

Volume 23
Issue 10
June 2016

The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



It is Time to Stand Up for Public Lands

by Kim Thorburn

I recently returned from birding at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, one of my favorite annual spring treks. For me, it is one of the most beautiful places in the world, and I've traveled lots. Anglers were my neighbors at the BLM Page Mill Campground, taking advantage of the Blitzen River's premiere fly fishing as it rushed from the melting snows of Steens Mountain. It was still early spring but the birds were returning. I couldn't look for songbirds in the gardens of the historic farm buildings that serve as the Refuge headquarters, though. It was still closed, a crime scene.

The occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge may have been a wake-up call but the Sagebrush Insurgency has been simmering and flaring for years. I first became aware of it more than a decade ago when the "Jarbidge Shovel Brigade" attempted to prevent the National Forest Service from closing a road in a beautiful, isolated section of north-eastern Nevada where the Service was attempting to protect endangered Bull Trout. More recently, Utah state legislators led off-road vehicle group drives on public lands roads that were closed to protect fragile ecologies.

The insurgents do not limit their destructive actions to the land. Employees of the government agencies that oversee public lands, our public servants, are harassed, intimidated, and threatened with violence. Unlike the brave sheriff of Harney County, Oregon, other Western sheriffs often refuse to protect the employees and lands, claiming they have no responsibility for enforcing federal laws with which they disagree. A network of Western state legislators, among them Spokane Valley representative Matt Shea, seeks to pass laws to grab federal lands for local control.

The root of the conflict may lie in the shift away from use of public lands for unrestricted extraction of timber and minerals, grazing on grasslands, and the taking of fish and wildlife. Western rural economies that were built on unfettered extraction argue that generational rights are being stolen as these practices become more regulated and controlled to sustainably protect the environment. The federal government counters that granting these uses to individuals is a privilege that comes with responsibilities to comply with regulations and contractual obligations.

Agencies that manage lands for multiple uses, particularly the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), face the greatest challenges (and often the greatest wrath) as they try to balance diverse interests of various stakeholder groups. Even so, environmental protection is high among BLM's priorities.

The targeting of a national wildlife refuge in the Malheur occupation seemed a troubling new development. These lands, along with state wildlife areas, are managed primarily for fish and wildlife protection and are subject to limited, if any, other compatible uses. The occupation's impact on our public lands reached far beyond Harney County. We saw our local national wildlife refuge, Turnbull, close twice during the occupation because of credible threats. I also found Cibola National Wildlife Refuge on the Colorado River in Arizona closed during the occupation.



Burrowing Owls at an artificial burrow at Cibola NWR. These birds are under pressure because of nesting site destruction. Photo by Kim Thorburn.

Many species face grave threats to survival as habitat is lost and the planet warms. Public lands are essential to habitat protection and represent the best chance for survival for many species of concern. But our need to be strong advocates for public lands goes beyond our wildlife conservation interests. As climate change brings more drought to our arid western lands, well managed public lands will contribute to water conservation and quality, as well.

It is time to stand up for public lands.

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Field Trip Report: Sprague Lake, April 16, 2016

by Fran Haywood

Cindy Cilo, Jeannie Harris, Larry Schroeder, Andre Walmsley, Chuck Kerkering and Margaret Peck joined me on the April 16th field trip. We started at Silver Lake and West Medical Lake, drove through the Miller Ranch, checked the Sprague Water Treatment ponds and the Sprague Cemetery, ending at Sprague Lake.

Highlights included: Red-necked Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, and Marsh Wren on Silver Lake; Hooded and Common Merganser and Horned Grebe on West Medical Lake.

We drove through the Miller Ranch, watching Western and Mountain Bluebirds, checking out bird boxes, while listening to Vesper and Savannah Sparrows.

Sprague sewage ponds had two Black-necked Stilts and an American Avocet.

We spotted our first Swainson's Hawk on the way to Macabee Cemetery where we added a Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Say's Phoebe, House Wren and Turkey Vulture.

At Sprague Lake we added to our swallow species: Tree, Violet-green, Cliff, Barn, along with more Marsh Wrens, and nesting Osprey.

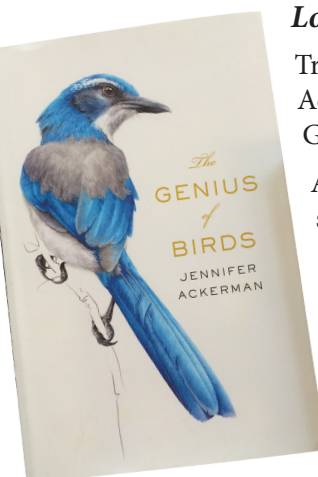
We saw most of the expected species of common duck and finished with a total of 61 species. I was sorry not to have refound the Snow Geese that Jon had reported earlier, but all in all, a nice trip with congenial people.

Looking for a fun summer read?

Try *The Genius of Birds*, by Jennifer Ackerman (Penguin Publishing Group, April 2016).

Are birds social because they're smart, or are they smart because they're social?

Birds acquire song in a way that's similar to the way humans acquire speech, and some bird populations develop their own dialects.



One species of Jay can cache thousands of nuts in a season, *and remember where all of them are stored.*

Ackerman explores some of the science of bird cognition, citing recently published research and speaking with scientists working in the field.

Sights & Sounds

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Spring migration came in full force with some interesting patterns. The early high pressure dominated weather systems had many migrants passing over our region without stopping en route to breeding areas further North. Many breeders arrived on territory in the region days to a week or more early. But there have been a few unexpected surprises, as every good migration should have! Especially rare sightings are in italics/bold.

SNOW GOOSE: Newman Lake (4/21-TL); LaCross (4/23-RB); Calispell Lake (4/29-TL); Coeur D'Alene (4/30-DW); Spangle (5/5-TO)

TUNDRA SWAN: Cave Lake (5/3-BJ) Calispell Lake (5/5-TL); Upper Twin Lakes (5/21-WY)

TRUMPETER SWAN: Calispell Lake (4/29-TL); Turnbull NWR (5/14-TO and 5/18-SS and HS); Philleo Lake (5/22-JI)

EURASIAN WIGEON: Genesee (5/1-ND); Medical Lake (5/10-TL)

HARLEQUIN DUCK: Harvey Creek (4/20-DK); Sprague (4/30-JI)

RED-NECKED GREBE: Moscow (4/30-MS); Sprague (5/6-JI and TL)

WHITE-FACED IBIS: Sheep Lake (5/10 -JI); Schlepp Ranch (5/21-DW); Philleo Lake (5/22-JI)

NORTHERN GOSHAWK: Lower West Branch (4/24-PS)

SANDHILL CRANE: Turnbull NWR (5/14-TO)

WILLET: Philleo Lake (5/14-JI)

PECTORAL SANDPIPER: Reardan (5/11-JI)

FRANKLIN'S GULL: Philleo Lake (5/3 and 5/22-JI); Sprague (5/10-JI); Coulee city (5/14-MY); Reardan (5/15-JI)

BAND-TAILED PIGEON: Moscow (4/28-RH and BH)

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER: Flodelle Creek (5/22-FH)

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER: Mt. Spokane (5/7-SS and HS)

HERMIT WARBLER: Davenport (5/9-JI)

BLACKPOLL WARBLER: Washtucna (5/18-BF)

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW: Post Falls (5/18-DW)

BREWER'S SPARROW: Post Falls (5/18-DW)

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW: Ritzville (5/7-BL); Davenport (5/9-JI); Turnbull NWR (5/14-PO)

TRICOLORED BLACKBIRD: Sprague (5/10-JI, 5/19-TL, and 5/26-RB)

Observers: JA-Jim Acton; DB-Don Baker; MB-Missy Baker; RB-R.J. Baltierra; MaB-Matt Bartels; TB-Tom Bragg; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; Janet Callen (JC); MaC-Marlene Cashen; MC-Mike Clarke; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; MD-Mike Denny; MLD-MerryLynn Denny; ND-Nancy Dranzin; KD-Kas Dumroese; PE-Patrick Ellsworth; GF-Greg Falco; BF-Bob Flores; MF-Marian Frobe; RF-Russell Frobe; JF-Joe Fulton; JH-John Hanna; LH-Lisa Hardy; FH-Fran Haywood; BH-Bettie Hoff; RH-Ray Hoff; DH-Dave Holick; MI-Michael Irving; JI-Jon Isacoff; ; CJ-Chris Jannet; BJ-Bruce Johnson; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; RK-Russ Koppendray; DK-David Krefit; CL-Christopher Lindsey; JL-Joshua Little; TL-Terry Little; TL-Thomas Light; CL-Carl Lundblad; BL-Becky Lyle; CM-Cindy McCormack; AM-Alan McCoy; EM-Eliot Miller; NM-Nancy Miller; WN-Walker Noe; PO-Peter Olsoy; TO-Tim O'Brien; JP-Jonathan Pafford; MP-Mary Porter; JR-Jethro Runco; MS-Mike Scott; SS-Sandy Schreven; HS-Herman Schreven; PS-Paul Sieracki; CS-Charles Swift; RT-Rick Taylor; NT-Norma Trefry; KT-Kim Thorburn; TW-TC Walker; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Weber; TW-Tina Wynnecoop; MY-Matt Yawney; WY-Will Young

There will be no general meetings in June, July or August.

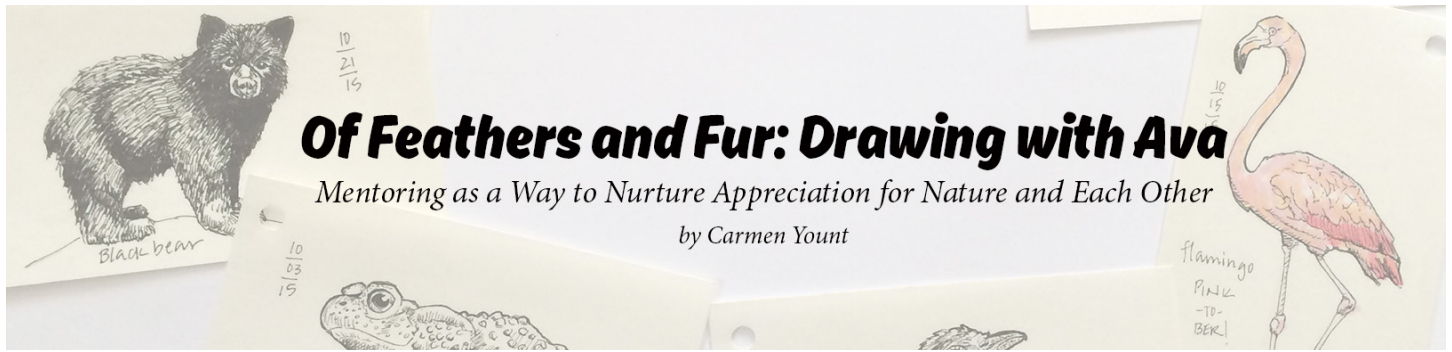
Spokane Audubon's next meeting will be:

Wednesday, September 14th at 7:30 p.m.

Have a great summer!

*Spokane Audubon is looking for a newsletter editor,
and more help with mailing the newsletter.*

Contact carmen@floreo.com if you'd like more information.



Of Feathers and Fur: Drawing with Ava

Mentoring as a Way to Nurture Appreciation for Nature and Each Other

by Carmen Yount

Since September of last year I have been drawing twice a week with my friend, Ava Mcleod. She's 18 years old (soon to be 19), so since I'm (much) older than she is, I'm the one who tries to find fun projects to do that will challenge us as artists.

I don't direct Ava; she and I draw together. Our relationship is not a student-teacher relationship; it's a mentoring relationship, and it has worked really well for us.

If you were a fly on the wall at the West Valley Outdoor Learning Center (the OLC) over the last year, you might have seen Ava and me huddled over a table with colored pencils or watercolors, or you might have seen us dash out the door to catch a view of a Red-tail or a Raven circling the grounds, or you might have caught a glimpse of us sprawled on the floor with a couple of tortoises (because the "tortoise-eye view" has its merits). Or maybe you would have seen us puzzling over a rubber duck on a mirror to learn something about how reflections work.

We approach our projects as natural science illustrators, trying to get to know our subjects by studying their physical attributes and their life cycles. We work from life when we can, and supplement our experience with photos and videos, and when available, skeletons. My drawings tend to be pretty tight, as I stay pretty close to my natural science illustration training, but Ava has a special interest in – and talent for – finding characters in her drawings; everyone has a story to tell, even (and maybe especially) guinea pigs and tortoises.

Ava and I met because we both volunteer at the OLC. Over the course of several conversations we learned that we both like to watch nature documentaries, we enjoy getting to work with animals long enough to get to know them as individuals, and we love to draw.

Here are some of the things we've learned in our year together:

1. Everything we draw is challenging in its own way. There is an endless number of unique shapes, textures and surfaces to explore in nature.
2. Perfection isn't possible, so we'd better enjoy the process. We start all of our projects with a couple of "ugly

pages" (pages of preliminary sketches), and sometimes we work in ballpoint pen (because if you're going to go ugly, you should plan to go "all in"). When the goal of an exercise is to learn about the anatomy of an animal, and not to make a piece of art, you can get a surprising amount of good work done, even using a cheap ballpoint pen.

3. We can learn something from every artist's work, even if it's not something we plan to apply to our own – everything from how to manipulate value and contrast, to how to show emotion in an animal that can't move its eyes (hint: you can do a lot with eyelids).



Tortoise illustrations modeled on the OLC's African Spur-thighed Tortoises. We spent a bunch of time on the floor with them, sketching from life and taking photos. Ava's tortoise is smiling!

We spent significant time over the last year exploring process and materials. We made small clay models of birds so we could examine form shadows. We created life-sized drawings of Shoebills using available materials: butcher paper, crayons, markers and colored pencils. (For those unfamiliar with African bird life, Shoebills are about 4½ feet tall.) We spent the month of October doing pen and ink illustrations on index cards for "Inktober." We celebrated

World Penguin Day by making watercolor illustrations of penguins.

When Ava finds illustrations that she's interested in, we talk about them to see what we can learn. Sometimes we try copying illustrations that we find interesting to see if we can discern what the original artist did to create them. Or we'll watch videos of other artists working to see what we can learn from watching their process.



Rendering fur isn't easy! Our live "pig" friends were our models before we attempted these drawings.

(Speaking of other artists, one of the highlights of our year was a visit from Spokane Audubon's Jan Reynolds, who shared one of her travel sketchbooks with us. Her vibrant and beautiful colored-pencil illustrations are amazing. We also appreciated that she shared how she prefers to work; there is great value in seeing how someone else approaches their work. We hope that she can come visit us again!)

This summer the plan is to do a "deep dive" project. Each of us will pick a personal project to work on, using our meeting times for inspiration, feedback and support.

I have learned a lot from our time together. I look forward to it and enjoy it. I can't speak for Ava, but I hope that she feels the same way.

For Ava and me, our shared interest is art, but there's no reason that mentoring can't work with activities related to birding. Mentoring relationships have the potential to be

flexible in ways that more formal arrangements are not, and they don't necessarily have to be long-term projects. Earlier this year, Kim Thorburn wrote a piece for *The Pygmy Owl* about working with the Boy Scouts to build and mount woodpecker boxes. That strikes me as a perfect example of a shorter-term mentoring relationship; the Boy Scouts learned some woodworking skills and got to work with wildlife biologists to participate in a citizen science project (and see where those new skills were being put to use).

Ava and I have learned quite a bit about working together. Based on our experience, here are some suggestions:

1. Figure out what works for everyone, in terms of time commitment, and honor it faithfully.
2. Find neutral territory for work, if that's possible or realistic. Jami Ostby Marsh, the OLC's education director, has been very generous, letting us use the classroom after the West Valley students leave. That has allowed us to spend time with the Center's live animals.
3. Pay attention to everyone's comfort level. When we started, I assumed more of a teaching role, not realizing that Ava isn't comfortable with that kind of relationship. It wasn't until I asked her about it that I learned that a collaborative relationship would feel better to her.
4. Everyone should be involved in decisions about projects. I usually suggest the subjects we study, but the life-sized Shoebill drawing came about as the result of a conversation we had about another life-sized project that Ava had worked on. Sometimes, Ava will decide what we do for our "homework."
5. The most important thing you can give young people, beginners, or those lacking confidence, is the sense that they either have or can develop the ability do what they want to do. Ava has the foundation to do whatever she wants to do artistically. Some of the skills she's interested in might take time, practice and experience to develop, but what she learns while she's doing the work will help her develop those skills. My role isn't to teach her so much as it is to provide some challenges that will stretch her (stretch us both, actually). And then it's my job to be her cheerleader. (Confession: it's not a difficult job.)
6. Don't just give assignments; be willing to work along side the person you're mentoring. Especially if you're a photographer or artist, work on similar projects. You'll learn something, if for no other reason than you're working with someone who has a different perspective.
7. Relax and have fun. It's actually more enjoyable to find your way into a project when you're working on it with a friend.

Field Trip Report: Peone Prairie, May 21, 2016

Text and Photo by Bea Harrison

At least 37 species were seen on the Peone Prairie field trip on May 21, 2016. With the threat of an imminent rain storm, an enthusiastic group of nine, led by Ann Brinley and Bea Harrison, visited several areas and were pleasantly surprised at the number of birds seen. One couple, Jerry and Charlene, brought their teen-aged granddaughter Abigale along. She was a joy and a big help, with her young eyes and ears!

The first spot was along Holcomb Road, where it crosses Deadman Creek. We saw a beautiful Western Tanager there, as well as a Black-headed Grosbeak, a Black-chinned Hummingbird, several Tree Swallows and a singing House Wren that was flying in and out of a hole in a fence post. An American Goldfinch, looking like a bright yellow Easter egg, sat atop a spindly snag for a long time. A Cooper's Hawk flew through a nearby woods and then back again so that most everyone got at least a glimpse of it. A singing Western Wood Pewee eluded us for the longest time, until we finally spotted him high up on a dead snag. Norma Trefry led us to a spot up the hill, where she had seen Lazuli Buntings in the past, and sure enough, there was one. We also saw Yellow Warblers, Wild Turkeys, Song Sparrows, Robins, a Spotted Towhee, Gray Catbird, and Black-billed Magpies.

Our next stop was at East Heglar Road, where it crosses Deadman Creek. It was loaded with Black-headed Grosbeaks. A Calliope Hummingbird kept vigil on top of a tall twig of a tree and Yellow Warblers were singing from several directions. Northern Rough-winged Swallows swooped from beneath the bridge and a Red-tailed Hawk flew over, giving us a show. This is always a birdy spot, with the nice creek and wetlands. Mike and Eileen McFadden spotted a Bullock's Oriole, but it was shy when the rest of us tried to find it. We also saw Brewer's and Red-winged Blackbirds and way too many Brown-headed Blackbirds at this spot.

We drove over to the Peone Wetlands overlook, which is a short hike up a hill. From there, we got to see a large group of Yellow-headed Blackbirds diving in and out of the tall grasses. We spotted several Common Snipe from this vantage point, as well as a Pied-billed Grebe, a pair of Mallards, a few Canada Geese and a flock of Ring-billed Gulls. In the parking area, we watched a Savannah Sparrow, who must have been sticking close to its nest, and spotted a Barn Swallow.

At the Feryn Wetlands Preserve we walked over to an old barn, near some houses and flushed an owl, which no one could identify, other than it wasn't a Barn Owl (maybe Great-horned or Barred?) From there we heard a pheasant, Eurasian Collared Doves, Mourning Doves and California Quail. At the parking area, a brightly colored American Kestrel put on a show for us. At least one person saw a Northern Harrier.

Special thanks to Margaret Peck for helping with bird IDs and to Jim Hudlow, who provided Ann and Bea with maps and instructions for the various sites.



SAS Field Trips, June – December

June 11, 2016, Saturday

Iller Creek Trip

Leader: Gary Lee

This trip is for birders of all levels as well as local citizens who want to learn more about protecting our precious Dishman Hills ecosystem. On this trip, we will slowly walk some of the trails and see what is there. The Iller Creek Natural Area is famed for its abundance of breeding flycatchers, vireos, and warblers. Occasionally a moose makes a cameo appearance! Meet at the Iller Creek entrance in the cul-de-sac at the end of Holman Road. Contact Gary Lee at bird_fan@aol.com or 389-5474 to sign up and for meeting time.

June 12, 2016, Sunday

Palisades/Indian Canyon Trip

Leader: Lindell Haggin

All levels of birders are invited to explore the Indian Canyon area immediately west of town. We will be walking one or two miles. We will meet at 6:30 a.m. at the Rosauer's at 1808 W. 3rd Ave. The field trip will end at approximately 11:00 a.m. Contact Lindell Haggin (446-4118 or lindell4118@comcast.net) by June 7 if you plan to attend.

*** NOTE DATE CHANGE***

June 20 - June 22, 2016

Monday - Wednesday

Conconully State Park Camping Trip

Leaders: Jim and Bea Harrison

Camp at Conconully State Park. We will be birding the east Cascade Range above Conconully and the Okanogan Valley. Last year we had 100 species of birds in two days, but this area recently burned, so we will be investigating how the area and the birding has changed. Call Jim Harrison at 830-313-0610 by June 12 if you plan to go.

** The camping trip was originally scheduled for June 16th - 19th (Thurs - Sun).*

July 9, 2016, Saturday
Little Spokane Canoeing
Leaders: Jim & Bea Harrison

Join us for a half-day trip as we float the Little Spokane River, birding along the way. This beautiful riparian zone is known for a wide variety of birds. Provide your own canoe or kayak. Basic skills on negotiating moving water are needed. Bring a sack lunch for a picnic at the take-out. Max 12 people, so sign up early. Meet at 8 a.m. at the upper boat launch between the fish hatchery and St. George School. Call Jim Harrison at 830-313-0610.

August 25 - August 28
Thursday-Sunday
Fall Birding and Camping Trip
(Little Pend Oreille NWR)
Leaders: Alan McCoy and Sandy Sollie
Check the website later for more detail.

September 10, 2016 Saturday
Sprague Lake Migrant Trip
Leader: Norma Trefry

This is a half day trip to the Sprague Lake area to look for migrating birds, and birds which often stray here in September. Meet at Coeur d'Alene Park at 6:15 a.m. We will leave the park at 6:30 a.m. There will be a \$5.00 charge per person if we bird at either of the private resorts on the lake. Please call Norma Trefry, 926-2533, or email, firsttrefry@gmail.com by Sept 6 if you plan to attend.

October 22, 2016, Saturday
Grant County Late Fall Migrant Trip
Leader: Gary Blevins

This is a beginning, intermediate and advanced birder-oriented trip to look for specialty birds, such as Arctic Gulls, Lapland Longspurs, and other hard-to-find-and-see northern visitors. There may be some down time with little action in between bird sightings but potential for rarities is high.

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Individual: \$20/year _____

Couple & Family: \$25/year _____

Student: \$10/year _____

Lifetime: \$300 _____

National Membership Dues: \$35/year _____

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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.

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

It is a full-day trip from sunrise to sunset. Contact Gary Blevins (533-3661 or garyb@spokanefalls.edu) by October 16 if you plan to attend.

November 19, 2016, Saturday
Douglas Plateau Northern Visitors Trip
Leader: Kim Thorburn

The Waterville Plateau is a challenging but high-quality destination for rarities during the late fall and winter months. We will work the rolling steppe of the Plateau in search of unusual raptors, owls, and passerines; we'll also bird along the Columbia River in hopes of finding rare Arctic Gulls and saltwater waterfowl, such as scoters, Long-tailed Duck, and Pacific Loon. We will spend the night of November 18 in Brewster for an earlier start with the birds during this short daylight season. Contact Kim Thorburn (465-3025 or kthorburn@msn.com) by November 14 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

December 10, 2016, Saturday
Coeur d'Alene area Eagles
Leader: TBD

This trip takes us around Beauty Bay on Lake Coeur d'Alene where the Bald Eagles feeding on spawned out

salmon are always a sight to behold. 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 particulars: 8:00 a.m. start at Liberty Lake Albertson's parking lot.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

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**Spokane Audubon's next program will be
 Wednesday, September 14th at 7:30 p.m.**

Have a good summer!