

The Pygmy Owl

Volume 32
Issue 7
Apr. 2024

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



April 10, 2024 7:00 p.m.

This meeting will be a “hybrid” – you can attend in-person at the Finch Arboretum, 3404 W. Woodland Blvd. (off Sunset Hwy., just west of downtown Spokane), in the Ponderosa Room of the Woodland Center, or you can attend virtually on-line via Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83716995836?pwd=VTRjcW1ic0JySk03M1IBTII5YzE2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 837 1699 5836

Passcode: 365258

Who Are You Calling a Bird Brain?

presented by Kim Adelson, Black Hills Audubon Society

For hundreds of years, birds have been considered stupid and incapable of advanced thought or learning. This is why the phrase “bird brain” is commonly used to denote persons who are dolts or simpletons.

Kim Adelson, a retired college professor and currently president of the Black Hills Audubon Society chapter in Olympia, Washington, says birds don’t deserve this bad reputation and are, in fact, NOT less intelligent than mammals.

Kim’s presentation will show the surprisingly strong mental abilities exhibited by a wide variety of birds. Recent research consistently has demonstrated that some birds have remarkably strong cognitive skills, comparable to monkeys and even apes. Some can form abstract concepts; some display prodigious memories; some make and use tools; and some can make complex inferences.

In addition to leading the Black Hills chapter, Kim is Vice President of the Friends of the Nisqually National Wildlife Complex in western Washington. She



regularly gives presentations on bird evolution, the effects that climate change is having upon birds,

and how to attract backyard birds. (She presented “Dinosaurs Amongst Us” to our chapter in November 2021.) Kim taught for more than 30 years at the University of Minnesota, Ohio Wesleyan University, and Canterbury University in Christchurch, New Zealand. She holds a master’s degree in evolutionary biology and a doctorate in psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. Her abiding interest since her undergraduate days has been the evolution of intelligence.

Kim got the “birding bug” about 30 years ago when she and her husband moved into a house in the woods and had 42 species of birds in their yard, which seemed like a lot at the time! She travels extensively to see birds, including trips to Namibia, Australia, and Indonesia. Ten years ago she fulfilled a life-long dream by moving to Washington, where she is passionate about preserving our beautiful habitat and wildlife.



Malinoff, et al, 2013

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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status February 20, 2024 through March 21, 2024:

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

Individual: Hannahlee Allers, Kelleen Doyle

Family: Steve Small & Carol Cwiklinski,
Ralph Reeb, Rod Brauner, Dan Brauner

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Ellie Emmanuel, Sharon McNeil,
Peggy Anderson, Jeff Hedge, Michelle Ho,
Jim Hudlow, Lois Strand

Family: Pamela Smith, Shenandoah Marr,
Dian Torphy, Peggy Blum, Richard & Sandy
Sollie, Rich & Sharon Leon

Supporting: Jim & Bea Harrison, Bob
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If you change your email address, please send your new email address to me, Alan McCoy, at ahm2352@gmail.com and I will make sure 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>.



Snowy Owl on nest
by Paul Bannick

Free Spring bird presentations and field trips are a great way to introduce your family and friends to birding

- **Thursday, April 11, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at Spokane Valley Library, 22 N. Herald Rd., Spokane Valley
- **Saturday, April 13, 8 – 10 a.m.,**
Saltese Flats Wetlands Bird Walk, Doris Morrison Learning Center, 1330 S. Henry Rd., Greenacres
- **Saturday, April 13, 10:30 – 12:30 p.m.,**
Spring waterfowl watching at Reardan Audubon Lake Wildlife Area, 350 E. Railroad Ave, Reardan
- **Tuesday, April 16, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Attracting Birds To Your Yard” presentation at Argonne Library, 4322 N. Argonne Rd.
- **Thursday, April 18, 5 – 6 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at Deer Park Library, 208 S. Forest Ave., Deer Park
- **Saturday April 20, 8 – 10 am**
Fan Lake Bird Walk with Jenny Emerson, 852 Fan Lake Road West, Deer Park, WA
- **Monday, May 6, 6:30 – 7:30 p.m.,**
“Introduction to Birding” presentation at Medical Lake Library, S. 1386 Lefevre St., Medical Lake
- **Saturday, May 11, 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.,**
Spring waterfowl watching at Reardan Audubon Lake Wildlife Area, 350 E. Railroad Ave, Reardan



A complete list and details about all events are available at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/upcoming-events>

60 x 40: The 2024 Earth Day pledge

The 54th annual celebration of Earth Day is April 22, 2024. This year’s theme of “Planet vs. Plastics” has international Earth Day organizers pledging to reduce plastic production by 60 percent by 2040 – 60 x 40!

All plastics, but especially one-use plastics, are very hard on human and planetary health. We’ve all long heard of, or maybe personally witnessed, the damage plastic litter can do to our oceans, landscapes, and fish and wildlife. More recently we’re learning that “micro-plastics” are getting into our own bodies through the use of plastic-bottled water or food containers.

Many plastics cannot be truly recycled. The solution lies in reducing overall plastic production and use. And since most plastics are oil-based, using alternatives now is far more sustainable.

Washington state already has taken steps toward this pledge with the reduction of one-use plastic shopping bags. But we have a long way to go.

Learn more about what you can do to help reach “60 x 40” at <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2024/>



2025 Spokane Audubon Calendar Photograph Contest Guidelines

Submission Period: April 15 – May 15, 2024

Submit photos to: calendarspokaneaudubon@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 can be submitted per person.
- Photographs must be submitted electronically via email to calendarspokaneaudubon@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 (East of the Cascades) or Northern Idaho. Please include the species name(s) and location where each photograph was taken.

Call for Entries

Photographers may submit entries starting April 15. The deadline is May 15; 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.

Please practice good bird watching etiquette with Greater Sage-grouse and Snowy Owls in central Washington

By Michael A. Schroeder, Grouse Research Scientist, and Michael Atamian, Grouse and Shrubsteppe Songbird Species Lead, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Few species spark the interest of bird watchers in central Washington more than Greater Sage-grouse and Snowy Owls. Douglas County is home to 90% of the remaining endangered Greater Sage-grouse in Washington. This area is also one of the few places in Washington where the migratory Snowy Owl can be expected to make at least one winter appearance every year. The rarity and spectacular beauty of these species regularly brings bird watchers and photographers to central Washington.



Snowy Owl - person too close!
© Douglas Scott

In winter, Snowy Owls like to perch on rock piles or other vertical objects in or close to privately owned crop fields. In early spring, Sage-grouse congregate on traditional sites (known as strutting grounds or leks) to breed. Virtually all of the leks in central Washington are located on private land. This breeding behavior is a wonder of the natural kingdom, and it is obvious why bird watchers and photographers desire the experience of witnessing this phenomenon.

In central Washington, both species primarily occupy private land on large farming and/or ranching operations. The vast majority of these landowners love the wildlife that depend on the habitats they provide.

Unfortunately, carelessness by some bird watchers and photographers is causing preventable conflict with landowners and disturbance of wildlife. As employees of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), we hear the complaints firsthand from landowners. We also see the long-term impacts on birds that have been disturbed too many times. The last thing anybody wants is for wildlife to suffer the consequences of these conflicts.



Greater Sage-grouse
© Matthew Pendleton

What are the problems?

1) Disturbance – All of us have witnessed poor behavior including altering vegetation to create the ‘perfect’ photo, flying drones to locate and/or photograph a bird, and getting too close to get a better look or a better photo. If a bird watcher or photographer flushes a bird, they are too close. The result of this type of disturbance is clear: all Washington Sage-grouse leks that have become public knowledge during the last 50 years have disappeared or moved.

2) Trespassing – This is causing the greatest amount of conflict in Douglas County. Many people are venturing off county roads to get a better look at Snowy

Owls and Sage-grouse and as a result, they end up on private property. This is the quickest way to upset landowners, whether done on foot or in a vehicle.

3) Privacy – Bird watchers and photographers usually have binoculars, spotting scopes, and powerful camera lenses. Add drones to the mix and you have a recipe for conflict. Imagine sitting in your living room with vehicles on the public road in front of your house and people focusing their equipment in your direction, and occasionally a drone flying overhead. Would you be happy about it?

4) Road damage –Even public roads may not be accessible year-round, especially in the spring when roads are often soft and muddy. Driving on roads that are too soft can cause damage that can last all year. If you damage a road by being too eager, every time ‘locals’ drive the road they will think of you, and not in a good way.

What are the solutions?

1) Respect the birds enough to give them the space to behave normally. You will learn more about the birds and likely appreciate them more if their behavior is not altered by your presence. Getting a “better” photo by getting too close to a bird isn’t worth the disturbance you cause to the wildlife.

2) Stay inside your vehicle if viewing or photographing sensitive species. Birds are more likely to tolerate people inside a parked vehicle than outside a vehicle.

3) If you get the opportunity/permission to closely observe Sage-grouse on a lek (from a blind or vehicle), please arrive at least an hour before sunrise and depart after the last male has left so as not to disturb the birds.

4) Avoid sharing the location of sensitive species. Remove GPS data from images/videos before posting them. If someone contacts you asking about the location of a lek, kindly decline and explain that you’re helping mitigate excessive exposure of this endangered species.

5) Do not use drones. Some of the Sage-grouse’s natural predators fly, meaning that the grouse are nervous around any flying object. Flying a drone over Sage-grouse disrupts their behavior, which is considered illegal harassment.

6) Drive like a local. If your car is leaving tracks/ruts on a dirt county road, stop and turn back. Even though its legal to drive these roads, they are not maintained for use when soft and most locals don’t drive them when muddy, as they have to pay the consequences year-round!

7) Don’t trespass. In Washington, landowners are not required to post non-trespassing signs. YOU are responsible for knowing if you are on public or private property. This includes driving and walking on farm and private roads and, obviously, in fields or rangeland.

The Audubon Society (<https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography>) posted the following advice: “Be respectful of birds located on private land but viewable from a public vantage point, and also respect the privacy of these private landowners. If they are uncomfortable with your presence, leave.”

One of the reasons why places like Douglas County are so rich in wildlife is that there is a perfect combination of native sagebrush-dominated habitat and crop fields. This combination supports the largest population of Sage-grouse in the state, as well as Snowy Owls and lots of other species such as Sage Thrashers, Sagebrush Sparrows, and Sharp-tailed Grouse. Bird watchers, photographers, and local landowners all have at least one thing in common - the love of wildlife and the lands that support them. When you do see a landowner, make sure to thank them for stewarding this habitat for local wildlife. We all want the wildlife legacy in central Washington to continue.



Birding from a car
© Camilla Cerea

Owl Survives Bizarre Accident

by Bea Harrison

I was dreading what we would find when we got a message about an injured bird on February 15th. The caller said he had hit what he thought was a hawk on his way home to Spokane from Seattle the night before. He was shocked the next morning to find the bird was stuck in the grill of his car. It had been there all night, outside in the cold and now it was snowing. I pictured broken bones and blood and a frightened, suffering bird.

Spokane Audubon comes to the rescue of injured, sick, and de-nested birds through the "Save-A-Bird" program. My husband, Jim, and I received a message through our special email account that someone named Dan needed help with this bird.

We contacted Dan and he said the bird was still alive, but he was afraid to try to help it because its talons looked pretty menacing. We gathered our safety gear and headed his way across town in the snow-storm. When we arrived, we were rather shocked.

The bird was obviously a Great Horned Owl. Its head was completely through the plastic grill on the vehicle and the rest of the body was on the front of the car. It was holding onto the grill with one taloned foot and its wings were tucked under part of



the front grill. But there was no blood and the bird seemed to be intact. The amazing thing was that the owl's head was inside the grill! The plastic grill had apparently expanded upon impact with the owl's head and then closed back up around its neck.

There was no possibility of pulling the head back out. The only option was to cut the plastic grill apart to make the hole big enough to get it out. Thankfully, Dan had no problem with us enlarging the hole in the grill with the tinsnips he had in his shop. Jim carefully cut the grill open while I held the bird in my gloved hands. We weren't sure if the bird had enough strength left to grab me and we know a Great Horned Owl's talons can exert 200 to 500 pounds of pressure per square inch, equal to that of the much larger Bald Eagle and comparable to the bite of a large dog.

As Jim began cutting the grill away, he bent down and looked through the grill at the owl's head and saw that the owl was looking back at him with those intense orange eyes. Soon the hole was big enough to remove the head and I took the owl in my arms, holding the legs against the abdomen, in the way I had been taught to keep it from reaching me. The owl was heavy, which I took as a good sign that it wasn't starving.

We wrapped him in a towel, and I held him on my lap as we headed to the nearest wildlife rehabilitator, Dr. Mark Schrag at Hunter Veterinary Clinic near downtown Spokane.

Our Save-A-Bird team has been working with Dr. Schrag for about two years, ever since he got his raptor rehabilitation permit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He is a truly compassionate animal doctor and has cared for many of the birds we have rescued.

The weather had not improved. It was snowing and the roads were hazardously icy. Cars were spinning and sliding on the slick surfaces. We were glad to finally arrive at Hunter's and transfer the owl to the staff.



(cont on page 8)

Dr. Schrag and his staff performed an examination of the bird and determined that it had no broken bones and very few abrasions. I'm sure it had a headache and was probably dehydrated from its overnight stay on the car's grill, but we had hope.

After waiting for about three weeks, we got incredible news. We received this email from Dr. Schrag :

"Just wanted to touch base on our sassy little Great Horned Owl that was brought in on February 15th after booking an overnight B&B in the grill of a car. With the expertise of your team and some rehab here he was successfully released yesterday!"

This strong, resilient creature fought for life and is now back to doing his owl thing, just in time to hopefully find a partner and start a family.

If you would like to donate or volunteer with the Save-A-Bird team please email us at birdrescue@spokaneaudubon.org.



Great Horned Owl
by Marlene Cashen

Carlene's Spring Turnbull Visit

It was a warmer, blue sky day on March 15th and time to take a walk out at Turnbull. It was still rather quiet but I spotted a few ducks on Middle Pine. It was nice to see a female Pintail and then a Buffle-head duck. A variety of ducks is beginning to show up!

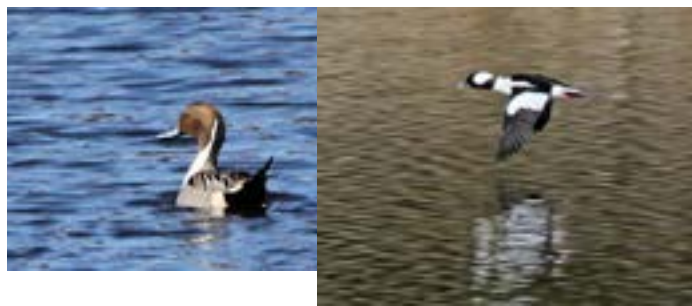
I parked by the Administration building and began walking past the Headquarters Pond and looped east. When I reached the next pond – Windmill Pond - I saw a "bale" of turtles (yes, a "bale"!).

There were SIX painted turtles basking in the sun! What a fun sight! Some later scampered off the rock and swam quite fast. Then I noticed that three returned to their favorite rock.

After returning home, I learned that "The painted turtle is the only turtle whose range extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It is native to eight of Canada's ten provinces, forty-five of the fifty United States, and one of Mexico's thirty-one states."

They're appropriately named because of the combination of yellow, red, green, black and tan that appears on their shells, head and limbs. Did you know that their shell is made up of about 60 bones? And that some of them could live to be 50 years old?

I found this really interesting: All aquatic turtles eat and swallow with their head under water and will not eat out of the water because they don't produce saliva and can't swallow without water.



all photos by Carlene Hardt



Sherman Creek Wildlife Area Habitat Monitoring Partnership

by Kim Thorburn

Spokane Audubon Society has a new conservation partnership with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)-managed Sherman Creek Wildlife Area. We are committed to providing data to monitor habitat work on the wildlife area. We're seeking volunteers to do point count bird surveys on two transects three times during the breeding bird season in June and July of each year. We will have a training on the morning of May 4, 2024, at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge for interested birders who would like to boost their survey skills.

Sherman Creek Wildlife Area consists of approximately 11,100 acres of WDFW-owned land and approximately 560 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acres, all managed as one unit at the lower end of the Sherman Creek Watershed that begins at the Kettle Crest and flows 24 miles down to the Columbia River. The wildlife area is located along the west side of Lake Roosevelt, in the eastern foothills of the Kettle River Range in Ferry County, about 3 miles northwest of the town of Kettle Falls. Sherman Creek Wildlife Area was acquired in 1948 with Pittman-Robertson and state wildlife funds to protect deer winter range and provide wildlife recreation.

The dominant habitat type at Sherman Creek is ponderosa pine and evergreen ceanothus vegetation and includes a greater variety of conifers at higher elevations. Aspen thickets are common around the many seeps and springs on the area. Since the first acquisition, there have been habitat restoration and management actions and some timber harvest. The restorative work focuses on forest health and fire risk mitigation, using prescribed fire and thinning.

The over-arching goal of habitat restoration is healthy ecosystems. Ideally,

the effectiveness of the restorative actions is monitored to inform whether adaptive changes in practices might be needed. Monitoring involves collecting data, often surrogate indicators rather than direct measurement of a goal that may not be apparent for years. For example, at Sherman Creek, wildlife use of the ecosystem is important to its mission. Obtaining information about bird populations and trends inside and outside of treated areas is a monitoring method that provides surrogate measures of forest health.

Collecting monitoring data is time-consuming. Public land agencies whose missions include ecosystem protection and restoration do not have adequate staff to carry out needed monitoring. Volunteers are essential. As an avid birder, I've always enjoyed volunteering for population monitoring surveys to support conservation efforts. Besides contributing to wildlife conservation, they're an opportunity to bird in special places and to hone my birding skills.

The small wildlife area staff at Sherman Creek are also excited about the burgeoning partnership with Spokane Audubon Society. It is an opportunity for them to gain habitat monitoring information that cannot be crammed into their busy schedules. Their support has provided a robust foundation for the project. They've identified and mapped survey transects and assisted in refining the methodology.

For more information about the Sherman Creek Wildlife Area bird count partnership, contact me at kthorburn@msn.com or I can provide details about the May 4 workshop.



Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Spring seemed to come early, with 70-degree temperatures in mid-March, but as of this writing, it looks like late winter is going to give us one last cold, wet stand before Spring is here to stay. Massive amounts of waterfowl should be moving through the region, with good diversity evident at traditional locations like Saltese, Turnbull, and Reardan. By the time this goes to press, the first shorebirds and rails should be just about showing up. It's been a quiet month in terms of rare sightings, but as always there are still some good ones listed below:

Greater White-fronted Goose: Reardan (3/9-BH);
Mirror Lake Field (3/10-eBird)

Long-tailed Duck: Almota (2/24-CL)

Red-breasted Merganser: Coeur D'Alene City Beach
(2/22-JE); Thompson Lake (3/3-eBird)

Red-breasted Sapsucker: Boyer Park (2/24-CL)

Ferruginous Hawk: Sprague (3/15-eBird)

American Three-toed Woodpecker (3/15-eBird)

Blue Jay: Pullman (2/23-eBird); University of Idaho
(3/5-CS); Sandpoint (3/8-RC)

Pine Grosbeak: Deer Park (2/23-eBird); East Mos-
cow (2/24-eBird); Myrna Park (2/24-eBird); WSU
(3/2-AS); Pullman (3/6-eBird); University of Idaho
(3/8-CS); Coeur D'Alene (3/9-eBird); Mt. Spokane
SP (3/15-eBird); Spokane Valley (3/19-MC); Cataldo
(3/20-JE)

Gray-crowned Rosy-finch: Wolf Lodge Bay (2/22-JE)

Common Redpoll: Garfield (1/21-CH); (Coeur D'Alene
(2/4-eBird); Bonner's Ferry (2/10-eBird)

Lesser Goldfinch: West Spokane (3/9-MW)

Lapland Longspur: Saltese Flats (3/6-TO)



Pine Grosbeaks
by Katie Carter



American 3-toed Woodpecker
by Cory Gregory

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; BB-Ben Bright; MC-Marlene Cashen; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JE-Jacob Elonen; MC-Micah Grove; LH-Lindell Haggin; BH-Bea Harrison; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; CL-Christopher Lindsey; AM-Alan McCoy; CM-Curtis Mahon; WM-Will Merg; TO-Tim O'Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; AS-Alex Sowers; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; DW-Doug Ward; MW-Michael Woodruff

Save-A-Bird Monthly Report

By Bea Harrison

Spokane Audubon's Save-A-Bird team continues to do good work for local birds and the community members who love their feathered friends. This month has seen some inquiries, interventions, and successes. We are gearing up for Spring, when nesting season brings more vulnerable new babies and questions about fledglings, injured migrants and other issues.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD:

On February 15th, a **Common Raven** with wing and foot injuries at Fairchild AFB was reported, sending us to the security gate twice. First Jim and Bea drove there, and the reporting party decided he couldn't come to the gate. The next day, after another person reported the same raven, Mike and Nan drove to the base. After showing identification, base security declined them security clearance to the base. (We didn't know we were on the terrorist watch list!). With instructions and a provided box, the reporting party was able to capture the bird and transport it to Hunter Vet Clinic. The bird had multiple injuries to the right foot, but the wings were okay, and it was reported to be stable.

The same day, a **Red-tailed Hawk** collided with a building in Spokane. Sara took the injured bird to Hunter Vet Clinic. The veterinarian was not able to save it.

Also, on February 15, Jim and Bea responded to a **Great-horned Owl** stuck in a vehicle grill in Spokane Valley. (See story in this issue of Pygmy Owl). The bird stayed at Hunter Vet Clinic, where it recovered and was released to the wild.

On February 22, we got a call about a **California Quail** that was sitting under a truck and not moving, but with no apparent injuries. The callers were advised to leave it there and see what happened. (It might have flown into something and was just stunned.) It eventually left on its own.

On Feb 26th, a small hawk, probably a **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, was reported as having an apparent wing injury. It didn't fly when approached, but eventually flew off.



Sharp-shinned Hawk

by Alan Kolnik/Audubon Photography Awards

On February 29th, a flock of 10 **Bohemian Waxwings** struck a window of a house. Five died, four recovered and flew away. Nan captured the remaining injured bird, but unfortunately it died before it could be transferred to a vet clinic.

On March 6th, a caller was concerned about a non-native **Chinese Goose** that was living at Riverfront Park, but with no apparent injury. We advised them that it is our policy not to intervene with domestic or non-native species.

On March 11th, a caller in Suncrest had a small bright red bird at her feeder that seemed quite tame and had a malformed beak. The caller wanted to take the bird to a veterinarian to have it trimmed. Margo determined the bright red bird to be a **Red Crossbill** which, of course, has a crossbill. No one knows why the bird was so tame, but its bill is just fine the way it is.



Red Crossbill by Bea Harrison

(cont on page 12)

March 12. The call about a downed **Bald Eagle** in Mead came atypically through a member's personal cell phone. It was at a known nest site, with another adult Bald Eagle and 2 sub-adults seen the day before. The caller was so gracious as to drive Margo to the site, in a rural field, to a draw with a seasonal stream and a mix of deciduous and coniferous trees/shrubs. The Eagle was on a pile of downed trees. It was weak and subdued. It was transported to Hunter Vet clinic to the care of Dr. Schrag. It was found to have severe lead levels and received chelation treatment (to bind and excrete the metal) and hydration four days before it died. WDFW is conducting a study to determine what levels of toxicity are appropriate to try to manage medically- with greater chance of recovery. Gut piles and lead contaminated deer carcasses are the primary culprit of raptors getting lead poisoning.

On March 15th, Joyce took a report about a **House Finch** injured by the caller's cat. The reporting party was able to take the bird to a local veterinarian for treatment. No word on the outcome.

Spokane Audubon member dues and donations help to cover the cost for supplies and transportation for Save-A-Bird volunteers. Thank you

Save-A-Bird is looking for volunteers who have time to help, especially people who have experience with wildlife, even if you can only give advice over the phone. Contact us at birdrescue@spokaneaudubon.org.

Remember, outdoor cats are the number one killer of wild birds. Please keep cats indoors. For more info see: <https://abcbirds.org/threat/cats-and-other-invasives/>

There are easy, inexpensive ways to prevent bird window strikes. For more info see: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/window-collisions>

Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area Winter Habitat Planting Project

A gala winter habitat planting project is scheduled at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area on May 11, 2024. The project is a component of Spokane Audubon Society's long-standing "Lek Surveys and other Prairie Grouse Recovery Program." The program has been supported by ALEA volunteer grant funding from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) since 2012. During the current biennial cycle of the grant, Spokane Audubon committed match funding to purchase plants and other supplies for the winter habitat restoration project. Our restoration partners are WDFW Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and the Spokane Chapter of Pheasants Forever.

State-endangered Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse are the focal species of our program. These birds forage on catkins and other fruits of riparian trees and shrubs during winter season. This habitat is in short supply at the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, a situation that was exacerbated by the Whitney Road fire of 2020. The Lake Creek drainage that flows through the wildlife area and surrounding Bureau of Land Management lands provides ideal sites to restore riparian habitats.

Wildlife area staff are currently preparing the restoration site with weed removal. After these treatments, they will lay down matting to retard re-growth. The plants and supplies have been purchased with Spokane Audubon, Pheasants Forever, and WDFW funds. The ALEA grant funding will cover travel to and from the planting and food for lunch. Our Pheasants Forever partners are providing a chef for the banquet. Now what we need are lots of hands on deck on May 11 to put the plants in the ground.

To volunteer for the winter planting gala at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, contact me at kthorburn@msn.com.

Sandygren
by Jason Lowe



Conservation Updates

By Shenandoah Marr

This year's short state legislative session wrapped up March 7th. While many of Audubon's priority bills did not pass, there were a few successes worth celebrating. These include:

- 100% clean school buses - Audubon members contacted their elected leaders 2,240 times to support this bill. Spokane Audubon's own Will Merg published a [guest op-ed](#) on the Clean School Bus Bill in the Spokesman Review.
- Promoting pollinator habitat in residential areas
- Studying the effects of avian predation of salmon. This bill establishes a work group of tribal members, wildlife agencies, and fishing organizations. The work group will identify avian species contributing to salmon predation, assess their population and consumption levels, propose remedies, and suggest regulatory measures

Next year will be a "long session" which will allow for more discussion and partnership on key priorities such as shrub-steppe conservation and waste management.

Initiative 2117

In November, voters will be asked whether or not to overturn Washington's landmark Climate Commitment Act. Initiative 2117, if passed, would significantly impact our environmental efforts by weakening carbon pricing and stripping crucial funding for climate and conservation initiatives (including the funding for the electric school buses and charging infrastructure). Washington Audubon is asking chapters to defend the Climate Commitment Act. [Sign up](#) for updates on this important initiative.

Wind and Solar Project Siting

Wind and solar energy projects have been getting a lot of media coverage lately. Several projects are being proposed in Eastern Washington. Spokane Audubon is working with other conservation-focused organizations and state biologists on ensuring these projects do not threaten birds and other wildlife. We will continue to advocate for birds and protection of their habitat.

Spokesman Review



Protect Pollinators at Home: Alternatives To Herbicides

by Aaron Anderson on 22 February 2024

If you're concerned with pollinator conservation at home, you've likely taken steps to eliminate insecticide use in your yard. But many gardeners may be surprised to learn that herbicides (chemicals designed to kill plants) can also pose a risk to pollinators and other invertebrates. Luckily, there are a number of solutions that home gardeners can use to manage yards and gardens without herbicides.

Caterpillars are especially vulnerable to herbicide exposure because they feed on the leaves of plants. (Photo: Candace Fallon/Xerces Society.)



How herbicides hurt pollinators

- Herbicides take away pollinator food sources. A major impact herbicides have on pollinators is simply killing flowering plants that they rely on for food. In urban areas, some important pollinator plants like milkweeds and native thistles are seen as weeds and are sometimes sprayed with herbicides. For example, a nationwide monitoring project in France found that herbicide use could [reduce the availability of host plants for many butterflies and decrease the number of butterflies found in yards](#). Additionally, herbicides used in our communities can move off-site and end up on plants other than the target weeds. Some are prone to drift. Others can wash off hard surfaces, like roads and compacted lawns, and end up contaminating nearby soil and water. Even if herbicide doesn't kill non-target plants outright, it

can reduce plant health, delay flowering, and decrease nectar and pollen production.

- Herbicides can make it hard for bees to find food. Some herbicides have been shown to cause direct harm to pollinators. For example, the most commonly used herbicide, glyphosate, can [impact honey bees' abilities to navigate](#) and [prevent the bees from learning the signals associated with food sources](#). This could interfere with bees' abilities to find food for their offspring.
- Herbicides can reduce the number of butterfly offspring. One study found that giant swallowtail, spicebush swallowtail, black swallowtail, and monarch [butterfly eggs exposed to glyphosate were much less likely to hatch](#) than unexposed eggs.
- Herbicides can weaken insect adults and juveniles. The herbicide [2,4-D can kill or weaken many types of insects](#), including honey bee larvae.

We should note that there has been relatively little research investigating the direct impacts of herbicides on pollinators, so there is a lot we don't know! This is one of the reasons we recommend caution, especially when there are other solutions to weed and pest problems at home

Safe alternatives to herbicides

Luckily there are a variety of strategies you can use to ensure you don't need herbicides to manage weeds at home.

- Right plant, right place. Create a resilient yard by selecting appropriate plants for your site and learning your soil properties so your garden plants can thrive. Check your soil pH; different plants have different pH needs, so be aware when choosing soil amendments and garden plants. Irrigate your garden with drip hoses so that only desired plants are watered and entire beds aren't saturated. This will create conditions that will promote the growth of desired plants and help them outcompete weeds.

(cont on page 15)

- Hand weed while plants are still small. The smaller size of home gardens makes weeding a practical method. What's more, this is the perfect time of year to get on top of weed control when the plants are small and the soil is moist! A variety of ergonomic tools are available that make hand weeding much easier, like hoes and claw weeders. Use dense plantings to outcompete weeds after you remove them, and consider mulch for weed suppression in garden beds.



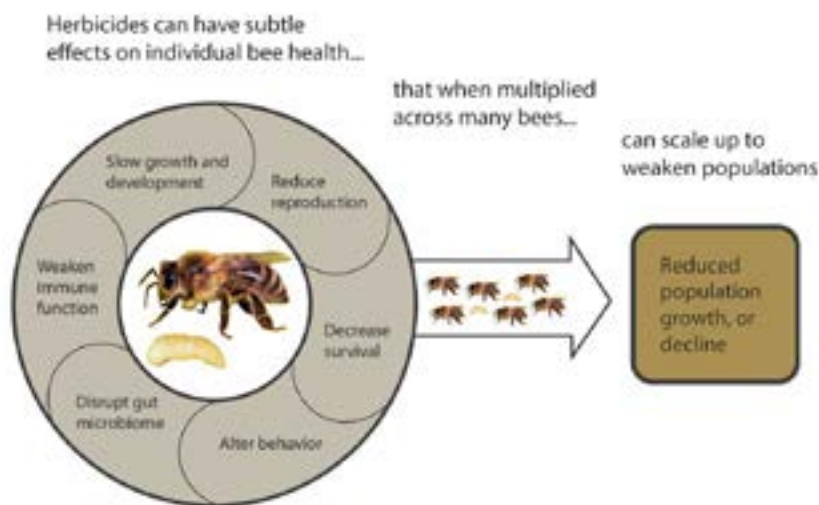
Hand weeding in the late winter and early spring can make the task easier. The plants are smaller and have shallow roots, the soil is moist, and plants are removed before they produce seeds. **(Photo: Aaron Anderson.)**



- View your yard as habitat and embrace ecological beauty. Allow some level of “wildness”, including some flowering weeds, in all or parts of your yard. This will provide protected habitat for all sorts of beneficial invertebrates, including pollinators **(Photo: Katie Lamke, Xerxes Society).**

Learn more

Our new Xerxes fact sheet, [Protecting Pollinators from Herbicides: Rethinking Weed Management at Home](#) shares additional solutions, as well as more about the impacts herbicides can have on pollinators



Many of the risks that herbicides pose to bees are subtle, like altered behavior, disrupted gut microbiomes, weakened immune function, slower growth, reduced reproduction, and decreased survival rates. When those effects are multiplied across many bees, they can scale up and impact the health and abundance of the larger population. **(Design: Emily May.)**

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.



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

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>

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Family: \$30 per year _____

Supporting: \$50 per year _____

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Lifetime: \$500 _____

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Annual memberships provide ongoing support for our many conservation and educational activities.

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