

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 29
Issue 5
Jan. 2021

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

January 13, 7:00 p.m.

This meeting will again be via Zoom on-line since pandemic-prevention restrictions continue to keep us from meeting in person. To join the Zoom meeting (ID: 886 4728 8678, Passcode: 185369), link to

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88647288678?pwd=ZHdwd1ZFZDhwWGVvdVBUVWRrcHNnUT09>

'Much Ado About Mothing'

by Susan Mulvihill and Carl Barrentine

Susan Mulvihill and Carl Barrentine will share their enthusiasms for the 'Dark Side' of lepidoptery. Susan's presentation will highlight her 2020 efforts to find and photograph moths in her Spokane backyard. Carl's presentation will revisit the 2018 Moths v. Birds 'BIG Year' competition with local Bird Watcher Tim O'Brien. He will also give an update on his third season of finding and photographing local moths.



An old man now, Carl Barrentine is retired from two college teaching careers--one in Biology at California State University, Bakersfield and the other in Humanities, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks. Nowadays Carl spends his declining years finding and photographing the moths of Spokane County, Washington. This journey to The Dark Side began ten years ago, back in 2011 when Carl's life-long passion for birds was eclipsed by an obsession with moths.



Local garden guru, author and Spokesman-Review garden columnist, Susan Mulvihill, will share how and why she got into backyard mothing. Susan will discuss a simple mothing set-up that has been very effective, photos of some of the moths she captured this summer, and a couple of interesting lessons she learned along the way.



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Spokane Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9820
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Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and pg. 8 © Jan Reynolds.



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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status November 20 through December 23, 2020:

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

Individual: Donna Pickens, Ruth Daugherty, Donna White

Family: John & Kristine Hoover

Supporting: Linda Jovanovich, Thomas Anderson

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Carla Joyal, Ron Petersen, Rachel Brabeck

Family: Sally English, Jim & Bea Harrison, Russell and Marion Frobe, Earl & Marilyn Elias, Sherry & Craig Lee, Ann Hurst, Ron & Pat Dexter, Marlene & Bob Cashen, Nan Berger, John & Amy Roberson

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Contributing: Brenda Day

You can help us reduce our costs and energy use and save paper by switching to our electronic publication. Please send your 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>.



Snow Buntings
Male - Female
© Christop Moning

Norma Trefry

by **Madonna Luers**

When Norma Trefry started participating in Spokane Audubon Society (SAS) Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) some 30 years ago, she was just hoping to learn more about birds and the area from others. But she discovered that the Spokane Valley where she lived was an undercounted area because SAS count leaders Tom Rogers and Amby Priestley struggled to get volunteers. So Norma got to work recruiting participants and organizing them into teams with a mix of both experienced and novice birders.

Norma learned that the Central Pre-Mix Concrete Products Company ponds east and north of the Spokane County Fairgrounds could hold lots of birds, including rarities, because the aquifer-fed water was always open and the private property was fenced and off-limits to public disturbance. Birders had to peek through fencing to catch glimpses, so Norma worked persistently to gain access permission. "Our count went from about 200 birds to over 1,200," she recalled. "And now local birders at various times of the year are spotting species like White-winged Scoter, Common Loon, Red-breasted Merganser, Glaucous Gull, and others that you normally wouldn't expect to see in Spokane Valley."

Norma became a co-leader of the CBC valley section for many years, and helped with counts for at least 22 years. Current SAS president and CBC coordinator

Alan McCoy says Norma "has been one of our sharpest birders who has forgotten as much about birds as I'll ever know!"

Norma Abbott was born in 1931 in Wenatchee. She always liked the outdoors and sports and played tennis and volleyball; but, as she says, "At that time the attitude was that girls can't play competitive sports." She earned a degree in physical education at Washington State University in Pullman where she met her husband Walt Trefry, an agriculture major. They lived in Tacoma for first jobs out of college, then moved to Spokane and eventually the Greenacres area of the Spokane Valley. Norma taught high school for 27 years, 25 of them at Freeman High School in south Spokane County, where she coached girls' volleyball and track teams.

Between teaching and raising their two sons and one daughter, Norma didn't have time for birding beyond her own backyard until she retired in 1990. That's when she took a night class on birding at Ferris High School from Maurice Vial, who recommended SAS field trips as a good way to learn more. She joined the chapter then, knowing only a couple of members. She saw the need to have newcomers welcomed and introduced at meetings, so when she served on the board from 1996 to about 2006, one of her goals was to make the organization more friendly through greeters and name tag.

Her husband Walt, who died in 2008, wasn't the birder Norma became but liked watching "bigger birds" like ducks. He accompanied Norma on many birding trips beyond Washington and North Idaho, including Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. She joined Elder Hostel birding trips to Canada, Florida, Texas, Virginia, and Nebraska.

One of her most memorable experiences was at Ontario's Point Pelee on Lake Erie during spring migration, when she saw more warbler species than ever before, including flashy American Redstarts. Her



Norma birded Hawaii in 2005 with her son Dave.

last trip in the hostel series was to the Platte River in Nebraska to see the spring migration of sandhill cranes by the thousands, plus a bonus tour to watch Greater-prairie Chickens on their leks.

Norma's favorite bird is the Lazuli Bunting because "it's so beautiful and has a lovely little song." She believes that the most important issue for the future of birds and birding is the conservation of habitat.

Her tips for new birdwatchers, including one of her sons and his son, are to start by learning about the common birds in the area, then go birding with a patient, experienced birder (like Mom and Grandma?) She also advises dressing for the weather.

"I've had newcomers join me on field trips who didn't wear hats or use sunscreen in the summer, or have warm jackets and boots in the winter," she recalls. "They never came again, because if you're not comfortable to be outdoors for hours, it isn't much fun."



Lazuli Bunting
© Alix d'Entremont

The Great Backyard Bird Count



The count is on the horizon -

February 12-15, 2021.

Participating is easy, fun to do alone, or with others, and can be done anywhere that you find birds.

Choose the easiest way for you to share your birds:

- Identify birds with Merlin Bird ID app and add sightings to your list
- Use the eBird Mobile app
- Enter your bird list on the eBird website (Desktop/laptop)

All you need is a free Cornell Lab account to participate. This account is shared with Merlin, eBird, Project FeederWatch and other projects at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. If you already have an account, please use the same username and password for submitting your bird list for the Great Backyard Bird Count.

It's That Easy!

Submit one or more lists over the four days of counting and you become a contributing citizen scientist (community scientist). All eBird entries and saved Merlin Bird IDs over the four days contribute to the Great Backyard Bird Count.



Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

After a historically cold and snowy October-November, December has shaped up to be warm and wet. It may be another “brown Christmas.” With more open water than normal, waterfowl are dispersed throughout the area rivers and lakes. A moderate, but much-welcomed Common Redpoll irruption is progress as well as the continuation of the historic Blue Jay irruption. White-winged Crossbills have thus far stayed mostly at higher elevations, with just a few lower elevation sightings. Notable bird sightings below:

Long-tailed Duck: Colville River (11/25-TL); Nine Mile Recreation Area (12/12-JI); Hawkins Point (12/14-RDC)

Red-breasted Merganser: Colville River (11/25-TL)

Anna’s Hummingbird: Spokane Valley; (12/13-MC); Kettle Falls (12/18-WC); Moscow (12/2-NP)

Mew Gull: Clark Fork (12/18-JI)

Pacific Loon: Bonner’s Ferry (11/26-JR and SE); Riley Recreation Area (12/4-TL)

Snowy Owl: Moses Lake (12/8-DS)

Black-backed Woodpecker: Mt. Spokane SP (12/1-JE); Little Pend Oreille NWR (12/5-SJ)

Blue Jay: Electric City (11/19-RM); Latah (11/20-TL); Spokane (11/28-SW); St. John (12/2-RB); Sandpoint (12/3-eBird); West Spokane (12/5-MS); University of Idaho (12/6-GL); Kettle Falls (12/7-DB); Bonner’s Ferry (12/12-eBird); Pullman (12/12-eBird); Waverly (12/12-eBird)

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch: Davenport (12/15-RuM)

Pine Grosbeak: Mt. Spokane Foothills (11/23-TL); Colville Tiger (11/25-TL); Dreary (11/26-eBird); Myrtle Creek (11/27-JR and SE); Robison County Park (11/28-CS); Paradise Ridge (12/1-BB); Mt. Spokane SP (12/2-MS); Colville (12/5-TD); Feather Creek (12/6-CS)

White-winged Crossbill: Paradise Ridge (11/27-NP); Mt. Spokane SP (12/2-TL); Kamiak Butte (12/2-RB); Sandpoint (12/7-RDC); Little Pend Oreille NWR (12/12-DK)

HOARY REDPOLL: Northrup Canyon (-MY)

Lesser Goldfinch: Feryn Conservation Area (11/25-MS); Saltese Uplands (12/2-TO)

White-throated Sparrow: Moscow (12/5-eBird); Pullman (12/19-RB)

Swamp Sparrow: Liberty Lake (11/22-JI)

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; MaC-Marlene Cashen; SC-Stacy Crist; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; KiD-Kirsten Dahl; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JoE-Johnna Eilers; JE-Jacob Elonen; BF-Bob Flores; FF-Fred Forssell; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-David Krefit; GL-Greg Lambeth; TLa-Terry Lane; TL-Terry Little; CoL-Courtney Litwin; CL-Carl Lundblad; CM-Curtis Mahon; 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; PS-Pall Sieracki; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark Selle; DS-Doug Shoenwald; KS-Katie Sorenson; AS-Adam Stepniewski; CS-Charles Swift; DW-Doug Ward; SW-Steven Warren; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; MY-Matt Yawney



Hoary Redpoll
© Skye Haas

Keep those winter bird feeders clean

by Madonna Luers

If you're maintaining bird feeding stations this winter to enjoy close-up views of resident birds, remember to keep them clean – not just for the birds' sake, but also for human and domestic pet health.

Disease is a natural part of a bird's world, but feeding stations concentrate birds and can spread diseases at an unnatural rate. Although some bird diseases can afflict dogs or cats, most are not transmissible to humans.

In addition to wearing gloves while filling and cleaning feeders and washing hands afterwards, here are a few basic steps to keep things clean:

- Use tube feeders to reduce accumulations of scattered seed on the ground that can become wet and moldy and spread disease, at least if not picked up and discarded regularly. If you use platform feeders, provide only a day's worth of seed at a time.
- Avoid or minimize use of wood feeders because they're difficult to keep clean. Make sure any feeder allows water to drain easily.
- Spread out feeders over a greater space to reduce crowding, which is a key factor in spreading disease among birds. Use smaller feeders that only allow a few birds at a time.
- Avoid or minimize use of bird seed mixes to reduce scattering of seed as birds select their preferences and discard others. Set up feeders with single seed types – black oil sunflower, nyjer or thistle, millet, safflower, and cracked corn.
- Pick up waste, including seed shells, from the ground at least once a week to reduce molding. Discard feed in feeders that is wet, looks or smells moldy, has fungus on it, or has been contaminated with bird or squirrel/rodent droppings.
- Disinfect feeders at least once a month with a solution of one part bleach to nine parts warm water, and dry thoroughly before refilling.

Winter's cold temperatures usually make keeping things clean easier than year-round feeding stations when warmer conditions are optimal for decay. But periodic warm-ups through winter melt snow and those wet conditions can be problematic, too.



Photos courtesy of
Backyard Bird Newsletter



Diseases to watch for at bird feeding stations

by Madonna Luers

Several diseases can afflict birds and be spread at feeding stations. Here's what to watch for:

Salmonellosis – This is probably the most common avian disease at feeders in the Pacific Northwest. It's caused by the salmonella bacteria and it's usually fatal, mostly to species like finches, pine siskins, and grosbeaks that flock together at feeders. The first indication is often a seemingly tame bird on or near a feeder. It's very lethargic, fluffs out its feathers to try to stay warm, and is easy to approach. There's very little that can be done for a stricken bird; but if you pick one up, please wear gloves and wash hands afterwards. It's possible, although uncommon, for people to become sick from salmonella bacteria through direct contact with infected birds.



Avian pox – This viral disease causes wartlike growths on birds' faces, legs, wings and feet. The virus is spread by direct contact with infected birds, ingestion of food or water contaminated by sick birds, or contact with contaminated surfaces of feeders, birdbaths and perches. Insects, especially mosquitoes, also carry the disease from one bird to another.



Aspergillosis – This disease is caused by a fungal mold that grows on damp feed or soil in or around a feeder. Birds inhale the fungal spores and the disease spreads through their lungs and air sacs, causing bronchitis and pneumonia. Infected birds have trouble breathing, usually seen open-mouthed but not eating.

Trichomaniasis – This disease is caused by small parasites that can affect a wide variety of animals, including humans. The mourning dove and band-tailed pigeon seem to be particularly susceptible. The disease causes sores in their mouths and throats, and results in death from starvation or dehydration.



If evidence of any of these diseases is seen, immediately remove feeders and clean them with a ten percent chlorine bleach solution. Dry completely before re-using and repeat if you see any more sick birds.



In North America, the majestic, snow-white Tundra Swan was once known as the Whistling Swan. This widespread, powerful bird was named by explorer Meriwether Lewis for its whistle-like calls. Lewis wrote the first-known description of the species during his famous expedition through the American West with William Clark in the early 1800s. The Tundra Swan is the smaller of the two swan species native to North America — the other is the larger, less common Trumpeter Swan.

Cobs, Pens, and Cygnets

An adult male swan is also called a cob, from the Middle English word *cobbe* (leader of a group). Although male and female swans look alike, the male is larger, more powerful, and more aggressive in defending its mate, family, and breeding territory.

The origin of the female swan's nickname, pen, is even more interesting. Apparently, female swan feathers made the best pen quills, so the nickname references that writing instrument. The small folding knife used to trim and sharpen a quill pen's hollow shaft thus became known as a penknife.

Young swans are known as cygnets, a word deriving from the Latin and Greek words for swan. *Cygnus*, the swan, is also a well-known constellation in the Northern Hemisphere that was first mentioned by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy in the 2nd century A.D.

Foraging on Land and Water

Mainly herbivorous, the Tundra Swan forages in shallow wetlands, seeking aquatic plants and roots as well as some arthropods, worms, and shellfish. It tips its body up and plunges its long neck underwater to forage, or uses its large webbed feet to dig up food items from the muck. Parents often bring food items to the water's surface for their cygnets, which also feed on the numerous mosquito larvae in their natal territory.

This adaptable bird also feeds on land, grazing harvested winter fields for corn, soybeans, and other waste grains, and digging up other food items with its strong beak.

Family Ties

Tundra Swans are monogamous, and a mated pair will remain together for life. Pairs court by facing each other, spreading wings, and bowing while calling loudly. A mated pair establishes a breeding territory of almost one square mile near a tundra pond or lake, where female and male build a large, mounded nest of reeds, grasses, and mosses. Often, prime nesting areas are reused from year to year. The female swan lays an average of five large white eggs and does most of the brooding. Her mate sticks close by to guard the nest and larger territory from other swans and nest predators such as Golden Eagles, foxes, and weasels.

Doing Well, Despite the Challenges

The biggest threat facing the Tundra Swan on its Arctic breeding grounds is habitat loss due to oil and gas extraction and climate change. Pollution and wetland loss top the list along its migratory routes and on its wintering grounds.

Also, many swans are affected by lead poisoning, which occurs after the birds ingest spent shot as they forage on the bottoms of rivers and lakes in areas where hunting occurs. This swan species is regularly hunted as a recognized game species. Its North American numbers remain relatively healthy.

ABC encourages hunters and fishing communities to consider non-lead shot alternatives to protect Tundra Swans and other species likely to ingest this toxin, including the California Condor, Mourning Dove, and Common Loon.



American Birding®
ASSOCIATION

Code of Birding Ethics • v. 2.1, Nov. 2019

— Practice and promote respectful, enjoyable, and thoughtful birding as defined in this code —

PLEASE SHARE IT WIDELY: ABA.ORG/ETHICS

1. Respect and promote birds and their environment.

(a) Support the conservation of birds and their habitats. Engage in and promote bird-friendly practices whenever possible, such as keeping cats and other domestic animals indoors or controlled, acting to prevent window strikes, maintaining safe feeding stations, landscaping with native plants, drinking shade-grown coffee, and advocating for conservation policies. Be mindful of any negative environmental impacts of your activities, including contributing to climate change. Reduce or offset such impacts as much as you are able.

(b) Avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger. Be particularly cautious around active nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display sites, and feeding sites. Limit the use of recordings and other audio methods of attracting birds, particularly in heavily birded areas, for species that are rare in the area, and for species that are threatened or endangered. Always exercise caution and restraint when photographing, recording, or otherwise approaching birds.

(c) Always minimize habitat disturbance. Consider the benefits of staying on trails, preserving snags, and similar practices.

2. Respect and promote the birding community and its individual members.

(a) Be an exemplary ethical role model by following this Code and leading by example. Always bird and report with honesty and integrity.

(b) Respect the interests, rights, and skill levels of fellow birders, as well as people participating in other outdoor activities. Freely share your knowledge and experience and be especially helpful to beginning birders.

(c) Share bird observations freely, provided such reporting would not violate other sections of this Code, as birders, ornithologists, and conservationists derive considerable benefit from publicly available bird sightings.

(d) Approach instances of perceived unethical birding behavior with sensitivity and respect; try to resolve the matter in a positive manner, keeping in mind that perspectives vary. Use the situation as an opportunity to teach by example and to introduce more people to this Code.

(e) In group birding situations, promote knowledge by everyone in the group of the practices in this Code and ensure that the group does not unduly interfere with others using the same area.

3. Respect and promote the law and the rights of others.

(a) Never enter private property without the landowner's permission. Respect the interests of and interact positively with people living in the area where you are birding.

(b) Familiarize yourself with and follow all laws, rules, and regulations governing activities at your birding location. In particular, be aware of regulations related to birds, such as disturbance of protected nesting areas or sensitive habitats, and the use of audio or food lures.

— Birding should be fun and help build a better future for birds, for birders, and for all people —

— Birds and birding opportunities are shared resources that should be open and accessible to all —

— Birders should always give back more than they take —

Contact your state legislators about our 2021 conservation priorities

by Madonna Luers

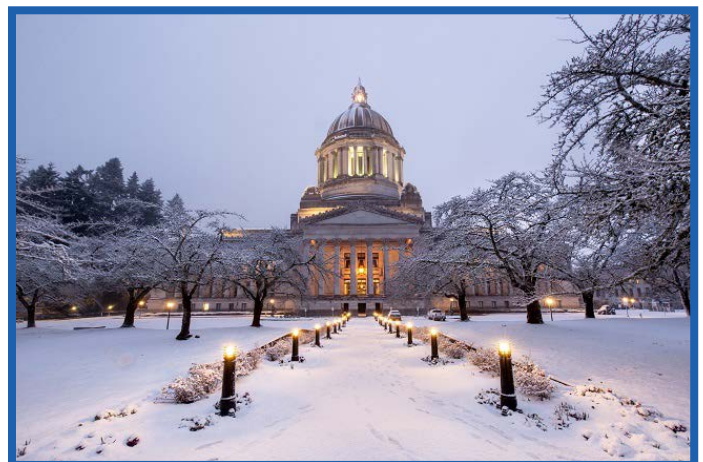
This first month of the new year, when the Washington state legislature convenes, is the time to contact your state senator and representatives to advocate for Audubon conservation policy priorities.

Some of our Spokane chapter members spent time last month talking with 3rd district Senator Andy Billig and Representative Timm Ormsby about Audubon Washington's policy priorities to protect critical investments in important bird habitat while combating climate change. But all our local legislators need to hear from individual constituents, and you can easily find contact information at <https://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder>.

Here are some points to make when you email or call your state legislator:

- Although response to the pandemic has strained state budgets, it's also shown us how important outdoor spaces are to all of us.
- Investing in conservation of these outdoor spaces, including wildlife habitat, is as important as ever in the midst of our ongoing economic recession.
- Audubon Washington supports full funding of both natural resource agency budgets and state grant programs such as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation program (which was the source of funds for the Reardan Audubon Lakes Wildlife Area)
- Continued and improved conservation funding supports habitat restoration and management projects that are critical to ecosystem and human health.
- Protecting birds, wildlife, and our outdoor recreation economy is as important as it has ever been.
- Cutting the budgets of our natural resource agencies only makes the economic recession worse because wildlife watching, fishing and hunting contribute three and a half times as much to the state general fund as the legislature appropriates to the Department of Fish and Wildlife alone.

- While maintaining conservation funding in the short term, Washington also needs to address climate change in the long term to protect that investment.
- Audubon's own research shows that slowing the rate of global temperature rise by reducing harmful carbon emissions in our air will have meaningful benefits for both people and birds. (Details, including that Spokane Audubon's own "mascot" the Northern Pygmy Owl would decline if climate change is not addressed, are available at <https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees>.)
- While our electricity sector is on a path towards 100% clean energy, we must curtail emissions from our state's transportation system to reach our climate goals. A Clean Fuel Standard will set clear limits on the carbon pollution from transportation fuels while also supporting the development of biofuels and transportation electrification projects that benefit low-income Washingtonians.
- Planning for a changing climate is a key component of protecting birds and the places they need for generations to come. We need to update the state's Growth Management Act, requiring counties to plan for climate resilience. This means recognizing the value of natural solutions for climate change as well as the role natural infrastructure can play in making our communities more economically resilient.



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.



Christmas Bird Count Reports

The Christmas Bird Counts for Cheney and Spokane will appear in the February issue of the Pygmy Owl.

White-winged Crossbills

Male - red

Female - yellow

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual Membership:

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.

Joining

Renewing

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 needed on your mailing label? Contact Alan McCoy: ahm2352@gmail.com



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

January 2020

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 early spring, 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!