

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 30
Issue 3
Nov. 2021

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

November 10, 2021, 7:00 p.m.

This meeting is only via Zoom on-line since pandemic conditions and prevention restrictions continue to keep us from meeting in person. To join the Zoom meeting

(Meeting ID: 828 0690 6901, Passcode: 561415), link to

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82806906901?pwd=TVN6QnhGNzJkUWdnMWVlVWm9pRUZlNkQ0OQ==>

The Dinosaurs Amongst Us

presented by Kim Adelson, PhD

Virtually all paleontologists agree that birds evolved from dinosaurs, and most even go so far as to state that birds are, in fact, living dinosaurs. The flood of new data coming from newly discovered fossil beds – primarily from China – has only solidified that position. Come learn about the structural and behavioral similarities between birds and the more “classic” dinosaurs from which they evolved. We guarantee that you will not only be surprised as to how dinosaur-like birds are, but also how very bird-like dinosaurs were. You never will think about T. rex or mallards or chickadees in the same way again!



Cassowary

Apteryx



Kim Adelson was a professor of psychology for almost 30 years. She has won teaching awards at three different universities. Before she switched fields, so as to better study behavioral evolution, she earned a Master's Degree in evolutionary biology. Paleontology has been one of her avocations since she was a child.

She is an avid bird watcher and is on the Boards of the Black Hills Audubon Society and the Friends of the Nisqually National Wildlife Complex.

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The Pygmy Owl, the newsletter of the Spokane Audubon Society, is published monthly, September through June.

Spokane Audubon Society
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Owl illustrations on pg. 1, 11 and 12 © Jan Reynolds.



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Planting help needed Nov. 6 at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area

Volunteers are needed to get 9,500 shrub-steppe plants into the ground at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area on Saturday, Nov. 6.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) effort is part of the restoration of the area after last year's wildfire destroyed habitat for sharp-tailed and sage grouse and other wildlife. WDFW staff will drill planting holes for volunteers to drop plants in and tamp them in place.

Volunteers will meet at the area headquarters at 9 a.m. for shuttling to the planting site about a mile northeast. Planting will continue until about 3 p.m. to allow travel home before dark.

Contact Lindell Haggin at 763-486-5627 or lindell4118@comcast.net for more details if you want to help.

Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status September 20, 2021 through October 19, 2021:

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

Individual: Joe Sykes

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Debbie Stempf, Mary Jokela,
Cindy Bunnell

Family: James & Mary Prudente,
Robb Repp & Liz Hamer

Supporting: Breda Klohe

Contributing: David Goss

Lifetime: Pam Gallaher

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>

Member Profile:

Gary Blevins

by Madonna Luers

Gary Blevins' bird connection may have started at birth.



In 1953, his parents had gone back to his father's childhood hometown of Stafford, in south central Kansas, for opening day of ring-necked pheasant hunting season when along came Gary, a month early.

Gary spent most of his childhood summers at his grandparents' Kansas farm where his grandfather had a bird bath and built nest boxes for house wrens and "condos" for purple martins. With his father being an avid outdoorsman, Gary also had many camping, fishing, hunting and hiking experiences that developed his love of nature exploration.

However, his serious enthusiasm for birds started with an ornithology class as an undergraduate student at Wichita State University, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Zoology. After taking that class, Gary went on a spring break trip to South Texas for birding with a friend. They happened to meet a retired ornithologist who invited them to join him birding for the rest of the trip. Gary says he's been birding ever since.

After earning a Master's degree in Ecology at Wichita State, surveying birds for the Kansas Department of Fish and Game, teaching at Hutchison Community College, and doing some additional

coursework at the University of Wyoming, Gary and his wife Laurie moved to Spokane in 1992 for his job at Spokane Falls Community College. In his teaching career, Gary taught biology, ecology, ornithology, comparative anatomy, human anatomy and physiology, and clinical anatomy. With summers free, Gary worked seasonally as a wildlife biologist and managed bird banding stations for the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A member of the National Audubon Society and chapters in other states, he joined the Spokane Audubon Society (SAS) in 1993. The first field trip he participated in was led by long-time SAS member Warren Hall. Gary joined the SAS board in 1995, serving many roles, including conservation chair and president. He helped with membership recruitment, newsletter production, and Audubon Council of Washington meeting organization. He led field trips, managed the Christmas Bird Count's Little Spokane River area for many years, and conducted "Learn to Bird" classes as a celebration of International Migratory Bird Day. He conducted bird banding stations for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) with fellow board member and WDFW wildlife biologist Howard Ferguson. As the Audubon Washington office was working to create birding trail maps for the different regions of the state, Gary managed an Important Bird Areas committee to identify sites for the eastern Washington regional map.



While serving as SAS president, Gary also served on the Audubon Washington Board of Directors, first joining as a regional representative for eastern Washington chapters. He served as the state board

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president for several years, helping to create several Audubon nature centers and Washington birding trail maps. Gary was also on the board of directors for the Western Bird Banding Association, first a director at large, later vice-president and then president.

Gary's participation and leadership in all these boards provided him many opportunities for birding travel associated with meetings, conferences, and bird banding work across the west. But he's also enjoyed incidental birding during vacation travel with his wife Laurie and their daughter Erin, both who have become "casual" birders under his influence. During a recent trip to Spain, focusing on history and culture like flamenco dancing, Andalusian dancing horses and sherry tasting, Gary spotted a Red-legged Partridge and a European Goldfinch. Since he and Laurie retired in 2017, they've made several winter trips to the southwest to enjoy new birding experiences.

Gary says it's difficult to pick a single favorite birding experience, but he recalls several in three categories of his life – hardcore birding, teaching, and "just lucky" sightings.

"Hardcore birding to me includes bird banding," he explained, "which provides the unique experience of holding birds in your hand and being able to see them in fine detail. My first Vermilion Flycatcher and Abert's Towhee in Arizona, and first Rufous Fantail in Saipan, are favorites. Another memorable hardcore birding experience was during our Spain trip, when we had a day in Parque Nacional de Donana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an Audubon International important bird area southwest of Seville. You had to have a guide to enter the park, so through some bird banding connections, I was able to find a bird "ringer", as they're called in Europe, to guide us. We saw 40 new bird species that day."

Gary says that what makes teaching experiences memorable is the joy expressed by students when they see a new bird. During an ornithology class field trip to Padre Island National Seashore in Texas over spring break, while walking along the beach one evening, students observed the classic single file flight of a flock of Black Skimmers, gliding along the ocean surface, with lower mandibles in the water, catching small fish. The sight really impressed the students, he recalls, and made it a favorite for him.

"Lucky birding experiences occur when you are doing something not related to birding and you end up in the right place at the right time for a great observation," Gary said. "During our Spain trip we were sitting in an atrium and, above the large glass skylight, I noticed movement that appeared to be either swallows or swifts. Pulling out my handy travel binoculars, I was able to identify a mixed flock of Plain Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows. Another time, while exploring slot canyons in Zion National Park in Utah, I noticed a large raptor, with unusual underwing white markings, flying overhead. The rare California condor came to mind, and I confirmed it later when I looked in a field guide."

Gary also finds it difficult to name a favorite bird. When he first started birding, every first sighting of a new species became his favorite.

"As I progressed as a birder, those first observations became more difficult to obtain and required more effort and travel," he said. "An excellent example of this for me would be the Acorn Woodpecker. It's as if evolution created the best clown-looking bird. While at Lopez Lake near Arroyo Grande, California, we saw several Acorn Woodpeckers in the area. We soon found their granary tree right next to our camping site. It was a delight to watch this family group drill holes, wedge acorns into them, and check their previously stored acorns."



Acorn Woodpeckers with granary tree
© William Leaman

Gary also has "want-to-be" favorites -- birds he's still spending time trying to see for the first time. After six trips to the southwest, he has yet to find the Crissal Thrasher, Red-faced Warbler, and Elegant Trogon.

Gary's tips for birding newcomers who are frustrated with identification is to look at bird groupings in field guides and pick a species that's easy to remember for comparing and contrasting. For example, a Mallard might be easy to remember among ducks, a Red-tailed Hawk among hawks, and so forth. He also notes that participation in field trips with other experienced birders is a great way to keep improving identification skills. "Be persistent and have fun," he said.

Gary believes that the most important issue for the future of birds and birding is climate change. "The long-term drought occurring in the intermountain areas of

the west, along with associated catastrophic wildfires, are impacting large areas of habitat," he said. "Increased average temperatures, particularly in late spring and early summer, could be very problematic for birds' reproductive rates. Historically, insect reproduction life cycles and bird nesting patterns have been inherently linked so that the peak of insect populations and hatching of bird eggs is timed concurrently. There is good preliminary data which indicates that insect reproduction is occurring earlier and becoming disconnected from bird egg hatches. This may be one factor in why some bird species are breeding and nesting farther north than in their historical ranges."

Help needed with bird rehabilitation committee

by Madonna Luers

Are you interested in helping injured, sick, and orphaned wild birds? Madonna Luers and Bea Harrison are forming a committee to look at ways chapter members can help with bird rehabilitation, including stabilizing care, transporting birds to a care facility, and/or becoming a state licensed rehabilitator.

This past summer SAS received a significantly increased number of reports about baby birds on the ground and heat-stressed birds. Many situations were addressed, as usual, by relaying information about simply protecting birds from harassment by confining pets and small children and letting parent birds tend to their young. But others needed referrals to state-licensed wildlife rehabilitators, which are fewer and further between than ever.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Spokane district wildlife biologist Mike Atamian confirmed that Spokane's one licensed rehabilitator – Ponti's Veterinarian Clinic in Otis Orchards, does not take

most non-raptor birds. Whitman County's only licensed rehabilitator, Washington State University (WSU) Wildlife Ward, might take more types of birds that need care, but transport to Pullman is often an issue.

The process of becoming a licensed rehabilitator is very rigorous, including interning or apprenticing with an established rehabilitator. WDFW is looking at "sub-permits" under the auspices of a fully-licensed rehabilitator, funding apprenticeships with western Washington rehabilitators, and working with volunteers to transport reported birds to the stabilizing care that any willing veterinarian can provide.

Madonna and Bea need interested chapter members to join them in a few meetings (probably on-line via Zoom, or by telephone conference calls) with WDFW staff like Mike to work out what might be possible with SAS volunteers. Please contact them at madwoodmel@centurylink.net and beaharrison@gmail.com to help.

Nov. 17 deadline for input on Columbia Basin Wildlife Area management

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is asking for public input through Nov. 17 on a draft management plan for the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, which encompasses 191,729 acres in Adams and Grant counties.

The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area supports diverse wildlife, including shrub-steppe dependent species such as burrowing owls, sagebrush lizards, Washington ground squirrels, and striped whipsnakes, as well as wetland dependent species such as migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, and Northern leopard frogs.

Recreation opportunities at the wildlife area include fishing, hunting, boating and water sports, horseback riding, rock and ice climbing, biking, and wildlife viewing.

Learn more about the draft plan and how to submit comment at

<https://wdfw.wa.gov/news/wdfw-seeks-public-input-draft-columbia-basin-wildlife-area-management-plan>



Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Mid-fall is of of those “lull” times for bird movement and often a bit dull in terms of unusual sightings. On the bright side, a fair share of White-winged Crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks are already well south of the border, or stuck around from last year’s mini-irruption and bred. Either way, look for them to head down to lower elevations as the weather gets more inhospitable in the mountains. Anna’s Hummingbirds are becoming quite regular at feeders this fall, a trend that likely will keep increasing annually! For the second fall in a row White-throated Sparrows made a strong showing as well. Tis’ also the season for migrating saltwater birds from the far north, including scoters, loons, and perhaps something even more unusual. Below are the notable sightings for the past month:

Greater White-fronted Goose: Wandermere (10/17-TL)

Snow Goose: Slavin Ranch (9/23-JI); Kootenai NWR (9/26-eBird); Mill Canyon (10/8-JI); Hepton Lake (10/14-CH); St. Marie’s (10/16-NP)

Surf Scoter: Eloika Lake (10/2-TL); Mill Canyon (10/8-JI); Rock Lake (10/9-BM and MM); Sprague (10/11-eBird); Heyburn SP (10/16-NP)

Clark’s Grebe: Sprague (10/2-JI); Hawkins Point (10/30-eBird)

Anna’s Hummingbird: Haggin Farm (9/22-LH); Cordelia (10/3-eBird); Bonner’s Ferry (10/7-JR); Garfield (10/8-CH); Bayview (10/9-DW); Pine Bluff (10/12-AT); Pullman (10/15-JW); Spokane Valley (10/17-MC and NT); Moscow (10/17-NP)

Sandhill Crane: Kootenai NWR (10/4-eBird)

Black-bellied Plover: Sprague (10/2-JI)

Sabine’s Gull: Sprague (9/22-TL); Heyburn SP (10/2-GL)

Broad-winged Hawk: Spokane (9/26-MS); Palisades Area (9/28-JI); Potato Hill (10/2-NP)

Blue Jay: Bonner’s Ferry (10/7-JR); Spokane (10/14-eBird); Sandpoint (10/15-RDC)

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch: Mt. Spokane SP (10/8-TL)

Pine Grosbeak: Salmo Pass (9/25-eBird); Mt Spokane SP (10/16-TL)

White-winged Crossbill: Clifty Trail (9/20-SE); Harvey Creek (9/20-TL); Myrtle Peak (9/23-eBird); Ball Lakes (9/26-eBird); Mt. Spokane SP (10/8-TL); Bunchgrass Meadows (10/16-CM); Salmo Mountain (10/17-eBird)

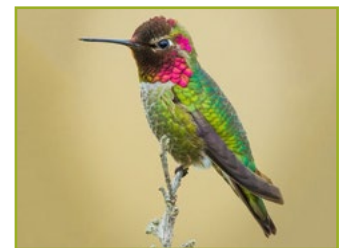
Lesser Goldfinch: Canyon Road Marsh (9/19-eBird); Feryn Conservation Area (9/20-MC); Spokane (9/26-JI); Paradise Prairie (10/2-AM); Spokane Valley (10/16-MC and NT)

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Mt. Spokane Foothills (9/22-TL); Potlatch (9/29-NP); Little Spokane Confluence (10/9-NE)

White-throated Sparrow: Lone (9/20-TL); Mt. Spokane Foothills (9/29-TL); Reardan (10/1-TL); Philip’s Farm Park (10/3-BB); Davenport (10/6-MC); Potlatch (10/8-CS); Kootenai NWR (10/16-eBird); University of Idaho (10/16-GL)



Anna’s Hummingbird female
© Mason Maron



Anna’s Hummingbird male
© Kyle Blaney

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; TB-Taylor Baldwin; Marlene Cashen; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; Jacob Elonen; NE-Norm Engeland; FF-Fred Forsell; BF-Bob Flores; DG-Don Goodwin; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; CH-Cameron Heusser; I-Jon Isacoff; LJ-Louie Johnson; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-David Kreft; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; CL-Carl Lundblad; AM-Alan McCoy; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; WM-Will Merg; RuM-Russ Morgan; TO-Tim O’Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark Selle; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; SW-Steven Warren; KW-Kevin Waggoner; MW-Michael Woodruff



BIRD OF THE WEEK

Long-eared Owl



Long-eared Owl
© Steven S. Ross

The elusive Long-eared Owl, also known as the Lesser Horned Owl or Cat Owl, superficially resembles the Great Horned Owl but is much smaller and slimmer — in fact, it's North America's most slender owl. Distinguishing characteristics include long, close-set ear tufts (held flat to the head while in flight), an orange face punctuated by blackish highlights around the eyes, and dark streaking and barring on the undersides that creates a more checkered pattern than seen on the Great Horned.

This owl's sleek silhouette makes an effective defense against potential predators, allowing the bird to blend with its surroundings. It prefers to roost within dense foliage, often next to a tree trunk, where its slim body and dappled brown plumage render it practically invisible. When threatened, a Long-eared Owl further elongates its body, raises its ear tufts, and compresses its plumage, making it resemble a tree limb. This cryptic strategy is shared by other owls.

Safety in Numbers

The Long-eared Owl is unusually social for an owl. During winter, it can be found roosting in groups, from several to upwards of 20 individuals, although roosts as large as 100 have been recorded. These congregations are located within thick cover, where the birds are very difficult to detect. This uncommon

sociability may help deter potential predators, including larger owls. Even during their breeding season, Long-eared Owls often nest in loose colonies, with pairs raising young within 40 to 50 feet of each other.

Widespread Owl

The Long-eared Owl can be found throughout the Northern Hemisphere, including from Western Europe to Russia, then as far east as Japan. In North America, it is found across southern Canada and from New England to the Southwest, including a few spots in northern Mexico. Isolated populations are also found in North and East Africa, the Azores, and the Canary Islands. North American Long-eared Owls are partially migratory, with some birds moving south during harsh winters.

This owl is quite vocal during its breeding season, and makes a variety of sounds. The male Long-eared Owl gives an "advertisement" call — a repeated, resonant hoot that can be heard up to a mile away. The female responds with a raspier call. When alarmed, this owl shrieks and hisses, giving rise to one of its common folk names, "Cat Owl."

The Long-eared Owl feeds almost entirely on small mammals such as mice, voles, and ground squirrels. It occasionally takes small birds and reptiles as well. Like the Barn Owl, it hunts in complete darkness, foraging low and pinpointing its prey with its excellent hearing.

Its flight style is buoyant and moth-like, reminiscent of a Short-eared Owl, but the two species use different habitat types, with the Long-eared Owl favoring forest edge and open woods, and the Short-eared preferring open fields.

Long-eared Owl fledglings
© Eric-Preston



Romance in the Rut

by Carlene Hardt

Last week I took a walk out at Turnbull right after work and just as I crossed the road to start down the path, I noticed several people on the hill there with cameras aimed downhill, taking pictures of something interesting! As I got closer, several of them warned, “Shhhh.” I looked and saw a different pair of moose than the ones I photographed just a week ago!

This bull moose’s antlers were much bigger than those of the bull I had seen the previous week. The two of them were flirting big time near Winslow Pool, which was a safe distance below. There was constant communicating by one of them and they stayed in the tall reeds for quite some time. At one point you could only see the top of the bull’s antlers!



After several minutes of that, they meandered up the hill and headed toward the main road. They crossed the road and headed north on the Turnbull property. It was cool to watch them for 1/2 hour. Didn’t get much exercise in but quite the unique nature show!

When I got home, I looked at my pictures and realized that I had witnessed some of their mating ritual. I looked up more information and found some very interesting facts that I want to share with you:

Moose are very active during the peak of the rut (late September, early October). By the end of the first week in October, the rut abruptly ends and moose return to their lives of eating and resting as they prepare for winter.

Bull moose shoulders are huge, and during the rut their neck muscles expand to twice their normal size. Ninety-eight percent of observed mating involved females mating with only one male. And they tend to be monogamous for an entire season. Cow moose tend to prefer more mature bulls, and a bull moose’s prime age for mating is between five and ten years. The cow will be pregnant for 243 days (right about 8 months).

Did you know that a moose’s “beard” actually is called a “dewlap”? One theory is that the dewlap is used for communication during the rut, or mating season, both by sight and smell. During the rut, a bull will rub the cow with his chin, also called “chinning”, and the dewlap transfers this bull’s unique scent to the female.



Male bull moose have one obvious way they show off to the ladies: their antlers. The bigger the rack, the fitter the bull, and the more females are likely to be interested. It turns out that size does matter to a female moose because a large set of antlers indicates that a bull is healthy and would likely father strong calves.

(cont on page 9)

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.

Details of the field trips will be found on our website <https://www.audubonspokane.org/upcoming-events>.

Due to their size and weight, the purpose of a bull's antlers is finished after the rut so they fall off during the winter. Male moose begin growing their annual antlers after their first year, but are very unlikely to find a mate at that young age. Really, the only way to tell how old a moose is requires looking at its teeth. (Good luck with that!)

Remember: While it's true that moose typically aren't aggressive towards people, if provoked they can be deadly. Unlike deer, moose usually aren't afraid of humans (or anything, really), so they won't run away just because you're there. A moose that is stressed, a bull in the fall rut or a cow protecting her young easily may be provoked into an attack. So if a moose approaches you, back away. If it charges, RUN! Don't stand your ground. You can't outrun the moose, so if possible, keep a tree or other nearby object between you and the moose as you retreat.

all photos by Carlene Hardt

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual Membership and Donation:

Student (under 21): \$10 per year _____

Individual: \$20 per year _____

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

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Nov. 2021

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*The Spokane Audubon Society advocates
for birds and their habitats in the Inland Northwest
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