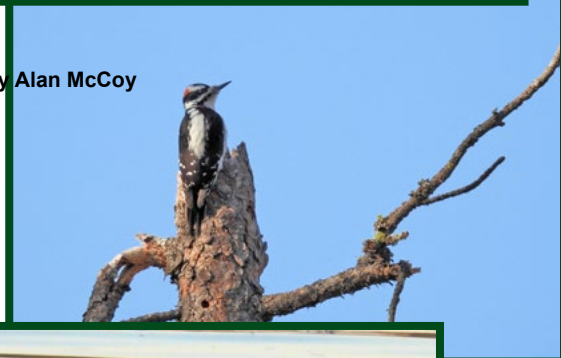
Among the songbirds were a few chickadees and lots of Pygmy Nuthatches, who apparently had a very successful breeding season, as they were abundant. Toward the end of our trip a couple of male Hairy Woodpeckers were busy looking for bugs in the pines. About the same time three Belted Kingfishers flew around and around us, just chattering away.

As we made our way back to the trailhead, Eric spotted a bird on the far reedy shore. We caught up with him and I set up my scope to see if we could identify it. We looked and looked. Finally, we found the bird. It was a common “stick” bird. I have to admit that, over the course of my birding career, I have found quite a number of stick birds, stone birds and treetop birds. I congratulated Eric on his find and we all had a good laugh.

As I write this, it has turned cold and rainy...as it should be for a “normal” October. But I think we were all glad to spend this glorious morning at the Cheney Wetlands enjoying one of the last days of this period extended warmth.



Photos by Alan McCoy



Garter Snake  
Photo by Cheryl Branz



## Keep those winter feeders disease-free!

*By Madonna Luers*

With Covid-19 mask-wearing, hand-washing and vaccinating these past couple of years, we're probably all pretty attuned to keeping free of disease. But, as many of us set up winter bird feeding stations this month, it's worth this reminder: Keep those winter feeders clean to keep birds disease-free!

Disease is a natural part of a bird's world, but feeding stations concentrate birds and can spread diseases at an unnatural rate. Although some bird diseases can afflict dogs or cats, most are not transmissible to humans. Still, always wear gloves when filling and cleaning your feeders, and wash your hands as you practiced during the peak of the pandemic!

This winter is predicted to be a snowy one in Eastern Washington. With our typical freeze-and-thaw patterns, that can mean wet, and spilled or "leftover" bird seed can get pretty grungy. Pick it up, clean it up; don't let birds scrounge food that could be moldy and spread aspergillosis. Use tube feeders to reduce your chore of cleaning up those accumulations of scattered seed on the ground. If you use platform feeders, provide only a day's worth of seed at a time.

discard others. Set up feeders with single seed types – black oil sunflower, nyjer or thistle, millet, safflower, and cracked corn.

Spread out feeders over a greater space to reduce crowding, which is a key factor in spreading disease among birds. Use smaller feeders that only allow a few birds at a time.

Disinfect feeders at least once a month with a solution of one part bleach to nine parts warm water, and dry thoroughly before refilling. Avoid or minimize use of wood feeders because they're difficult to keep clean. Make sure that every feeder allows water to drain easily.

Leaving feeders unfilled, or removing them entirely, for several days or weeks actually can be a good thing in terms of disease prevention and predation reduction. Most birds will rely on their ongoing natural food sources and you'll be able to enjoy that winter vacation guilt-free.

Let's all keep our feathered friends healthy out there!



Avoid or minimize use of bird seed mixes to reduce scattering of seed as birds select their preferences and

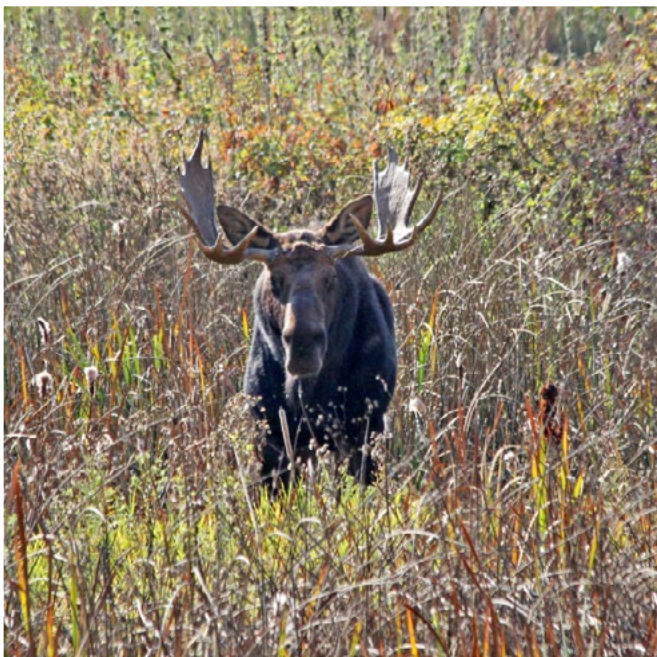


# Watch Out!

written by Peter Hardt, photos by Carlene Hardt

Last Monday (10/10) I went for a walk at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge with Carlene and Sky “the Wonder Dog”. We decided to do the 5.5 mile drive through the Refuge back woods in hopes of finding a rumored moose herd that other photographers spoke about. We ran into two groups of photographers who informed us that we had JUST missed several moose moving through the area - 7 total! But we finished the drive without seeing A. Single. One. - very disappointing!

So we parked at one of the parking lots and did our usual one-mile hike for exercise around Middle Pine lake. We saw a smattering of chipmunks (one dared to shoot across the trail RIGHT in front of Sky) and a few ducks, but nothing else. Just dead grass, cattails and pond scum as far as the eye could see. Ah, well, it was good exercise, although walking has become unusually hard for me.



We were less than 500’ from our car when some college girls doing an art project (!) on the little hill to our left started yelling at us and pointing. Two hundred feet ahead was a blind turn in some thick bushes and trees and - what do you know - a big moose cow came walking around the corner ON the paved trail, walking right toward us and the dog.



There was a little off-trail path 30’ ahead and Carlene scampered up the hill a bit and started photographing, while Sky and I (veterans of two recent Moose Close Encounters, and armed with fresh bear spray) lingered below for the ground-level view. That was fine for about 15 seconds until the moose put her ears back, a sure sign of Moose Unhappiness (snorting is another Bad Sign). So Sky and I beat feet up the hill far enough for a headstart.

It was SO cool to watch the moose going by that close, but then we were gobsmacked when a BULL moose came around the same corner! Huge, with manly antlers, and a knowing attitude that he could stomp any of us into a thin pink paste if he took a notion. It was like sighting Elvis at a Homeschooling convention - completely unexpected - after our morning of disappointing searching. But there he was and THAT was our sign to back up the hill a LOT further!





There was an exciting moment when another couple of college-aged girls came walking down the same path we had just finished, with their little pudgy dog bounding ten feet ahead of them, off-leash! We yelled warnings to them - they were just about 20 feet from the bull moose to their right in the cattails - buuut they gave NO indication they heard us. (In conversations afterwards they admitted that they heard our warnings, heard the moose very near them, but decided to keep walking on the trail instead of turning back and waiting... “if we don’t see it maybe it’s not there? What DO they teach kids in school these days?” So that wasn’t nearly as interesting as it could have been...

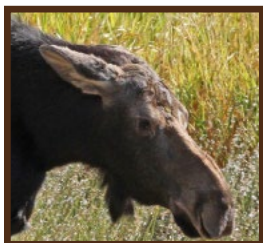
We ended up with about 10 people bunched up on the little hilltop where there’s a Refuge observation telescope, watching the moose move through the marsh. Sky got to meet the pudgy dog as well as a polite little Sheltie. Everyone was taking pictures.

Pudgy Dog had been inching its way down the hill as it watched the bull moose move around, when suddenly it decided to make a break for it and raced downhill, down the path a way, and started to enter the marsh in its apparent mission to either retrieve or repel “Mr. I Stomp Little Dogs For Fun”.

Pudgy’s owner frantically shrieked for it to come back, but it was locked on. Only when the owner called that she was “leaving now” did the dog stop dead, then run back up the hill at full speed! She has her dog figured out, that’s for sure. Too bad she didn’t just keep it on leash like everyone else.

Eventually Mr. and Mrs. Moose found an area of thick brush that provided more privacy and everyone went about their business, going for hikes or returning to our cars. Sky had done very well, only a few “alert” barks. She was under control the whole time and even got to meet some other dogs. And Carlene got some decent close-up moose pictures!

What an exciting morning! Wow!



## Hybrid Presentation Protocol

We want to include everyone, whether you are here in person or here via Zoom.

Our location is at the Hive, which is part of the Spokane Public Library. We must be out of the room by 8 pm and it will take about 30 minutes for us to pack up our equipment and to clean up the room. Thus, our presentation will be from 6:30 to 7:30 pm to allow us to respect their schedule.

Whether you are attending in person or via Zoom, we ask that you arrive 10-15 minutes early. Since the presentation will start at 6:30 pm sharp, we want to have enough time for our Zoomers to get admitted to the meeting by the Zoom host, and for everyone to have a chance to “meet and greet” each other.

All audio equipment in the room needs to be muted to avoid possible feedback with our audio equipment.

When those in the room have a question, please walk to the mic located on the table. The mics already will be turned on so please avoid pressing the button. (Pressing the button will mute the mic.) Our speaker will call on you. Speak directly into the mic so Zoomers can hear your question or comment.

When a Zoomer wants to ask a question, either use the chat feature or unmute yourself and “raise your hand” Zoom style and wait for our Zoom host to call on you.

If you cannot hear someone, please speak up to let us know.

Please be patient with us as we learn how to host a successful hybrid meeting.

Your feedback is welcome. Please let us know what worked and what didn’t so that we can improve your experience at our programs



## Lindell has retired; we need a new treasurer!

Lindell Haggin deservedly has retired from her 30 years of service as our chapter treasurer, so we need a new treasurer. This position is vital to our small organization, but it does not require a 30-year commitment!

SAS board member Jenny Emerson, who manages our website and on-line services, graciously has offered to act as interim treasurer until the end of the year, when we hope that someone else in the chapter steps up to fill the position for a two-year term.

The job requires attention to detail and about 4-6 hours per month. The chapter provides the Quicken software used to manage our finances and balance our books.

Please contact Alan McCoy at [ahm2352@gmail.com](mailto:ahm2352@gmail.com) or call (509) 999-9512 for a more detailed description of the job. Thank you for considering this opportunity to serve with us in our mission to conserve and connect.



Lindell Haggin



Jenny Emerson



## 2023 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar is Available!

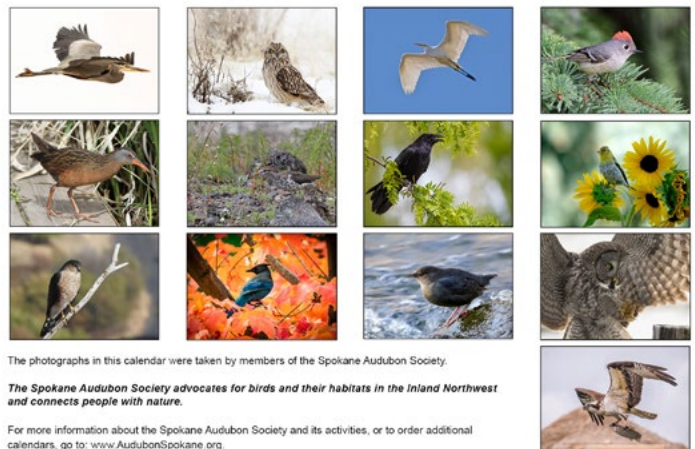
We are pleased to share the 2023 Spokane Audubon Society Birds of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho calendar with you. Despite increased paper costs, the calendar is still a bargain at \$12.00. They are available for purchase on-line, with an additional mailing cost charge of \$2.50 per calendar 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. 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](http://www.AudubonSpokane.org)

Spokane Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 9820  
Spokane, WA 99209



Gill's Printing  
Spokane, WA  
509-953-3611

# Inside the Data Factory



**Red-winged Blackbird.**

Photo: Jerry Tsao/Audubon Photography Awards

A brief glimpse at the work Audubon scientists do with the data that you collect during Christmas Bird Count and Climate Watch.

[By National Audubon Society](#)

August 18, 2022

## Birds Tell Us to Act on Climate

Pledge to stand with Audubon to call on elected officials to listen to science and work towards climate solutions.

So you've participated in a Christmas Bird Count or have signed up for a few Climate Watch blocks. You've sent in the data and now you have questions about who analyzes that data and what are they looking for. Well, we have some answers. *American Birds* spoke with quantitative ecologists Tim Meehan and Sarah Saunders, and Audubon's Director of Climate Science Brooke Bateman, about their work with your hard-won data points.

Meehan, who is a quantitative ecologist with Audubon's Science team, spends his time digging through the vast datasets of the Christmas Bird Count. Now in its 122<sup>nd</sup> year, the Christmas Bird Count is one of the longest-running community science projects in the world, and the data collected is some of the richest available for avifauna in the Western Hemisphere.

### **What are some of the ways in which data from the Christmas Bird Count are used?**

Some folks use the data to answer basic science questions about how birds interact with each other, other species in their community, and their physical environment. Other folks use the data to understand how birds respond to more recent changes in the environment caused by humans: things like habitat degradation and climate change. And yet other folks use the data to judge if species are increasing or decreasing in different regions, and if current resource management policies are helping or harming birds. The CBC database is remarkable in that it goes back more than one hundred years and covers a whole continent! And that scope is growing every year. The questions you can ask of the data are only limited by your imagination.

(cont on page 11)



**Dr. Tim Meehan, Quantitative Ecologist for the National Audubon Society.**

Photo: Tim Meehan/Audubon

**Tim, you periodically update the population trends of some birds using data from the Christmas Bird Count. What does a bird population trend tell us?**

Every couple of years, the Science team pulls together the latest CBC data and updates population trends for more than 500 species of birds. These population trends tell us how each species is doing. Are the numbers stable? Are they increasing or decreasing? Maybe they are increasing in one part of their winter range but decreasing in another part.

We produce two kinds of trend reports: long-term trends that cover approximately 50 years, and short-term trends that cover the last decade. We produce them for individual states and provinces and whole countries. When we are done, we put all these trend reports on the Audubon website so that anyone can view them, download them, use them in whatever way is helpful.

A lot of people use them, too. Some folks visit the site just to see how species are doing in their area, because they are curious. A lot of scientists download the trends to do their research. One recent example that comes to mind is a scientist who is using the trends to understand how birds have shifted their winter ranges in the last few decades due to warmer winters. Other trends customers are wildlife biolo-

gists that work with Partners in Flight and Environment Canada, who use them to inform management recommendations.

**How long does your process take to run these population trends?**

From start to finish? Well, first it takes about seven months, on and off, to get all the data entered, verified and cleaned up. Geoff LeBaron, director of the Christmas Bird Count, mostly does that. Then it takes me about five months, on and off, to do the trend analyses, do a bunch of quality checking, get them bundled up for public consumption, and sent off to folks who put them on the Audubon website.

**What is one thing about Christmas Bird Count data that you think would be a surprise to volunteers?**

I'll bet that people would be surprised by the power of CBC data. Every year I get data requests from scientists in Canada who study birds of special conservation concern. CBC data are regularly used to evaluate the conservation status of the 'snowbirds' that breed in remote parts of Canada, where they are hard to monitor, but winter in the USA where they can be counted by CBC volunteers. Bird conservation status, whether it is threatened, endangered, special concern, or otherwise, can have a huge economic impact on many thousands of people.

**What's one of the weirdest things you've seen in the data?**

Over time, one of the most abundant species counted on CBCs has been Red-winged Blackbirds—they account for up to one-third of all of the 4.7 billion birds that CBC volunteers have tallied since the CBC began. But one memorable year—the 88<sup>th</sup> CBC, according to Geoff LeBaron—birds, and especially Red-winged Blackbirds, thronged into one count circle in Pine Prairie, Louisiana. That year, volunteers counted more than 100 million birds—more than all birds counted by all the other count circles combined—53 million of which were Red-winged Blackbirds.

Sarah Saunders, also a quantitative ecologist with Audubon's Science team, analyzes the data generated by volunteers for Climate Watch, Audubon's newest community science project. Together with Brooke Bateman, director of climate science, Saunders aims

(cont on page 12)



to track how birds are—or aren't—responding to a changing climate. While the program is still quite new, Saunders and Bateman already are seeing some bird species responding to the changing conditions around them.



**Dr. Sarah Saunders, Quantitative Ecologist for the National Audubon Society.**

Photo: Luke Franke/Audubon

**Sarah, how is Climate Watch data used to understand birds and a changing climate?**

There are two important ways we use Climate Watch data. First, we use the observations to determine whether our climate suitability predictions are correct. Are species being found in locations that are predicted to be more climatically suitable than those that are not? If they are, then we know that the models we build to predict where climate conditions will become more or less favorable are indeed accurate.

Second, once we've validated the climate predictions, we use the observations to see whether species really are moving in response to changing conditions – are individuals leaving locations that are worsening in suitability and moving into new locations that are becoming more suitable? In other words, which species seem to be doing a good job of tracking climate change? Which species seem to be “stuck in place”, or remaining in locations that are worsening in terms of climate suitability?

**How many data observations are really needed in order to tell us if the birds are moving their ranges?**

Answering big questions like range shifts requires a lot of data! Not only is it important to have observations from across species' ranges, but it is critical to have observations over a long period of time. Species' occurrences can change each year in response to local weather conditions or land use, but that doesn't necessarily mean their entire ranges are shifting. Generally, range shifts can be only detected after decades of data collection.

**What happens if a particular location is only surveyed for two years? Can the data still be used?**

Yes! That's the beauty of a large community science program like CBC or Climate Watch. We pool all the observations across the country each year to get a bigger picture of what is going on, which means if a site “blinks” on or off between years, that's ok because we can still understand the larger patterns when all the observations are combined.



**Dr. Brooke Bateman, Director of Climate Science for the National Audubon Society.**

Photo: Camilla Cerea/Audubon

**Brooke, one of the important things about Climate Watch is documenting where birds are *not* found. Is it hard to get people to look for birds where they're not supposed to occur?**

Most birders don't like missing seeing a bird. But experiencing the frustration of “dipping,” the act of searching for a bird and not finding it, is incredibly important to the science of Climate Watch. Why? Because some of these bird species may not live in a particular area now, but they could move into that area soon because of climate change.

As such, those ‘zero’, or absence, data points help us to understand where a bird species is or isn’t right now—and we can track how that will change over the next five, ten, or fifteen years. The same goes for when you detect a species for several years at a location, and then it disappears. Over time we can compare the bird data with our climate change models to determine if and how climate change is causing these shifts. I think once volunteers understand the importance of how *not* finding a bird contributes to our broader understanding of birds and climate change, they’ll be more willing to put up with some missed birds on their birding trips.

I spent several winter Climate Watch survey periods looking for Eastern Bluebirds in Madison, Wisconsin. The climate conditions are expected to continue to improve for this bird in winter there, and there have been more found each year as time goes by. Most years I didn’t find any bluebirds on my surveys, but one year I did, which was really quite exciting. It helped me feel that, by my being there, looking for these birds year after year, I was contributing to our understanding of how a global scale problem like climate change can affect birds in my neighborhood.

**Speaking of Christmas Bird Count, Sarah, you’ve done your fair share of analysis of that dataset. With a dataset that large and varied, when you look at the much older counts, do you have to do things differently than just doing studies on the more recent data?**

Yes, often with long-running community science programs like CBC, survey protocols have changed over time. In order to analyze all the data (both historic and recent) consistently, those varying protocols and efforts need to be accounted for during analysis. Frequently, we can do things like correct counts of species based on the amount of effort or sometimes, we will start the time period of analysis at a certain point after more consistent protocols have been in place. In other cases, we can analyze time periods separately and then compare results. For example, if the first few decades of a dataset followed one protocol but the most recent decades followed another, we can analyze those two sets of decades differently (accommodating the different protocols) and then standardize the results in way that they can be compared to understand any differences in counts (or whatever is being measured) between historic vs. recent time periods.

**Tim, do you have more fun analyzing Christmas Bird Count data, or participating on a CBC?**

Analyzing the data. I know. I’m a geek.



**Lisa Langelier scans a field west of Cheney on Sunday Dec. 15, 2019 during the Spokane Audubon Society’s annual Christmas Bird Count.**  
Eli Francovich / The Spokesman-Review



The Killdeer is the largest and most familiar of the “ringed” plovers, a group that includes the Piping and Wilson’s Plovers. Although classified as a shorebird, this conspicuous, double-banded species is most often found in areas far from water — similar to other shorebirds such as the Mountain Plover or Long-billed Curlew.



Killdeer  
© ABC Library

Across most of North America, the Killdeer is a familiar species, thanks to its presence in open habitats and its loud calls, which give it both its common and scientific species names — “Killdeer” and “vociferus” (from the Latin for “shouting” or “yelling”).

**Named for a Noise**

Naming something, like a Killdeer, for its sound uses a convention known by the Greek name “onomatopoeia,” literally “imitation of a sound.” Several members of the nightjar family, including the Eastern Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will’s-widow, and Common Poorwill, are named for the sound of their loud, repetitious nocturnal songs.

In earlier times, the Killdeer also was known as the Chattering Plover or the Noisy Plover, both nods to its vocal nature. Killdeer often call in flight and at night. When disturbed, they give a prolonged chattering call and are often the first birds to sound an alarm if a predator or other threat approaches.

**Leapfrog Migrant**

Most shorebird species, such as the Red Knot, are champion long-distance migrants, but depending upon the population, the Killdeer can be a year-round resident or a partial, or “leapfrog,” migrant. Killdeer in the northern United States and Canada migrate south each year to escape harsh winter weather, passing right over regions such as the southern U.S. where other Killdeer populations are nonmigratory.

The Killdeer is the most widespread North American plover species. The breeding range extends from central Alaska east to Newfoundland and down. Killdeer occur year-round along much of the Pacific Coast, lower elevations of the Rockies, and across the southern United States, then well into Mexico.



Wintering birds are found south to northern South America. Killdeer are found year-round in the Caribbean, and there is a separate permanent population in coastal Ecuador and Peru, too.

**Dashing and Dining**

The Killdeer feeds on invertebrates such as earthworms, beetles, grasshoppers, and snails, sometimes adding seeds and small vertebrates to its diet. This plover forages on the ground in a characteristic manner: dashing a short distance, stopping to seize prey, then running onward in search of the next tidbit. Killdeer will also pat the ground with one foot to stir up prey, or probe mud like a Semipalmated Sandpiper. They even follow tractors, in search of prey turned up by the plow.



## Dual Displays

Killdeer couples perform both aerial and ground displays as a duo. During flight displays, both birds hover high in the air or make short, butterfly-like flights on stiff wings with slow wingbeats, calling all the while. On the ground, the pair displays to each other by bowing with fanned tails, revealing their bright orange-brown rumps and uppertail feathers.

Killdeer usually nest in open areas with sparse vegetation or on a gravel surface. In developed areas, parking lots and rooftops are favored nest sites. Both the male and female participate in building the nest, a simple scrape or shallow depression in the ground. The pair lines the nest with small rocks, shells, or other objects. Killdeer nests are always well-camouflaged, and the four heavily speckled eggs blend perfectly with their surroundings. Both the male and female take turns incubating the clutch.

Like many other shorebirds, such as the Wilson's Snipe and Snowy Plover, the Killdeer performs a "broken wing" distraction display to lead predators away from its nest. To guard against large hooved animals that may mistakenly trample its nest, the Killdeer uses a different display, fluffing itself up, fanning its tail over its head, and running at the intruder to change its path.

Killdeer chicks hatch with eyes open and covered in downy fluff; they leave the nest almost immediately, attended by their parents. Young Killdeer only have one breast band, and can easily be mistaken for smaller plover species.

## Familiarity Breeds Threats

Since the Killdeer adapts well to human habitats, it remains a common and widespread species in many areas. This proximity carries some risks, though. Pesticide poisoning poses a major threat, since Killdeer 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 are still in use, such as neonicotinoids, chlorpyrifos, and glyphosate (used in a familiar and widely advertised weed-killer now the target of many lawsuits). Pesticides can also affect insect populations, the chief food source for this bird.

Killdeer are also vulnerable to collisions with towers, buildings, and cars, since nesting birds are attracted to the gravel surrounding building pads and along road shoulders. In addition, mowing equipment can damage nests and kill or injure young, as well as disturbing breeding birds. In mowed areas, locating nests first and marking the area as a temporary "no-mow" zone is essential for individual nest success.



Killdeer chicks  
© Sandra Hazen

## 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](mailto:info@spokaneaudubon.org) for publishing consideration.

The newsletter deadline is the 20th of the month for the next month's edition.



The Pygmy Owl  
**Spokane Audubon Society**  
P.O. Box 9820  
Spokane, WA 99209-9820

**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

Join us, or renew your membership, online at our website:

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

Click "Support Us" or "Join Us" We accept PayPal, credit/debit cards or Apple Pay.

Receiving duplicate newsletters? Errors or other changes to your email address?

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