

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 29
Issue 8
Apr. 2021

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

April 14th, 7:00 p.m.

This meeting again will be via Zoom on-line since pandemic-prevention restrictions continue to keep us from meeting in person. To join the Zoom meeting (ID: 813 2261 1736, Passcode: 475583), link to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81322611736?pwd=Q0szcTNKUWJ6ZVdEU1VzazBibXRmUT09>

Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park Photography Adventures

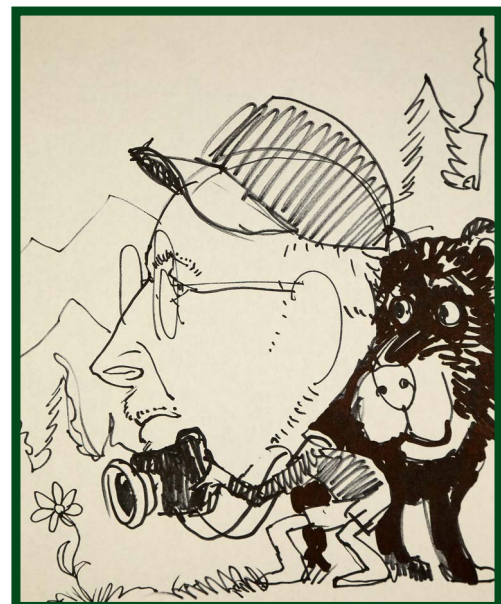
Presented by Ralph Kerr

My name is Ralph Kerr. I describe myself as a “Country Boy” who enjoys the out-of-doors and, particularly, wildlife photography. Many of my early life bird-watching experiences came from the seat of a farm tractor, while working the fields of the North Dakota farm where I grew up.



Grand Teton Mountain Range © Jim Fowler

All of my life, observing wildlife has been a diversion from life's routines and stresses. Approximately 17 years ago I became seriously interested in photographing wildlife. My career, from which I retired in 2012, was that of a CPA, during which time I primarily worked with taxes. I am not a professionally trained photographer. I started out on my own, tried many things and made lots of mistakes, while enjoying every minute of it. Along the way I had opportunities to ask questions of various professional photographers and I give them all my thanks for being patient and offering guidance. I follow a statement from a professional photographer who said, “The more time I spend out there, the luckier I get.” I challenge myself by occasionally entering photo contests and producing an annual Wildlife Calendar. It is my great honor to be invited to share my photography from Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks with you.



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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.



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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status - February 21, 2021 through March 19, 2021:

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

Family: Dave Smith

Supporting: David Dempsey

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Wes Schneider, Rick Eichstaedt, Sue Orłowski, Joanne Powell

Family: Conn & Julie Wittwer, Gary Lee, Jim Hudlow

Supporting: Sharon & Norman Genung, Marianne & Mahlon Dalley

If you change your email address, please send your new email address to me, Alan McCoy, at ahm2352@gmail.com I will make sure that 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>



Rufous Hummingbird
© Will Fuller

Attracting Hummingbirds to Nest

Birds and Blooms
George Harrison

Watching hummingbirds is more fun when you find a hummingbird nest. Learn how to attract these tiny fliers to nest in your yard.

Like a crown jewel, a hummingbird nest is one of the great wonders in all of nature. They are so tiny, so perfect. Yet, few of us have ever seen a hummingbird nest. This is because they are nearly impossible to find. From the ground, they look like another bump on a branch. From above, an umbrella of leaves conceals them. And from the side, they look like a tiny knot, quilted with lichens, plant down and fibers. Though each of the 17 hummingbird species that breed in North America builds slightly different nests in various habitats, all hummingbird nests have much in common.

Hummingbird Nest Facts

Female hummingbirds build their nests 10 to 90 feet high, generally in trees or shrubs (with a few exceptions).

Hummingbirds build velvety, compact cups with spongy floors and elastic sides that stretch as the young grow. They weave together twigs, plant fibers, and bits of leaves, and use spider silk as threads to bind their nests together and anchor them to the foundation.

Hummingbird eggs are about the size of navy beans. Most females lay two eggs, which they incubate for 15 to 18 days.

Juvenile hummingbirds fledge (leave the nest) 18 to 28 days after hatching. Any hummingbird lover knows that adding nectar plants to your garden is an important part of attracting hummingbirds. But these tiny creatures rely on a different set of plants for nesting materials. Add some of these to your garden to encourage hummingbirds to nest nearby.

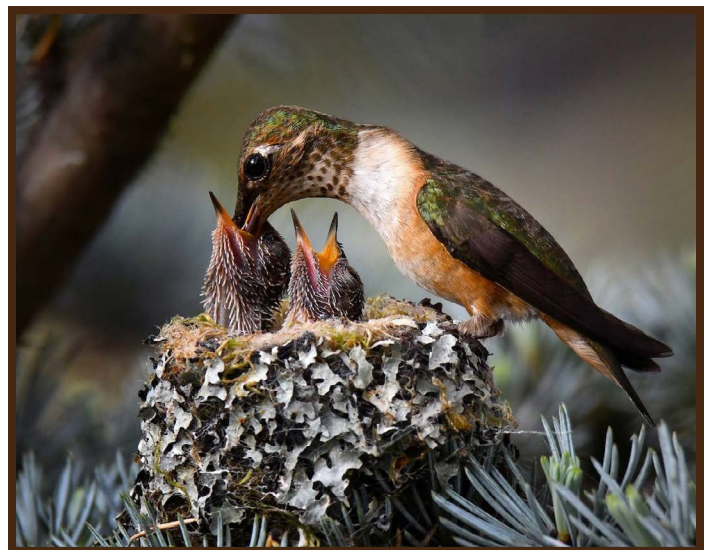
Hummingbirds don't use nest boxes or tree cavities. Instead they generally build their nests in sheltered trees or shrubbery, often in a fork of branches. Enhance your own hummingbird habitat by growing a diversity of leafy trees and large shrubs that provide shelter at varying heights. And if you want to get more bang for your buck, plant catkin-bearing trees and shrubs, which provide soft

plant fibers for nesting material. Some examples of these include willows, witch hazel, alder, American elm, cottonwood, ironwood, poplar, birch, beech, mulberry and maple.

Hummingbird eggs are cradled in soft fluffy fibers that hummingbirds choose from plants nearby. Add plants with fuzzy foliage like Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantina*), which forms dense, ground-hugging rosettes of thick, soft, woolly leaves. The silken plumes of ornamental grasses are also useful in attracting hummingbirds looking to nest. Some plants have seed heads or pods that transform into fuzzy balls of soft fiber, or are encased in soft protective casings. Examples include clematis, honeysuckle, milkweed (*Asclepias* species) and blanket flower (*Gaillardia* species). Pasque flowers offer both soft foliage with silken hairs, and mid-spring flowers followed by fuzzy seedpods.



Stachys byzantina
(Lamb's Ears)



Rufous Hummingbird Babies
© Sally Harris Sequim, WA

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Spring is finally here. That's great for getting outdoors and enjoying birds and other parts of nature. In terms of the birds, though, March is often a dead time; as many to most of our winter visitors have left, but the bulk of migrant breeders have not yet returned. It is a great time for waterfowl, bluebirds, phoebes, and Tree and Violet-green Swallows, all of which have arrived as of this writing. Look for more exciting movement of birds in the next few weeks! Especially rare sightings are in all caps:

Snow Goose: Bonner's Ferry (2/19-SE and JR); University of Idaho (2/21-CS); Pullman (2/23-MM); Mondavi (3/10-MC)

Long-tailed Duck: Hope (2/18-CL); Spokane (2/18-MW)

Red-breasted Merganser: Coeur D'Alene (2/20-eBird); Heyburn SP (3/7-BM)

Anna's Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (3/13-MC); Moscow (3/14-NP)

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Coeur D'Alene (2/14-RC); Heyburn SP (3/2-TL)

Glaucous Gull: Coeur D'Alene (2/17-CL)

Northern Goshawk: McCroskey Park (3/10-BB)

Blue Jay: Troy (2/17-eBird) Sandpoint (3/2-RDC); Bonner's Ferry (3/5-JR); Pullman (3/12-MM); Kettle Falls (3/13-DB); University of Idaho (3/14-MM)

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch: Fairfield (2/20-DG); Rockford (2/21-MC); Plummer (2/21-JI); Potlatch (3/6-NP); Dreary (3/14-NP)

EASTERN PURPLE FINCH: Chattaroy (3/13-AT)

Pine Grosbeak: Spokane (2/15-eBird); Rice (2/19-TD); Bonner's Ferry (2/20-NP); Cusick (2/21-SS)

White-winged Crossbill: Mt. Spokane SP (2/24-RuM)



Eastern Purple Finch © Wendy Hogan

Eastern Purple Finch vs House Finch



House Finch © Suzanne Labbe

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; MaC-Marlene Cashen; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; KiD-Kirsten Dahl; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JoE-Johnna Eilers; JE-Jacob Elonen; BF-Bob Flores; FF-Fred Forssell; DG-Don Goodwin; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; JI-Jon Isacoff; LJ-Louie Johnson; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-David Kreft; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; CoL-Courtney Litwin; CL-Carl Lundblad; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; RM-Roy Meyers; RuM-Russ Morgan; TO-Tim O'Brien; PO-Peter Olsoy; JP-Jim Patten; CP-Chris Pease; NP-Neil Paprocki; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark Selle; CS-Charles Swift; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; SW-Steven Warren; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; MY-Matt Yawney

Member Profile:

Jon Isacoff

by Madonna Luers

If you read this newsletter regularly, you know that member Jon Isacoff compiles our “Field Notes” feature on recent bird sightings every month.

But did you know that Jon is a professor of political science and environmental studies, and founding chair of environmental studies, at Gonzaga University?



A lifetime Spokane Audubon Society member, Jon joined the chapter a few years after moving to Spokane from the East Coast in 2004. He served as field trip committee chairman from 2009 to 2014, usually leads a field trip every year, participates in the Christmas Bird Count when he’s in town at that time, and has been the Field Notes editor for the past seven years. With his lifelong interest in birds, Jon’s participation in Spokane Audubon comes naturally.

Jon was born in 1970 in New York City. When he was 10 years old his family moved to a heavily wooded suburb 35 miles north of the city. “I didn’t know anyone or have any friends there,” he recalls, “and there was no Internet or computers to keep kids busy. My parents put up a bird feeder and gave me

a very old pair of binoculars and a Peterson’s Field Guide to Eastern Birds. That’s how it all got started.”

Jon earned Bachelor of Arts and Master of Public Administration degrees at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. He worked as an assistant to New York Governor Mario Cuomo and as a consultant for MeretzUSA, an Israeli-American non-governmental organization based in New York. He taught at Saint Joseph’s University, Haverford College, and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to many political science journal articles, he has written a book on the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He’s traveled extensively in the Middle East and has studied Arabic for four years and Hebrew for two years.

Jon moved to Spokane to join the Gonzaga University faculty where he’s been especially interested in interdisciplinary teaching and has co-taught with faculty in Religious Studies and Biology. He was awarded an Exemplary Faculty Award from Gonzaga in 2012.

Jon is currently Secretary and Board Member of the Dishman Hills Conservancy, and has served on the Washington Ornithological Society board and as Hiking Committee Chair for the Spokane Mountaineers. He is also a regional reviewer for the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology’s eBird citizen science project. He has written an article on the taxonomical status of “Western Flycatchers” -- *Empidonax occidentalis* (Cordilleran Flycatcher) and *E. difficilis* (Pacific-slope Flycatcher) that were split in 1989 but may be reversed to one species – for a future edition of the Western Birds Journal.

While Jon does a lot of birding locally, most years he makes a trip or two in the United States or Canada specifically to see other birds. He’s made six trips to Arizona, four to Texas, a couple each to Glacier National Park in Montana and Banff National Park in Alberta, and one each to Alaska, Minnesota, and

Florida. Before the Covid pandemic restrictions, he usually birded once or twice a year in New Jersey, and once a year somewhere in California.

His favorite birding experience is camping in a very isolated place, typically in a National Forest, and exploring backcountry trails and old logging roads. “The mountains of this region are quite pleasant in summer when Spokane gets hot and dusty during mid-summer,” he said. “It’s always fun to hear if any owls or nightjars are about throughout the night.”

He says his favorite bird is probably the Pygmy Nuthatch. “I love how energetic and brave they are,” he said. “They’re uncannily smart, too, for a bird of their tiny size.”

Jon’s advice to new birders is to get an app or guide and try to match what they see to what’s in the guide. “Pay attention to range maps and bar charts,” he said. “Bar charts in particular can be readily viewed readily on eBird, and you don’t have to have an account to use it. Many new birders don’t realize when birds are supposed to be around. A Western Wood-pewee is super common in June, but not in January!”

Jon doesn’t agree with many that the most important issue for the future of birds and birdwatching is climate change. “Don’t get me wrong; climate change is a global emergency and one of the greatest challenges facing the planet, which requires massive immediate attention,” he explained. “But in terms of birds, old-fashioned habitat destruction – logging, clearing and burning for agriculture and development, as well as hunting by humans and predation by cats – are killing birds and their habitats at shocking rates in real time.”

Jon noted that now only 50 percent of the earth is habitable by wild ecosystems and species, and only 10 percent of that half is currently protected. Over 10 years ago, the United Nations put out its conclusions that an additional seven percent needs to be protected to avoid massive extinctions. “We’re going rapidly in the wrong direction,” he said. “It is true that, in an undetermined number of decades, climate change will make that dire situation worse. But my fear is that we will put all of our eggs in the climate change basket (pun intended!) and not

spend the time and money needed to conserve land and save critical ecosystems and species here and now. Then we’ll have to look back and ask if the net reduction of atmospheric carbon was worth it if much of the world’s ecosystems and the birds already become extinct because we neglected to preserve and protect land.”



Pygmy Nuthatch (adult) © Gordon Karre



Pygmy Nuthatch (immature) © Ian Routley

2022 Spokane Audubon Calendar Photograph Contest Guidelines

Submission Period: April 15 – May 15, 2021

Submit photos to: sauduboncalendar@gmail.com

Requirements

- All photographs must be submitted by a Spokane Audubon Society member in good standing (i.e., a current member).
- A maximum of four photographs may be submitted per person.
- Photographs must be submitted electronically via email to sauduboncalendar@gmail.com.
- Each photograph must be submitted in jpeg format, be in landscape orientation, with dimensions of 9.25" wide by 6.75" high, have a resolution of at least 300 pixels per inch, and be no larger than 10MB in size.
- Submitted photographs shall not have the © symbol with the photographer's name or other inserted script.
- For images selected for the calendar, the photographer maintains copyright and agrees to provide perpetual use of the photograph(s) to Spokane Audubon Society for the calendar and other promotional and educational purposes.
- All photos must be of wild birds and must be taken in Eastern Washington or Northern Idaho. Please include the species name(s) and location where each photograph was taken.

Call for Entries

Photographers may submit entries starting Monday, April 15th. The deadline is Friday, May 15th; no entries will be accepted after that date.

Judging and Selection

- Selection will be made by a panel of three to five impartial judges, at least one of whom is a Spokane Audubon Society board member. At least some panel members will have moderately advanced bird identification skills and experience with bird photography.
- Photographers who submit entries will not be judges.
- The bird in a natural setting must be the focus of the photograph. Preference is given to interesting behaviors, unusual or hard-to-see species, and eye-catching compositions. Habitat and artificial features should not overpower nor draw attention away from the bird(s).
- Judging criteria are photo composition, technical excellence, artistic merit, and overall impact. Normal processing is allowed, but over-processed or altered photos will be rejected.
- Submissions must comply with the specified size requirements.
- Following selection, all entrants will be notified of the decisions.

Publication

Each photograph will be published with the common name of the bird species and © with the name of the photographer.

Special Note: Photographers whose images are selected for the calendar may need to provide a TIFF version of the photograph for printing purposes.

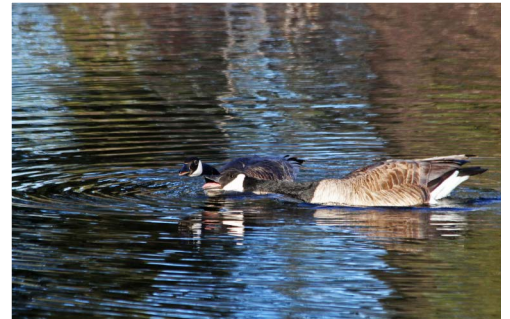
Turnbull NWR Spring Arrivals

from Carlene Hardt

I have been looking for signs of Spring and I found lots of it at Turnbull NWR these past two weeks. Yes, I saw many of the more common animals and flowers that we see every Spring, but they are even more meaningful to see this year because of how difficult 2020 was.

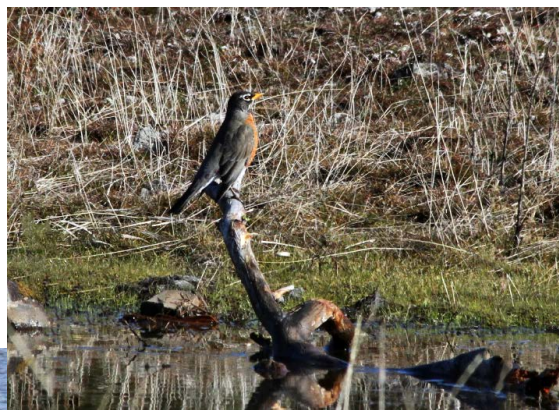
The big annual bird migration has begun. One week I saw geese and ducks on Cheever Lake, but the next week I only saw two strange-looking ducks there. I wondered, what ducks have red bills? As it turns out, I guess I have never seen male Common Mergansers before! (Sometimes also called Fish ducks, or Goosanders.) These handsome diving ducks are also called Sawbills, because of their long, serrated bills, used to catch fish.

My picture of the geese with their necks held out straight was interesting. They were making a loud warning call at the same time. And that's apparently their warning for other geese who are flying overhead when they don't want them to land.



It was good to see the Tundra swans. Their bills are mostly black (like Trumpeters) but they have bright yellow spots on both sides by their eyes.

This time of year you just never know what you might see and enjoy. I hope you, too, will keep an eye out for the signs of Spring around your home and when you are out and about.



all photos by Carlene Hardt



Keep birds and other wildlife in mind during “spring cleaning”

by Madonna Luers

Springtime has many of us cleaning up our yards and gardens, from raking leaves and other over-winter debris to pruning trees and shrubs. But it's important to keep the needs of birds and other wildlife in mind during our spring cleaning efforts.

Cavity-nesting owls, woodpeckers, squirrels, bats and other species use older trees and a myriad of songbirds make nests in the branches of many trees and shrubs. Pruning or cutting down trees from now through September can displace, harm or even kill these animals. If you must cut now, thoroughly inspect a tree or shrub for active nests before beginning work. Consider cutting just the bare minimum of branches, leaving a nest section alone.

Many birds and other wildlife use the “duff” – partly decayed organic matter on the ground – while foraging for insects, worms, and other goodies. So when you're raking up leaves, twigs, pine cones and other debris from a grass lawn or flower bed, consider leaving a little here or there. Rather than hauling all raked-up debris away, consider creating brush piles in a few places that work for your sense of aesthetics.

The birds will appreciate your willingness to forego a little of this traditional springtime yard work, and you'll have more time to appreciate them!



Where do feeder birds go in Spring?

by Madonna Luers

If you like to provide supplemental feed for birds year-round, you may wonder why many birds stop coming for free meals in Spring – a time when they need extra energy and nutrition for the rigors of breeding and nesting.

Many birds are now on their nesting territories, which may no longer include a backyard feeding station they frequented earlier in the year. Birds are not as territorial during the winter and will congregate in much greater numbers at feeders and other foraging spots. When the days grow longer and breeding rituals are triggered, they tend to stay in a relatively smaller territory, defending it from other birds.

It's true that many birds really chow down just before or during the mating season. In fact, March and April can be among the busiest times at backyard feeding stations, including visits by newly arrived migrant species. But it's likely fewer individuals are coming back repeatedly to a feeder that's within their nesting territory, or migrants are moving through and stopping in to feed for a couple days.

Many birds also shift their diets as Spring unfolds and other preferred foods become available. Seeds and suet just can't compete with green buds and newly emerged insects, caterpillars, worms, and other fresh sources of protein. In response to that diet change and spring newcomers, many who like to feed year-round provide mealworms and other fresher fare. Bluebirds, in particular, are known to use feeders that offer those options.

A word of caution to year-round bird-feeding enthusiasts: Keep feeders as clean and dry as possible to avoid spreading disease. Clean feeders weekly with a ten percent chlorine bleach solution and dry thoroughly. Regularly pick up and discard feed spilled on the ground. Reduce the number of feeders so birds have more space. This can be challenging in the wetter, warmer spring and summer months. It might be easier and wiser to simply stop feeding until fall or winter, especially since birds do find other natural food sources.

Pileated Woodpecker, the ABA's 2021 Bird of the Year!

Where did you see your first Pileated Woodpecker? In the deep woods of a protected forest? Within the dense cypress strands of a southern swampland? Or maybe in a parking lot, like where I saw mine.

The Pileated Woodpecker—quite common in the southeastern United States, increasing in other parts of the East, present throughout much of southern Canada, and uncommon in some parts of the West—has adapted to people and disturbed forests as it increases its presence in urban areas. This large and hardy bird can be at turns cryptic, silently working tree trunks and logs while disappearing in the dim light of the understory, or conspicuous, unmistakably gliding through a wooded ravine with its trademark cackle. Its huge form and far-reaching laughter are often the highlight of a day's birding excursion. The ABA is proud that the Pileated Woodpecker, emblem

of both the wild woods and the adaptability of birds to anthropogenically altered spaces, is our 2021 Bird of the Year.

We see these qualities, too, in Juan Travieso's entrancing 2021 Bird of the Year art. The Pileated's profile is spliced with stark red and fuchsia lines, which blend into its crest and mustache stripe as if they were diagnostic marks. The bird is overlaid on digital cubes, speaking to its, and maybe all birds', merger with digital identities: we think of birds through our online understanding of them. The red vine leaves and pink flowers draped behind the bird add an almost pop sensibility, perhaps both a reinforcement and reevaluation of the Pileated Woodpecker's iconicism.

by Frank Izaguirre
American Birding Association



Pygmy Owl Contributions

Spokane Audubon Society members who want to contribute to the Pygmy Owl newsletter can submit articles on, and photos of, birds and bird conservation issues to info@spokaneaudubon.org for publishing consideration.

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

Due to the pandemic, organized field trips are on hold until further notice

You might be a backyard birder if...

...you clean your birdbath more often than your bathtub!

...you buy six kinds of birdseed but only one kind of breakfast cereal!

...you've built more square feet of nest-boxes than square feet in your deck!



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 or (509) 999-9512.



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

April 2021

To:

*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>

At this time we are not offering any field trips. Our hope is that by Fall 2021, we can resume a full schedule of field trips.

We always encourage and enjoy carpooling on birding field trips to save fuel, lower our carbon footprint, and share sighting information more easily.

But with the current need for “social distancing” to help minimize the spread of coronavirus, we need to shift gears. Please consider the following on your next birding field trip:

- Carpool only with people you live with or at least feel comfortable and confident with in the close quarters of a motor vehicle.
- Don’t share binoculars, scopes, cameras, or mobile units with birding apps. If you need or want to share, clean equipment with disinfecting wipes between users.
- Maintain the Centers for Disease Control and other public health official “social distancing” guidelines of staying at least six feet away from each other when you reach a birding site where you leave your vehicles.

These steps may seem extreme, but they are simply part of our collective, responsible pre-emptive action to slow the spread and impacts of this virus. We’d all rather be safe than sorry. Happy birding!