

Volume 22  
Issue 6  
February 2015

# The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society



## February 11th Program:

**MAPS: A program to monitor Avian Productivity and Survivorship,**  
featuring Spokane Audubon's Lindell Haggin



*Kat Farrell (left) and Cindy McCormack (right);  
Cindy was the certified bander for the Little Spokane River site.*

**B**ird banding is a fascinating activity that provides invaluable information. Join Spokane Audubon on February 11th, when our own Lindell Haggin will share a presentation about what's involved with bird banding and what we are learning about the birds of our area.

A site was established on the Little Spokane River in 1998 and continued until 2013. Lindell assisted at the Little Spokane River banding site for over 10 years, and will share photos, equipment, and data from the site. She will also share the stories of danger and intrigue... who bites the hardest? Which bird has the most attitude? Come to the meeting and find out all there is to know about bird banding!

Spokane Audubon's February program will be held at the  
*Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Building*  
*2117 E. North Crescent Avenue*

Please join us at 7 p.m. for refreshments and friendly conversation.

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

## February 13 - 16

### Great Backyard Bird Count

This is citizen science at it's best: birders of all ages count birds to create a real-time snapshot of where our birds are.

#### *Why Count Birds?*

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document and understand the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

Scientists use information from the Great Backyard Bird Count, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, to get the "big picture" about what is happening to bird populations.

The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate far-reaching questions about bird population health, diversity and climate impact.

Here's how it works:

1. Count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the GBBC.
2. Enter your observations on the GBBC web site ([gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org)) or on *eBird.org*.

Don't have a backyard? You can count in a park, schoolyard, nature center or anywhere in your neighborhood.

Go to <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/get-started/> for more information about how to participate in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count.

## The Pygmy Owl

Volume 22, Issue 6 ~ February 2015

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Spokane Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 9820  
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## Notes from the President

by Fran Haywood

February! Only one more month of winter. Soon the first pussywillows will appear, followed by buttercups, snowdrops, crocus and all the other spring flowers. Birds will be arriving from their wintering areas in March. Great Horned and some other owls will be close to fledging babies.

Time to get out and see the wintering species before they head back to their northern nesting regions. Keep your eyes out for Gyrfalcons following the returning ducks, and eagles in farm fields feasting on afterbirths and stillborn animals.

We can still hope for more mountain snow to refill reservoirs, lakes and streams as it melts, and to give outdoor recreationists more time before they change to summer mode. As for me, I will be happy to be able to walk without worrying about slipping and falling.

Environmental issues continue: Mt Spokane is planning on cutting the beautiful old growth trees on the back side of the mountain to install a new ski lift. I guess only time will tell if this will result in more profit for them; but it will come at a terrible cost.

Conservation Chair Greg Gordon has been keeping track of the Mount Spokane decision. Spokane Audubon has an opportunity to sign on to a lawsuit with The Lands Council as a co-plaintiff to appeal the decision. Please read Greg's report on pg. 4 for more information.

An oil pipeline rupture spilled 50,000 gallons of oil into the Yellowstone River resulting in contaminated drinking water in the town of Glendive, MT. The residents are forced to use water that is being trucked into their town.

Closer to our area, a train derailed on the Cheney-Spokane road just outside of Cheney, resulting in the road being closed for several days while repairs were made to the tracks.

Luckily, it was carrying grain and not a hazardous cargo.

We must all be concerned and watchful of these issues. Our sole source of drinking water in this area is the Spokane Aquifer and many oil and coal trains travel over it every day, along with other hazardous chemicals. Think about not having water to drink, or even cook or bathe in.

Our Audubon partners on the west side of the state are working very hard to protect forage fish (smelt, & other small fish that feed birds and other species).

Finally, some good news! Inland Northwest Land Trust has purchased an additional 150 acres of the Reardan Audubon Lake wildlife area. Lindell Haggin was involved in the purchase and we owe her many thanks.

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# Sights & Sounds

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

**W**ith the mid-winter doldrums bird activity is low, but as always, our local birders are finding good stuff. An unprecedented fourth and fifth sightings of Harris's Sparrow were found in the region since last October. And the regional Pine Grosbeak irruption continues, putting many smiles on birders' faces!

**SNOW GOOSE:** Cow Lake (1/11-RT); Little Spokane Confluence (1/18-TL)

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE:** Moscow (1/10-1/14-CS)

**TRUMPETER SWAN:** Hayden Lake (12/14-CCBC); Indian Mountain (1/3-IMCBC); Wolf Lodge Bay (1/9-DW)

**LONG-TAILED DUCK:** Coeur D'Alene (12/14-CCBC); Rock Lake (12/26-JL and TL)

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER:** Coeur D'Alene (12/14-CCBC); Usk (12/24-TL)

**EARED GREBE:** Coeur D'Alene (12/14-CCBC)

**NORTHERN GOSHAWK:** Mill Canyon (1/4-JI); Paradise Prairie (1/4-Alan McCoy)

**FERRUGINOUS HAWK:** Sprague (1/1-FH)

**MEW GULL:** Blackwell Island (1/2-LH)

**GLAUCOUS GULL:** Harrison (1/8-MH); Coeur D'Alene (1/14-DW)

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL:** Coeur D'Alene (12/14-CCBC)

**SNOWY OWL:** Rock Lake (12/23-EL); Swanson Lakes (12/26-1/9-KT, TL, FH, NT)

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD:** Hayden (12/14-1/9-DW)

**WHITE-HEADED WOODPECKER:** Turtle Creek (12/23-JL and TL)

**BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER:** Corkscrew Canyon (12/23-JL and TL); Turtle Creek (12/23-JL and TL)

**GYRFALCON:** Rock Lake (1/3-GF)

**BLUE JAY:** University of Idaho (1/12-LB)

**SNOW BUNTING:** Usk (12/29-MM); Coffee Pot Road (1/4-FH)

**LAPLAND LONGSPUR:** Crab Creek (1/4-JI)

**AMERICAN TREE SPARROW:** Calispell Lake (12/29-MM); Calispell Lake (12/31-TL); Indian Mountain (1/3-IMCBC); Moscow (1/3-BB)

**HARRIS'S SPARROW:** Valley Chapel (1/3-FH); Washtucna (1/11-RT)

**WHITE-THROATED SPARROW:** Hayden (12/14-CCBC); Moscow (12/20-CL); Moscow (1/8-SC)

**GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW:** Valley Chapel (1/3-FH)

**PINE GROSBEEK:** Coeur D'Alene (12/14-CCBC); Slavin Ranch (12/19-JI); Tum Tum (12/23-TL); Newport (12/29-MM); Rice (1/1-TD); Seven Bays (1/2-TL); Indian Mountain (1/3-IMCBC); Hauser Lake (1/3-WY); Moscow (1/7-1/10-CS); Indian Canyon (1/9-MF); Hayden (1/9-DW); Usk (1/16-TL); Sandpoint (1/16-DB and MB)

**COMMON REDPOLL:** Fan Lake (12/17-TL); Calispell Lake (12/31-TL); University of Idaho (1/3-RA); Usk (1/16-TL)

**LESSER GOLDFINCH:** Colfax (12/26-JL and TL)

Observers: RA-Ryan Anderson; DB-Don Baker; MB-Missy Baker; RB-R.J. Baltierra; MaB-Matt Bartels; LB-Leigh Bernacchi; BB-Ben Bright; MC-Mike Clarke; CCBC-Coeur D'Alene CBC; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; TD-Tim Durnell; GF-Greg Falco; MF-Marian Frobe; RF-Russell Frobe; MF-Mike Fulton; MH-Mike Haldeman; JH-John Hanna; LH-Lisa Hardy; FH-Fran Haywood; BH-Bettie Hoff; IMCBC-Indian Mountain CBC; JI-Jon Isacoff; EL-Erik Lewis; JL-Joshua Little; TL-Terry Little; AL-Angela Lotrario; CL-Carl Lundblad; AM-Alan McCloy; MM-Matthew Moskwik; TO-Tim O'Brien; CS-Charles Swift; RT-Rick Taylor; NT-Norma Treffry; KT-Kim Thorburn; DW-Doug Ward; RW-Rick Welle; WY-Will Young

March Newsletter Deadline:  
**Thursday, March 19th**

Please e-mail material to Carmen Yount at  
**carmen@floreo.com**

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## *Mt. Spokane Ski Area Expansion Challenged*

by Greg Gordon and Mike Petersen

Last November the Washington Parks Commission held a public hearing on the classification of the Mt. Spokane PASEA (Potential Alpine Ski Area Expansion) to a packed crowd. The next day, the Parks Commission voted 5-2 for to classify the PASEA as Recreational, which allowed for ski area expansion. Spokane Audubon has long supported classification of the PASEA as a Natural Forest Area, which would protect the old growth forest habitat on the north aspect of Mount Spokane.

In classifying the summit of Mt. Spokane as Recreational, it appears that the Washington Parks Commission violated its own policy to protect high value natural resources. In order to balance the agency's twin objectives of protecting natural resources and providing recreational opportunities, the Parks Commission adopted policies whereby when lands contain natural resources of particularly high value, the land classification decision should protect those resources. The policy explicitly states:

*Areas of a park containing natural resources of regional or statewide significance, unusual and/or sensitive habitats (e.g., Bald Eagles), or a species of concern should be classified restrictively to allow only low-intensity uses and minor facilities development.*

In addition, the Environmental Impact Statement ("EIS") failed on two fronts. First, it failed to adequately disclose the project's significant impacts to the ecology of Mt. Spokane. And it also failed to adequately respond to comments submitted to the Commission. Spokane Audubon and many individual members made detailed comments on the EIS, most of which the Park Commission dismissed. This was especially apparent in the wildlife section of the EIS.

Several groups and individuals, including former Spokane County Commissioner John Roskelley, have retained Attorney David Bricklin to explore a challenge the Washington Parks and Recreation Commission land use classification decision and approval of ski area expansion in Mount Spokane State Park.

Roskelley said, "Mt. Spokane State Park belongs to all the citizens of the state of Washington, not just to one small user group of skiers from the Spokane area for less than four months a year. The Parks Commission's dual mission is to protect our state's natural resources and to provide quality recreation. Their politicized decision to classify critical wildlife habitat and an intact old growth forest on the northwest slopes of Mt. Spokane as recreation and authorize 280 acres of clear-cuts and logging damage to this irreplaceable alpine area fails to follow the Commission's mission."

Spokane Audubon's board has voted to support Roskelley and the legal challenge regarding the Parks Commission decision to allow for ski area expansion and the ensuing impacts on old-growth habitat on Mt. Spokane.

## **Treasurer's Report for 2014**

by Lindell Haggin

Last year Spokane Audubon had a total income of \$15,392.32. Our expenses were \$11,293.71.

We received a grant in January to support upland game birds that totaled \$4700; we have dispersed \$2900 thus far.

We just received a grant of \$800 to purchase GPS units for our Sagebrush song bird survey; they will be purchased this coming spring.

Our major expenses are include support of the state office, printing and mailing the newsletter and supplies (calendars).

Our major sources of income include membership fees and support and calendar sales.

### **Save the Date!**

**Sagebrush Songbird Survey  
Training Workshop  
Saturday, April 4, 2015  
9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.**

Spokane Community College  
Science Building  
3410 W Fort George Wright Dr.,  
Spokane 99224

Spokane Audubon's Gary Blevins will teach a one-day songbird identification class in advance of the Sagebrush Songbird Survey in April, May and June.

(If you can't make the SAS workshop but still want to participate, additional training sessions are available: Richland on March 7 and Wenatchee on March 21.)

RSVP to Lindell Haggin ([lin-dell4118@comcast.net](mailto:lin-dell4118@comcast.net)) or Christi Norman ([cnorman@audubon.org](mailto:cnorman@audubon.org)).

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## SAS Board Report

by Ed Reynolds

### *Reardan Audubon Lake Acquisition*

For some time we have been working on an opportunity to purchase 150 acres adjoining Reardan Audubon Lake. The original property, purchased through the efforts of Spokane Audubon, the Reardan Community and WDFW, had long been a favored birding spot noted for migrants and had been platted for a housing development. When we learned that additional property might be on the market, Lindell Haggin led Board efforts to explore possible expansion of the existing wildlife area, and after many months those efforts culminated in the new property being purchased by the Inland Northwest Land Trust. The Spokesman-Review for January 22 features an article by Rich Landers discussing the purchase and the importance of the area. (The Spokesman blog posting can be found here: <http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/outdoors/2015/jan/20/reardan-audubon-lakes-area-expanding/>)

Inland Northwest Land Trust has more about the acquisition on their web site: [www.inlandnwlandtrust.org](http://www.inlandnwlandtrust.org).

Birders like the late Warren Hall and his sidekick Jim Acton were responsible for bringing this important birding area to our attention, and it is unlikely that this new purchase would have occurred without Lindell's unstinting efforts. Members of the Spokane Audubon Society can be proud to have had a hand in the effort.

### *Oil Rights Lease*

Some years back a doctor in Montana willed about a third of an acre of mineral rights to Spokane Audubon. The property lies on the western edge of the Bakken oil fields. We have sold a lease on the rights to a Texas company for about \$250, and will, if the company drills and extracts oil, be paid royalties. Your board has been hesitant about being involved with oil extraction, but we concluded that selling the lease was the best option. We could have sold the rights for a little more than the lease fee, but that would only mean that someone else would have collected royalties. Had we refused to sell or lease, the courts could have allowed the drilling to proceed. (One suspects that the oil industry had a hand in writing Montana law.) Given the recent drop in oil prices it may be that no drilling will occur, but one never knows. Meanwhile, we have a little bit more money to aid in our conservation and education efforts.

## *What Field Trip could you take and see a Golden Eagle, Great Egrets and Eastern Blue Jays?*

By Gary Blevins

The answer, of course, is the late migrant trip led by Gary Blevins. On October 25th, 2014, eight of us headed out from Airway Heights to bird Spokane, Lincoln, and Grant counties. Our first stop was Reardan Audubon Lake. On the way there we spotted a Great-Horned Owl. The lake yielded the predicted species of birds for a windy early morning. Going through Davenport we stopped at the small park near Subway for biological necessities. While waiting there we heard the ruckus call of the Eastern Blue Jay. Walking quickly up the street by the city pool we were able to find a couple of Jays in an apple tree.

The next stop at the Davenport cemetery provided a few birds along with wind burnt faces and hands. Other than a Red-tailed Hawk that was annoyed with us for making him fly into the wind, we also observed both races of dark-eyed Juncos (Slate-colored and Oregon).

The drive from the cemetery toward Odessa provided us with great views of Northern Harriers, Broad-winged Hawks, American Kestrel, Prairie Falcon, Northern Shrikes, lots of Horned Larks with the occasional American Pipit mixed in the flocks. Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting eluded us. The star of this part of the trip was a Golden Eagle sitting by the road on some carrion.

A stop at Stratford Lake yielded a number of common duck species and lots of Canada Geese. Mixed in these large folks were some Cackling and Snow Geese. Also the group got some long distance views of Western Grebes.

Several stops around Soap Lake provided more common duck species as well as great views of both Eared and Horned Grebes. At the city park we saw Killdeer and spent some time with those most challenging of species, sandpipers. In the end the group concluded that we were observing Wandering Tattlers and Surfbirds... no wait, that was a different trip in September for me. On this trip it was Western and Least Sandpipers. Our surprise came as we were driving the highway around the east side of the lake, a lone Peregrine Falcon sitting on a power pole hoping for a duck dinner.

Continuing on to Lenore Lake we observed more of the same ducks and grebes seen earlier on the trip. At the north end of the lake our last stop provided the entertainment of a couple of Great Egrets being hassled by a pair of Great Blue Herons.

*continued on page 7*

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## *The Little Blue Heron and Migratory Vagrancy*

by Kim Thorburn

On November 17, 2014, Wendy Klaue walked into her garden across the street from Cannon Hill Park and was astonished to see a small white egret-like bird frozen to death under a tree. She knew immediately that something special had sought refuge in her backyard with its pool sometimes visited by great blue herons. Unfortunately for the traveler, it was the day that our local temperatures plunged from unusually mild autumnal days to uncommon frigidity.

Wendy, who noted that Native American traditions recognize heron and egret visits as good omens, sought help to identify and preserve the exceptional visitor. She eventually took the specimen to the district Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife office where it was confirmed to be an immature little blue heron. A report was submitted to the Washington Bird Records Committee for official verification. The committee secretary said that there have been five previously recorded state sightings of this species and none from Eastern Washington.



The best place to see little blue herons is on their breeding grounds in the wetlands and coastal lagoons of southeastern United States and Texas. There are small breeding populations in southern and central California. Many populations of this species are long distance migrators, wintering in Central and northern South America.

Semialtricial young of the little blue heron are raised by both parents. Parental feeding and care continues until post fledge dispersal in late summer or early fall. Families disperse in all directions and many birds fly north. Occur-

rences throughout Oregon are known. Southward migration usually commences in late September or October but may be delayed by mild fall weather.

Migratory vagrancy, i.e., bird species showing up in unexpected places during spring and fall, is a common phenomenon that excites the bird watching community. Many of us travel great distances for the “chase.”

Bird migration, guided by both biologic and environmental forces, is mysterious enough. The causes of vagrancy are even more enigmatic; the data by their very nature are anecdotal. As Spokane County compiler Tim O’Brien observed when he received the report of the county’s first record of a little blue heron, “Just tells you that birds are out there that we don’t even know about most of the time.”

There are many hypotheses about causes of migratory vagrancy, contentions arising from patterns of specific bird appearances. Unusual weather during migration certainly contributes to sending birds off course, as we see with “fall-outs” following strong storms.

Patterns of passerine vagrancy have led to a theory of reverse migration shadow, a disorientation that causes birds to show up in areas opposite their normal migratory direction. Others have challenged this theory, claiming instead an array of long-range dispersal not often recognized because of observer bias. That is, as Tim noted, we tend to look for birds in a limited number of places and most unusual occurrences probably go unseen.

Given what is known about the movement of little blue herons, the long-range dispersal theory could explain the rare appearance in Wendy’s Cannon Hill backyard. A big question related to migratory vagrancy in the future will be the impact of climate change. Were the abundance of bird rarities at Neah Bay last fall and Spokane’s first known little blue heron arrival mere coincidence or harbingers of things to come?

### *Oops!*

*In the 2015 Spokane Audubon calendar for January,  
The small photo of a thrush is a juvenile Varied Thrush,  
not a Swainson’s Thrush.*

*Spokane Audubon regrets the error.*

Gary Blevins, continued from page 5

Blue Lake is always one of my favorite stops for this trip because it yields loons. The stop did not disappoint. As the skies turned from partly cloudy to rain we were seeing a number of loons. Standing in the cold rain the group was hoping to distinguish a Pacific Loon from all the Common Loons. In the end the group felt confident we had found a Pacific Loon. Was it the bone chilling cold rain, the tiredness of a long day of birding, or the water spotted spotting scopes? As you are aware with some species of birds there is always the element of uncertainty. But, that's what makes birding fun!

We ended the trip at dusk at Coulee City Community Park sitting in the cars in the rain viewing more loons. All and all a great day in the life of a birder, birding with great friends in several different set of weather conduction and observing about 60 different species.

I'll bet you are already looking forward to next year's trip.

**Friends of Turnbull  
2015 Wild Refuge Dinner & Auction  
Saturday, March 14, 2015**

Wren Pierson Community Center  
615 4th Street, Cheney, WA

Doors open at 5:30 p.m.

Admission is \$35/person  
includes dinner and music

Since 1997, Friends of Turnbull has been a major sponsor of the Environmental Education Program, outreach activities, habitat restoration and other projects at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge.

Friends of Turnbull is excited to host our 9th annual 'Wild Refuge' fundraiser dinner and auction, our primary source of funding to support our mission.

Tickets may be purchased online through Brown Paper Tickets at the following address:

<http://2015wildrefuge.bpt.me/>

**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:  
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Send this form and your check to:

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

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<http://spokaneaudubon.org>

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or 413-1524.



The Pygmy Owl  
**Spokane Audubon Society**  
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Non-Profit  
 Organization  
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February 11th Program:  
 MAPS: A Program to Monitor  
 Productivity and Survivorship  
 with Lindell Haggin  
 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>**

## SAS Field Trips for February & March

**February 7, 2015, Saturday**

**Snowy Owl Trip**

**Leaders: Fran and Brad Haywood**

This trip is geared toward all levels of birders. We will spend most of the day exploring the area around Reardan and Davenport, and perhaps drive down Mill Canyon or to the Coffee Pot Lake area depending on the latest bird reports. Winter birding can be slow and there are no guarantees. Weather can be a major factor. We will meet at Spokane's Coeur d'Alene Park at 7:30 a.m. Contact Fran at 484-8666, or [birders13@gmail.com](mailto:birders13@gmail.com) by January 31 if you plan to attend.

**March 21, 2015, Saturday**

**Bluebird Trip**

**Leader: Marian Frobe**

This is a family friendly half-day trip and a great way to greet spring. We will drive a route on Paradise Prairie to see returning favorite birds. We will probably end up at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. The trip usually ends around 2 p.m. We will meet at Spokane's Coeur d'Alene Park at 7:00 a.m. Call leader Marian Frobe at 328-0621 by March 15, if you plan to attend.

**March 28, 2015, Saturday**

**Turnbull NWR Beginning Birder Basics Trip**

**Leader: Fran Haywood**

This is a half-day driving and walking trip for all levels of birders, and is family oriented. It is early in the season for many species, but always exciting to see what has arrived. Meet at the refuge headquarters near Cheney at 7 a.m. Contact leader Fran Haywood, 484-8666, [birders13@gmail.com](mailto:birders13@gmail.com) by March 15 if you plan to attend.

Note: We will have a group pass to cover the refuge entrance fee.

**March 28, 2015, Saturday**

**Kids & Family Trip**

**Leaders: Joyce Alonso and**

**Ann Brinly**

Joyce Alonso and Ann Brinly will lead a half-day trip specifically for Scouts of both genders and/or families interested in introducing their children to birds. The destination will be determined by weather conditions (advancement of Spring). The most likely possibility is Reardan's Audubon Lake and surrounding area. Meeting time will be 8:00am. Place to be determined. Call Joyce Alonso (448-2447) for more info and to register.