

# The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society



## December 9<sup>th</sup> Program:

### *Preparing for the Christmas Bird Count,* featuring Gary Blevins

Join us on December 9th for one of Spokane Audubon's most anticipated programs: it's time to get ready for the Christmas Bird Count! Gary will discuss changing trends learned from CBC data, and give us some bird identification pointers to refresh our knowledge of local birds!



*Dark-eyed Junco, by Flickr user Carla Kishinami (Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 2.0)*

Gary will be familiar to anyone who has been involved with Spokane Audubon. His background combines a long academic career with agency experience early in his career, and a long history of being active with environmental groups. Gary is an avid promoter of birding and, for a number of years, has conducted "Learn to Bird" workshops for Spokane Audubon in conjunction with International Migratory Bird Day. He also leads some Spokane Audubon field trips.

Gary has work experience as a Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Kansas Fish and Game, and has engaged in research on Neotropical Migratory birds off and on throughout his career. Past research includes the effects of park management and landscaping on population of both non-migratory and migratory bird populations in Wichita, Kansas, and managing MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding stations in Wyoming and Washington.

**This year's count will be on Sunday, December 27th. For more information about how to participate, see Compiler Alan McCoy's summary on page 3.**

## December Events

December 2, Wednesday

*Fascinating Stories of Natural  
History and the People  
That Live Along Side Them,  
with Hazen Audel*

**Ferris High School Auditorium  
3020 E. 37th  
7:00 p.m.**

Hazen Audel, former biology teacher at Ferris, more recently outdoor adventure guide and presenter for NatGeo TV (*Survive the Tribe*), will present a special program co-sponsored by Spokane Audubon Society and the Ferris High School Environmental and Outdoor Living Classes.

**December 12, Saturday  
Winter Lake and Wetbelt Trip  
Leader: Joyce Alonso**

This trip takes us around Beauty Bay on Lake Coeur d'Alene where the Bald Eagles feed on spawned out Kokanee. Weather permitting: those interested may drive down to the Thompson Lake/Harrison region where a variety of birds winter in a slightly warmer zone. Probable 8:00 a.m. start outside Liberty Lake Albertson's. Contact Joyce Alonso (939-0120) by December 6 to attend.

.....  
*The next program will be held at the  
Riverview Retirement Community,  
Village Community Building  
(Directions on page 8.)*

*The program will begin at about 7:30  
p.m., after announcements.*



**Holiday Tradition:  
Bring you favorite holiday treat to  
share. Calories don't count!**

## The Pygmy Owl

Volume 23, Issue 4 ~ December 2015

*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 and pg. 8 © Jan Reynolds.



### Officers

#### President

Tom Light tlight3@gmail.com

#### Vice President

OPEN

#### Treasurer

Lindell Haggin lindell4118@comcast.net

#### Secretary

Ed Reynolds edndaisy@aol.com

### Elected Board of Directors

Joyce Alonso	jbalonso3@msn.com
Ann Brinly	agbmaelstrom@gmail.com
Bob Cashen	mjaycashen@aol.com
Marlene Cashen	mjaycashen@aol.com
Bea Harrison	beatriceann@peoplepc.com
Jim Harrison	jimharrison2@peoplepc.com
Gary Lee	bird_fan@aol.com
Jan Reynolds	edndaisy@aol.com

### Committee Chairs

#### Field Trips

OPEN

#### Programs

Gary Lee bird\_fan@aol.com

#### Education

Joyce Alonso jbalonso3@msn.com  
Lindell Haggin lindell4118@comcast.net

#### Conservation

Greg Gordon fightingbull63@gmail.com

#### Hospitality

Jan Strobeck jandeerpark@aol.com

#### Membership

Dave Plemons davep\_nublado@me.com

#### Publication

John English jhe230@yahoo.com

#### Publicity

Kim Thorburn kthorburn@msn.com

#### Pygmy Owl

Carmen Yount carmen@floreo.com

#### Volunteer Coordinator

Joyce Alonso jbalonso3@msn.com

#### Website

Alan McCoy spokaneaudubon.org

*Calendars make great Holiday Gifts!*

## 2016 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar: Birds of Eastern Washington



*Short-eared Owl, by Buck Domitrovich*

Calendars cost \$10 each, and are available for purchase at general meetings, through mail order or through the website, [spokaneaudubon.org](http://spokaneaudubon.org) (using PayPal).

Note: Shipping charges apply for all mail/online orders:

1 calendar: \$10 + \$3 s&H = \$13

2 calendars: \$20 + \$4 s&H = \$24

3 - 6 calendars: \$30 + \$7 s&H = \$37

Contact Spokane Audubon for shipping costs for 7+ calendars.

To order by mail, send check to:

Spokane Audubon Society  
15418 Little Spokane Drive  
Spokane, WA 99208

Make checks payable to *Spokane Audubon*.

The deadline for the January 2016 edition of  
*The Pygmy Owl* is

**Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**

Please send any materials for the newsletter to

***carmen@floreo.com***

---

# Christmas Bird Count

## Sunday, Dec. 27th

by SAS Compiler Alan McCoy

**A**re you absolutely sick to death of campaign news and then you realize we are still a year away!? We have some good news for you! We can provide you with a full day of non-stop delight that includes not a whiff of news coverage that you don't want. Count Birds! Yes, you read correctly. Count Birds!

On Sunday December 27, 2015 we have 12 or 13 teams of seasoned birders taking part in the annual Spokane Christmas Bird Count. We start the day in various locations

around Spokane as soon as it is light enough to see and we end at dusk. Some of us even hang around listening for owls in the early morning or later in the evening.

Even if you are not a seasoned birder, you are welcome to join us as we traipse around with our binoculars, counting birds. It can be cold and sunny or cold and wet, but we will be there. And we can use your help. Although it is a dawn to dusk affair, you don't even have to stay the whole day: part-timers are welcome too.

And if you are unable to go out in the field with us, you can still help with the Christmas Bird Count. Anyone living within the Spokane Count Circle (a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Francis and Division) who can reliably identify the birds in their yard can send us a list of birds.

Do you want to count with us in the field or count at home? Please call Alan McCoy at 448-3123, or email him: [ahm2352@gmail.com](mailto:ahm2352@gmail.com).

## Sights & Sounds

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

*Sights & Sounds* is shorter this month because of the *Pygmy Owl's* quick November-to-December turnaround. (*Happy Thanksgiving!* ~ ed.) Winter is here. Early indications are that this will be an excellent winter for Bohemian Waxwings, Pine Grosbeaks, and Common Redpolls. Will White-winged Crossbills join in the fun? Stay tuned.

**SURF SCOTER:** St. Maries (11/1-CL); Sprague (11/6-TL)

**WHITE-WINGED SCOTER:** St. Maries (11/1-CL)

**GREAT EGRET:** Sprague (11/6-TL)

**FERRUGINOUS HAWK:** Sprague (11/6-TL)

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD:** Hayden (10/30-DW)

**BLUE JAY:** Coeur D'Alene (10/26-MS)

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE:** Rare in Columbia Basin – Ritzville (10/31-RK and 11/6-TM)

**MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE:** Rare in Columbia Basin – Ritzville (11/6-TM)

**SNOW BUNTING:** Cusick (10/30-TL); Peone Wetland (11/2-TL); West Plains (11/6-TL); Steptoe Butte (11/10-RB)

**GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW:** Potlatch (11/1-CS)

**WHITE-THROATED SPARROW:** Steptoe Butte (10/24-RB); Coeur D'Alene (10/30-DA); Kettle Falls (11/2-DB)

**GRAY-CROWNED ROSY FINCH:** Mt. Spokane (10/21-TL); Mill Canyon (11/7-JI); Steptoe Butte (11/10-RB)

**PINE GROSBEAK:** Stevens Creek (10/23-JI); Salmo Pass

(10/24-TS); Moscow (11/3-CS); Kettle Falls (11/4-DB); Ephrata (11/7-MY); Moscow (11/9-ToB); Heyburn State Park (11/10-JI)

**COMMON REDPOLL:** Colburn (10/27-SS); Coeur D'Alene (10/30-DA); Hayden (10/30-DW); Coeur D'Alene (11/4-MaC); Calispell Lake (11/5-TL); Mill Canyon (11/6-TL); Sandpoint (11/6-RDC); Mead (11/9-TL); Heyburn State Park (11/10-JI)

Observers: JA-Jim Acton; DA-Dan Audet; DB-Don Baker; MB-Missy Baker; RB-R.J. Baltierra; MBa-Maria Barone; MaB-Matt Bartels; ToB-Tom Besser; TB-Tom Bragg; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; CC-Corinne Cameron; DC-Del Cameron; MaC-Marlene Cashen; MC-Mike Clarke; Stacy Crist (SC); RDC-Rich Del Carlo; WC-Warren Current; KD-Kas Dumroese; PD-Peter Dunwiddie; GF-Greg Falco; MF-Marian Frobe; RF-Russell Frobe; MF-Mike Fulton; JG-Joshua Glant; JH-John Hanna; LH-Lisa Hardy; FH-Fran Haywood; RH-Ray Hoff; DH-Dave Holick; MI-Michael Irving; CJ-Chris Jannet; JI-Jon Isacoff; DJ-Dick Johnson; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; RK-Russ Koppendrayner; TL-Terry Little; AL-Angela Lotrario; TL-Thomas Light; CL-Carl Lundblad; TM-Tom Mansfield; MFM-Mary Frances Mathis; AM-Alan McCoy; EM-Eliot Miller; NM-Nancy Miller; TO-Tim O'Brien; JP-Jonathan Pafford; JR-Jethro Runco; TS-Todd Sahl; SS-Shane Sater; MS-Mike Scott; BS-Brad Sondahl; CS-Charles Swift; RT-Rick Taylor; NT-Norma Trefry; KT-Kim Thorburn; DW-Doug Ward; TW-Tina Wynnecoop; MY-Matt Yawney; WY-Will Young

---

## Water is Key to Complete Backyard Wildlife Habitat

CROSSING PATHS WITH WASHINGTON'S WILDLIFE,  
November 2015,  
distributed by Washington Fish & Wildlife

This year's record drought really brought home a basic tenet of providing backyard wildlife habitat: Water is often *the* limiting factor. Anyone who witnessed birds or other wildlife drawn to lawn sprinklers this summer can attest to this key element.

With the weather forecast for Washington this fall and winter including higher than normal temperatures and lower than normal precipitation, relatively dry conditions are likely to continue.

While most species need to consume water regularly, either directly or through their food, some also require it for cleanliness and fitness. Many birds need water for bathing and post-bath preening to keep their feathers in shape to provide "all weather" protection.

The provision of water, including through fall and winter freezes, can turn an average wildlife habitat into an extraordinary one.

Those fortunate enough to have a natural waterway running through their property already have that "extraordinary" status. But most of us need to create sources of water, either building ponds, ditches, landscape swales, or rain gardens, or just setting up birdbaths.

The trick with maintaining a birdbath through the winter months in many parts of Washington, of course, is keeping the water thawed.

Birds need to drink and bathe even on the coldest days, and although they can use snow and melting ice, open water may be more attractive. Keeping water just above freezing between dawn and dusk, when birds are active, is key.

You can keep a birdbath free of ice by regularly pouring water into the bowl, but that quickly becomes tedious during extreme cold when water freezes rapidly. A stick of wood left in the water during cold snaps can help you pop out the ice so you can add fresh water. When the water freezes, the stick will also help prevent the birdbath from cracking. Providing water next to a reflecting window can also help keep it open.

Birdbaths equipped with submersible, thermostatically controlled heaters will save time and maybe the birdbath itself. Small heaters designed to operate at a depth of one to three inches, many with automatic shut-off features when water

levels drop or evaporate, are available through garden and hardware stores that cater to bird-feeding enthusiasts, and catalogues or on-line businesses.

Be careful about the source of electricity needed to run a birdbath heater. Outdoor outlets should be on a circuit or outlet protected by a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI), which will cut off the flow of electricity in the event of a short. Most outlets in newer homes are GFCI-protected, but if you're not sure about yours, have outlets checked by an electrician.

Providing water for birds and other wildlife comes with the responsibility to keep the water clean to prevent diseases from spreading. This is especially important during warm months, but periodic thaws during cool months can be deadly, too. Scrub the birdbath a few times each month or briskly hose it out to remove algae and bacteria. Change the water frequently; locating the birdbath near a hose bib is a good idea. Never add chemicals to clean or keep water from freezing because you may poison wildlife.

If providing open water consistently through winter is difficult for you, consider other ways you can help your backyard birds and other wildlife.

Drinking water is obtained by some animals through fleshy fruits, berries and other plants they eat in your landscape.

Some birds bathe in dust, rather than water, sifting and shaking soft, dry soil through their feathers to clean them for thermal regulation. Wrens, sparrows, quail, grouse, pheasants and hawks will enjoy vigorous dust baths in a tilled garden space or specially-dug area with a mixture of loose sand, loamy soil, and wood ashes.

For more on providing water in your backyard wildlife habitat, see <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/birdbaths/index.html>.

### *Tips for Providing Food for Overwintering Birds*

Many overwintering birds use feeders as an additional hedge against limited resources. National Audubon has several recommendations for feeder and food types at <http://tinyurl.com/NAS-winter-birds>

Wild Birds Unlimited has advice for feeding birds over the winter, like being sure to include high calorie/high fat foods and locating feeders out of the wind: <http://www.wbu.com/education/winterbirdfeeding.html>

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Feederwatch program published a PDF with tips for providing food and water for overwintering birds: <http://tinyurl.com/feederwatchPDF>

---

## Field Trip Report: Sprague Lake Field Trip, Sept. 12, 2015

by Norma Trefry

Eight birders spent the morning looking for birds on and around Sprague Lake. We started at Sprague Lake Resort (a \$6.00 charge per person, but well worth it). On a rocky spit in the lake were Great Egrets, a Great Blue Heron, White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants. An interesting combination! The cove had Killdeer, Mallards, and Northern Shovelers.

We had an interesting variety of raptors: a Merlin, an Osprey, a Red-tailed Hawk and best of all, a Peregrine Falcon, which perched in a tree for all to see. Two Turkey Vultures also landed in a tree for close looks.

In the trees and shrubs were a Gray Flycatcher, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Townsend's Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Song Sparrow, Northern Flickers, a Marsh Wren, a Downy Woodpecker, White-crowned Sparrows, and Warbling and Cassin's Vireos. Looking for insects along the fence were a Varied Thrush and a Townsend's Solitaire, giving us great views. The usual flock of Quail was also there.

At the Harder Boat Launch we added Coots, Ruddy Ducks, a Horned Grebe, and Ring-billed Gulls to our list.

Along Harder-Denakas Road were American Pipits, Chipping and Savannah Sparrows, Canada Geese, Magpies, Brewer's Blackbirds and Eurasian Collared Doves.

At the Adams boat launch we added Western Meadowlark to our list, plus many species we had seen earlier.

At the Sprague Sewage Treatment ponds were Barn Swallows, Red-neck Phalaropes and more Mallards.

Even our mammal sighting was a treat; we saw three river otters playing in the lake.

We stopped early because of the heat, but still saw a great selection of birds!

---

### ***Habitat: If You Build It, They Will Come... and not just the birds***

Alan McCoy has done significant work on his land to make it amenable to birds and other wildlife. (He wrote about birding his yard in the November 2014 edition of *The Pygmy Owl*.)

It worked, and not just for attracting birds. A bull moose recently visited his pond for a drink.



Alan reported that he was on his porch, about 15 feet away from the moose, and that's where he stayed. He wondered if adult moose are afraid of anything. "They just seem so nonchalant."

\* A quick public service announcement (most assuredly we're preaching to the choir): moose are amazing, but can be territorial and dangerous, and are best appreciated from a distance. Do NOT attempt to approach them.

*Photos courtesy of Alan McCoy.*

---

## The Value of Day-to-Day Sightings in eBird

by Carmen Yount

Everyone is happy to hear about “gold-star” bird sightings in our area, but it’s also a good idea to keep an eye on “the usual suspects.” We know that eBird is a great place to record sightings, whether you’re out birding in the field or observing visitors to your yard. Recording the day-to-day birds in eBird can be *extremely valuable* because those records can help to build a picture of what’s going on with bird life in our area over time.

In addition to date and time stamps, eBird records are geo-tagged so they can be mapped using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). With enough eBird data, researchers can use statistical analysis, not just to find patterns in the data, but to be able to see *where* those patterns are occurring.

For instance, I did a project in graduate school that looked at the distribution of the three species of nuthatches in our area. Using a ~5000-record dataset from eBird of sightings over a five-year period, I was able to perform “hot spot” analysis (which is commonly used to track crime) to see that, over that five-year period, white-breasted nuthatches were seen more frequently in different areas than red-breasted or pygmy nuthatches. (I suspected it based on experience, but thanks to eBird data, I could *see* it on a map.) The results of my analysis served as a sort of “proof of concept” for that dataset, and because it was reasonably successful, my initial project had the potential to be developed further.

Larger datasets are more useful than anecdotal evidence for this kind of research, especially when dealing with the kinds of records collected by birders. In this instance, *more is better*.

It took very little time poking around eBird to find some excellent examples of recent records that may someday be part of a large and very useful dataset:

- SAS President Tom Light regularly reports visitors to his yard, including a nice assortment of songbirds: Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted and Pygmy Nuthatches, Juncos, House Finches, Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches on Nov. 12.
- Tim O’Brien reported several raptors, including a Northern Harrier and Bald Eagle, on a trip to the West Plains on Nov. 12. In addition to his other sightings, he included a count of 250 European Starlings.

Even if you’re not impressed with what you’re seeing, those observations have the potential to be interesting or important in aggregate. Consider this encouragement to use eBird to report *everything!*



Washington  
Department of  
**FISH and  
WILDLIFE**

## Seen a Moose?

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife sent a reminder that it is interested in hearing about your moose observations while hunting, hiking, biking etc. this fall, especially in northeast Washington.

This citizen science survey is designed to collect long-term data on the population status and trends of moose in Washington. Your observations will be very helpful in this venture.



**Sightings can be reported using  
a smartphone app, available at:**

**<http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/moose/>**

The app has been designed for use with  
iPhones (iOS) and Android.

**If you don’t use a Smartphone, you may  
report your observations online:**

**<http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/moose/>**

## Staying Warm in Winter: Strategies of the Pygmy Nuthatch

Overwintering birds employ a number of strategies to stay warm, including huddling with others, finding protected roost sites, and using hypothermia. Few birds use more than one strategy, but one bird that uses all three is the tiny Pygmy Nuthatch.

Groups of Pygmy Nuthatches roost in cavities in snags. One study (Knorr, 1957) counted 150 individuals using the same cavity! (That many in one place is rare.)

Once they have snuggled in, the nuthatches arrange themselves in tiers and huddle together to preserve warmth. If it gets particularly cold, they'll move downward within the tiers overnight to stay warm.

Nuthatches also make use of a hypothermic state, with a lower body temperature to conserve energy, sometimes when they're roosting in groups. It's not quite torpor, because the hypothermic birds can still fly, if necessary.

Hypothermia, in addition to communal roosting, helps the birds to stay warmer and lose less heat to evaporative cooling.

Kingery, Hugh E. and Cameron K. Ghalambor. 2001. *Pygmy Nuthatch (Sitta pygmaea)*, *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the *Birds of North America Online*: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/567>

### A note from our our October Presenters:

Judy Hallisey and I enjoyed sharing our presentation on *Climate Change, Birds, and All of Us* at your October meeting, and especially enjoyed the several really good questions.

If you were there and have a question or comment that you didn't think of then—or even if you weren't there—please don't hesitate to contact me at [mathisfun@mac.com](mailto:mathisfun@mac.com).

— Barry Brunson, Chair, Kittitas Audubon Climate Change Committee

## Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Local Membership Dues:

Individual: \$20/year \_\_\_\_\_

Couple & Family: \$25/year \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \$10/year \_\_\_\_\_

Lifetime: \$300 \_\_\_\_\_

National Membership Dues: \$35/year \_\_\_\_\_

Individual + National Dues: \$55/year \_\_\_\_\_

Couple + National Dues: \$60/year \_\_\_\_\_

**Your local membership provides you with *The Pygmy Owl* and supports your local chapter's many conservation and education activities. You will also be eligible for website privileges.**

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: Dave Plemons  
1224 W. Riverside #1101  
Spokane, WA 99201

Current members may renew memberships from our web site::

<http://spokaneaudubon.org>

Receiving duplicate newsletters? Errors or other changes needed on your mailing label? Contact Dave Plemons at [davep\\_nublado@me.com](mailto:davep_nublado@me.com), or 413-1524.



The Pygmy Owl  
**Spokane Audubon Society**  
 P.O. Box 9820  
 Spokane, WA 99209-9820  
 (509) 838-5828

Non-Profit  
 Organization  
 Spokane, WA  
 US Postage  
 PAID  
 Permit No. 34

**December 9<sup>th</sup> Program:**  
**Preparing for the Christmas Bird Count,**  
**with Gary Blevins**  
**7:30 p.m.**

**To:**

*The Spokane Audubon Society provides resources and services to educate people about birds, wildlife, and the importance of habitats, and to advocate and support public policies and actions that conserve and restore wildlife habitats.*

**Visit our website: <http://spokaneaudubon.org>**

**Directions to the General Meeting:**

*Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Building  
 2117 E. North Crescent Avenue*

**To get to Riverview Retirement Community:**

**From West Spokane & South Hill**

- I-90 East to Exit 281 toward US-2 E/US-395 N/ Newport/Colville
- Follow US-2 E/US-395 N to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**From Spokane Valley**

- I-90 West to Exit 282A
- Follow N. Hamilton St. to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**From North Spokane**

- Take US-395 S to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**Once you're on E. Upriver Drive (see map below):**

- Follow E. Upriver Drive to N. Crestline Street
- Turn Left at N. Crestline Street
- Turn Right on E. North Crescent Drive
- Proceed to entry on left showing numbers 2105-2145

Limited parking is available by the Village Community Building. Overflow parking is along E. North Crescent Ave.

