

The

Heron Herald



Rainier Audubon Society

December 2011

December General Membership Meeting
Monday December 19, 2011 7:00 p.m.
Federal Way United Methodist Church

The Best of Malheur

Dan Streiffert

This was a very special year at Malheur. The birding and photography were so good that I went down there twice; once in June with my fellow photographer, Jay Galvin, and again in August, with another friend and photographer Larry Engles. In most years, August would be a bit warm for me but when I saw the following article in the paper, I decided that this was the year to do it. This would also give us an opportunity to finally get up on Steens Mountain, which, due to its altitude and snow pack, is normally only open from August to October.

“BURNS -- Migratory waterfowl and shorebirds reel and swoop above an overflowing Malheur Lake in numbers unseen here in decades. At the same time, more than 1.5 million carp are busy spawning "like crazy" in the shallow, high-desert lake. ..

Birds are everywhere now, thanks to huge mountain snowpacks and high runoff from the nearby 9,773-foot, 50-mile-long fault block of Steens Mountain. All that water caused the lake to expand from 23,000 acres last August to 79,000 acres last week. The water is a magnet to American white pelicans, cormorants, colonial water birds, gulls, terns and other species. Ducks bob in the shallows, avocets and terns shriek and dive.”

----From The Oregonian, July 31, 2011

RAS Mission Statement

To conserve and restore natural ecosystems and protect birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and biological diversity in South King County and the world we live in.

The first time I went to Malheur was in April of 2007 for the John Scarff Bird Festival <http://www.migratorybirdfestival.com/>.

At that time of year Snow Geese, Ross's Geese, Sandhill Cranes and numerous other waterfowl are found in the fields around Burns, which the local farmers flood from early spring runoff.

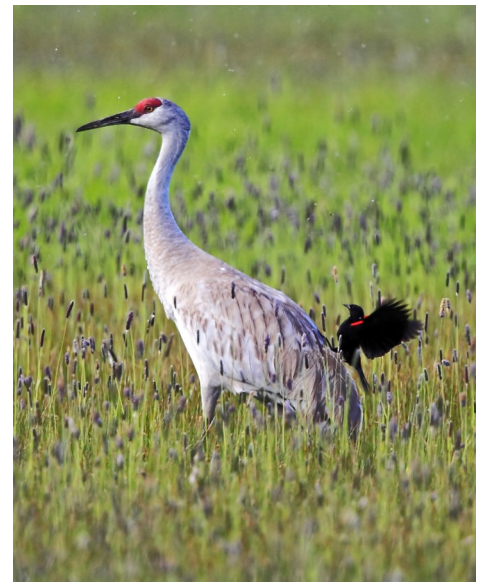
The Malheur refuge is generally still dry at this time as its water source is from

Steens Mountain, which comes a month or two later.

We had such a great time at the festival, that I came back in late May of 2008 for a one week Elderhostel course at the Malheur Field Station. I have been going back every year since. In my opinion, this is

the best birding/photography location in the Pacific Northwest. The birds are plentiful and the people are not. This provides ample time for getting to know and study your subjects.

Join us in December for “The Best of Malheur”. Come early and share in our annual Cookie Exchange.



Rainier Audubon programs are held at

Federal Way United Methodist Church, 29645 - 51st Ave. So.
98001 (in unincorporated Auburn)

Directions: In Federal Way, take 320th St. EAST past The Commons, crossing over I-5 and Military Rd.

At 321st St, turn left. Stay on 321st as it becomes 51st Ave. So. Follow 51st Ave. to 296th. Church will be on your left.

President's Message by ???

Rainier Audubon's Christmas Bird Count

Nancy Streiffert

Last call in the Heron Herald to sign up for the RAS Christmas Bird Count on January 1, 2012. Start the new year with your feathered and human friends! Leaders and teams are shaping up – all the teams can use more eyes and ears to spot and count birds. Experts and beginners both benefit – learning new places, seeing the occasional rarity, and enjoying the company of like-minded folks. We will converge at the Towne and Country Suites in Tukwila in the late afternoon to tally our finds and share a potluck dinner and warm comraderie. The map of our count circle and sign up information will be at our next meeting on December 19. For more information, call Nancy at 253-796-2203 or email nancy_streiffert@hotmail.com.

Thanks.

King Conservation District Bareroot Native Plant Sale

The King Conservation District Bareroot Native Plant Sale is beginning. Check out the bird and wildlife-attracting, low maintenance trees, shrubs and groundcovers at their website. Ordering can be done online this year. To see the results of KCD plants after 6 years, come see our "old growth" native forest-to-be created from a cow pasture!! Call Nancy at 253-796-2203

or email nancy_streiffert@hotmail.com



Upcoming Events

- December Cookie Exchange—Dec. 19, 2011 - Contact Lori Robertson (loriusa@yahoo.com)
- Christmas Bird Count— Jan. 1, 2012—Contact Nancy Streiffert or Lori Robertson)
- January 16 - Gary Luhm.— Birding by Kayak
- February 20 - Christie Norman "Puget Sound Loop - WA Birding Trails"
- March 19 - Connie Sidle - Book Reading and discussion
- April 16 - Maria Ruth "Marbled Murrelet"
- May 21—open.

RAINIER AUDUBON OFFICERS

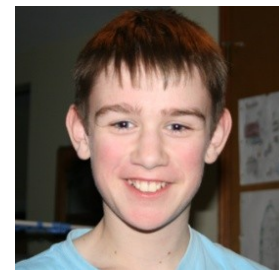
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Board Member	Erin Wojewodski-Prinsen*	425-432-9965
Board Member	Alex Juchems*	253-529-8996
Publicity	Tom Sernka	253-529-8970

*Also serves as Board Member.

Board meetings are held the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM in the church conference room and are open to all members.



Seen and Heard by Calen Randall



What a treat Mother Nature has given us this month! I hope you are all enjoying the incredible colors. We have a lot going on in our own backyard. We still have 3 Anna's Hummingbirds buzzing around. Our Japanese maple's leaves have metamorphosed from a canopy that shaded us throughout the summer to a crocheted red tablecloth set for the Spotted Towhees and Northern Flickers. We even had a Great Blue Heron fly through our backyard on October 26th. My mom jokingly said that the heron was probably on its way to Alex Juchems' house to go fishing in *Juchems' Pond*. (Alex is another Rainier Audubon member who lives on the same greenbelt as my family.) Ironically, about thirty minutes later, I received a report from Sara Juchems that she saw a Great Blue Heron, not once, but twice in her backyard—eating fish from her pond!

For the past few weeks, I have been on the road for hockey, travelling up and down the I5 corridor—aka raptor alley—between Federal Way and Vancouver, BC. It has been special to see how the migration of fall has unfolded from north to south along those two hundred miles: the snow in the mountains, the pace of the leaves changing and falling, and the change of the fields from bountiful harvests to barren fields. One highlight for me came on November 5th.



I noticed the first return of Trumpeter Swans to the Mount Vernon area—4 flew over our van—thankfully not into it! What excited me most about this sighting is that I knew it would not be long and we would be seeing these beauties in our neck of the woods. Four days later, eight Trumpeter Swans were gorging on the crop residues at nearby Smith Brother's Farm and Carpinito's Pumpkin Patch in Kent. They must love pumpkin seeds and corn! Since first sighting, I have noticed their flock has grown to about 18.

Recent Sightings

Reports are up 400%! Thank you to Barbara Petersen, Ralph and Sandra Embrey, Dan Streiffert, and Alex and Sara Juchems for your reports. Here is what has been seen and heard:

Common Birds seen regularly

Black-capped Chickadees, Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Bushtit, Bewick wrens, Golden-Crowned Kinglets, Ruby-Crowned Kinglets, Fox Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Golden-Crowned Sparrows, House Finches, Oregon Juncos, Spotted Towhees, Northern Flickers, Downy Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Stellar's Jays, American Crows, Anna's hummingbirds, and band-tailed pigeon.

Here is the list of special birds seen:

- Male Slate-Colored Junco Oct. 15 (BP)
- Female Slate-Colored Junco Oct. 25/Nov. 1 (BP)
- Townsend's Warblers Oct. 25/31 (BP), 26 (CR), Nov.8 (DS)
- Hermit Thrush Oct. 8th/25th (BP)
- Pacific Wren Oct. 27 (BP)
- Hutton's Vireo Nov. 8 (DS)
- Great Blue Heron (in backyard) Oct. 26 (CR & SJ)

Reporters:

Barbara Petersen (BP), Dan Streiffert (DS), Sara Juchems (SJ), Sandra Embrey (SE), and Calen Randall (CR)

Seen & Heard's Surprise Bird of the Month

The winner of the surprise bird of the month is Sara Juchems. Honorable mention goes to Dan Streiffert for his bathing Hutton's Vireo.

Sara spotted her special bird on October 26th. What is so unusual is that this bird was in Sara's back yard—however, she does have a pond. Here are some clues to what unusual backyard bird Sara found:

I belong to the *Family Scolopacidae*.

I am of the 'common' type.

My name is also the verb that means "to shoot accurately".

I have the longest bill for my type.

I elude hunters by flying in a zigzag pattern upon take off.

When you hear me during mating season, you may think you hear a goat in the sky,

hence the Finnish name for me "Sky goat".

A collective group of me can be called a "winnow", a

(Continued on page 5)

Bio: Calen is a 12 year old birder. He enjoys birding around Lake Fenwick and Boeing Ponds—especially with Charlie Wright. Calen is thrilled to revive Charlie's 'Seen and Heard'. When not birding, Calen can be seen flying up and down the ice at Kent Valley Ice Center.

Field Trip Report by Carol Schulz

All of our field trips so far this year were fun and the weather was surprisingly good. On September 10, Joe Miles led a large group on the Soos Creek Owl Prowl on a balmy night. The group attended the orientation, and then heard male and female Great Horned Owls hooting to each other during the walk. Our Kent Ponds and Boeig Ponds trip in September was also fun. Inside Kent Ponds, we had two or three very-close Virginia Rails calling and had a view of one of them.

On October 15, Steve Johnson led our group to beaches and parks from Kent to Fife to Federal Way. It was a cool day, and the birding was quiet at first at Lake Fenwick. Next we got to ID confusing seabirds which included a juv Pigeon Guillemot, and a juv Rhino Auklet with its small dark bill at Redondo and Brown's Point Lighthouse. Later down on Commencement Bay and in Fife we warmed up and saw Bonaparte's gulls, a few shorebirds, and had nice views of several Golden-crowned Sparrows. Later in Fife there was a perched juv Cooper's Hawk that we think had buzzed a Red-tailed Hawk. On Tue, October 18, Shep Thorp led a large group to Fife and Commencement Bay in sunshine! We visited Gog-Le-Hi-Tee, and many other sites. Some of the sites such as Circling Waters and Julia's Gulch were new to us. At the very end of the day, Shep took some of the hearty folk who still were with him to the log booms on Commencement Bay. They got to see the BLACK-TAILED GULL which is a rare gull from Japan.



Dash Point State Park. -Photo by Mike Weatherby

The weather was nice for our Oct 29 field trip. I was the leader, and there were 5 participants. We visited Lk. Lorene in Twin Lakes, where we saw a beautiful Eurasian Wigeon with the many American Wigeons. We practiced our birding ID as we viewed the ducks and noted their field marks. We visited the areas near the top of Dumas Bay trail, and finally spent quite a bit of time at Dash Point State Park. At the state park we visited Picnic Point, the trails near the ranger station, the beach down below, and the camping loops at the state park. The upper camping loop was very nice, as there are no campers up there in the winter, and there are lots of good roads and trails to walk on. We had killer views of very-active Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Golden-crowned Kinglets there. Dash Point State Park is huge, and can be very good for birding. To visit there you need a \$30. Discover Pass that lasts one year, or you must pay \$10. per day (they sell that one at the park). The pass is available at Fred Meyer or other stores, or online.

Later in fall as the holidays approach we do fewer field trips. But many of us help with the Kent-Auburn CBC, and some of us get out and walk at that time.



Lorene Lake - Photo by Mike Weatherby

Field Trips by Carol Schulz



Weekly Birdwalks at Nisqually

Wednesdays 8:00 am to Noon
Leader: Phil Kelley

Join Phil Kelley on his weekly bird walks as he counts the birds at Nisqually NWR. The group walks over to an area near the visitor's center to view the entry road estuary, and then takes the boardwalk/trail loop out to the Twin Barns, and the Nisqually overlook area. From there, the group walks the dike, and back to the Riparian Forest.

Some may choose to continue on the new estuary boardwalk extension which goes out toward the mouth of McAlister Creek. It has benches and covered viewing areas.

The walk totals 2.0 miles roundtrip to the estuary boardwalk extension. In winter the estuary boardwalk will add an additional 1 3/4 miles total, so the whole walk including the boardwalk extension is up to 3 3/4 miles.

Bring: Good walking shoes or boots, raingear, water, snacks, and \$3 for entry fee unless you have a pass. Scopes are welcome.

Meet: At the Visitor's Center Pond Overlook.

Directions: Take I-5 south from Tacoma and exit to Nisqually NWR at exit 114. Take a right at the light.

Sign-up is not necessary. Call or email Phil Kelley if you have questions. Phil Kelley, Lacey, [\(360\) 459-1499](tel:3604591499), scrubjay323@aol.com.



Kittitas County Birding in Winter

Sunday, December 4, 2011
6:30am to evening
Co-Leaders - Charlie Wright
and Roger Orness

Come enjoy a day of winter-season birding in central Washington. We will venture over Snoqualmie Pass and visit areas including Swauk Prairie and South Cle Elum along our route. Large numbers of raptors including Rough-legged Hawks and Prairie Falcons are seen wintering in the open, snow-covered fields of Kittitas. Proceeding east we will reach the Columbia River at Vantage, where waterfowl are sometimes present in vast numbers. Some target species will include unusual loons, ducks, American White Pelicans, and possibly rare gulls. Chukar are occasionally seen in the basalt outcroppings here.

Bring: Bring many layers of clothing for cold weather conditions, a lunch, and snacks. Scopes are welcome. Space is limited.

Meet: At 6:30am at Auburn Safeway at Auburn Way and Main St. Take Hwy. 18 to Auburn and exit at Auburn Way. (Hwy 164). Turn north (right) on Auburn Way and drive three blocks north. Safeway sign and gas station will be on the left. Park in the Safeway lot just beyond the gas station and straight out from the Safeway door. We will meet and carpool (promptly) from there.

Sign-up: Contact Roger Orness, r.orness@comcast.net, 253-922-7516. E-mail is preferred.

Seen & Heard *(Continued from page 3)*

"leash", a "whisper", a "volley", or a "walk".

My claim to fame is how I use my tail feathers while diving in my unusual winnowing display.

Do you know who I am?

People have asked a few questions about sending in sightings:

Should I only report unusual birds?

While we all love to hear about rare sightings, I think it is also important to know what common birds are around. So, if you see something that you want to report, please send it in!

Do you want just one report that tallies all of our sightings?

I am flexible. If you want to send in multiple reports, that is fine. Or, if you want to send in a report once a month, that is fine, too.

Send your sightings to calenbirds@hotmail.com I love reading your reports!

ANSWER: Common Snipe

Fun Facts About Brown Creepers

Reprint Courtesy of Wild Birds Unlimited, Burien

- *Brown Creepers search for insects by starting at the base of a tree and climbing, sometimes spiraling, up the trunk. They fly to the base of the next tree and start up again.*
- *Brown Creepers build nests behind loose flaps of bark still attached to a tree five to fifteen feet from the ground.*
- *The Brown Creeper's nest consists of a base made in part out of cocoons and spider egg cases anchored to the inner surface of tree bark with a cup made of fine pieces of bark, fibers, leaves, mosses and feathers.*
- *The male collects the nesting material and the female builds the nest taking up to a month to construct it*
- *The female will lay anywhere from four to nine eggs, usually five or six.*
- *Both parents help feed the babies which fledge in thirteen to sixteen days.*
- *Brown Creepers will often flock with kinglets, nuthatches and chickadees.*



- *If in a treeless area, Brown Creepers will creep up any vertical object such as a fence post, a telephone pole, or even a brick wall.*
- *To hide from predators, the beautifully camouflaged Brown Creeper spreads its wings and flattens almost invisibly against the tree trunk.*
- *Besides insects, Brown Creepers eat spiders and spider eggs, some sunflower seeds, pine and grass seeds, acorns and corn, chopped peanuts, peanut butter and will come to suet feeders*

Birding Trail's Puget Loop Debuts for Holidays

Delight your favorite birders this holiday season with the newest – the seventh and final – map of the Great Washington State Birding Trail: the Puget Loop. Hot off the press Thanksgiving weekend, this signature route features 220 of our 346 annually recorded bird species around Puget Sound from Seattle to Mt. Rainier, plus Lake Washington, Kitsap Peninsula; and Vashon, Bainbridge, Whidbey and San Juan islands. .

On Sale at our December 19 Membership Meeting for \$4.95. All proceeds go to Rainier Audubon.



Mewsings from Millie

Hello, and welcome once again to my musings.

Did you know that our Winter Wren is now called the Pacific Wren? The name change was made based on differences in songs, calls, plumage and lack of hybridization. Also, if you look at the VERY cool Occurrence Map on e-bird.com, you can see that there is a very definite division of the two wrens centered on the Great Plains. Just go to e-bird.com, click on the "about e-bird" tab, click on Occurrence Maps in the right margin, then click on Pacific/Winter Wren in the right margin.

If you continue to watch the map you will also see that the Winter Wren is much more migratory. Pacific Wrens breed in the cool evergreen forests of the western United States and Canada and are present year-round in many areas of their range such as northern California and the Pacific Northwest. Winter Wrens breed in deciduous and evergreen forests in the Appalachians and northern United States from Minnesota eastward. They winter across the southeast in deciduous swamps and dense tangles.

So, give a welcoming salute to our beautiful, little Pacific Wren!

I've mentioned before that feathers define birds meaning if an animal has feathers, then it's a bird. I thought it would be interesting to explore the fascinating subject of feathers a little further.

Feathers are made of keratin, an insoluble protein that is also found in mammal hair and reptile scales.

Feathers consist of six structures:

1. calamus - this is the hollow shaft of the feather that attaches to the bird's skin
2. rachis - this is the central shaft of the feather to which the vanes are attached
3. vane - this is the flattened part of the feather that is attached on either side of the rachis (each feather has two vanes)
4. barbs - these are the numerous branches off the rachis that form the vanes
5. barbules - these are tiny extensions from barbs that are held together by barbicels
6. barbicels - these are tiny hooks that interlock to hold the barbules together

There are several different types of feathers and each type is specialized to serve a specific function. In general, a bird has:

- * primary feathers - long feathers located at the tip of the wing
- * secondary feathers - shorter feathers located along the trailing edge of the inner wing
- * tail feathers - feathers attached to the posterior end of the bird's spine
- * contour feathers - feathers that line the bird's body and provide streamlining, insulation and waterproofing
- * down - fluffy feathers located under the contour feathers that serve as insulation
- * semiplume feathers - feathers located under the contour feathers that also serve as insulation
- * bristle feathers - long, stiff feathers around the bird's mouth or eyes (the function of these feathers is unknown)

That's a lot of different feathers on one little bird!

Of course, feathers enable birds to fly and birds have refined flight to a form unmatched by any other organism. Feathers have other functions as well. Feathers protect birds from the elements, provide birds with waterproofing and insulation and can block harmful UV rays from reaching a bird's skin.

Wow! Who knew? But then I've never heard of a bird needing sun screen.

Over time, feathers suffer wear and tear from friction and the elements. As a feather deteriorates, its ability to aid in flight or provide insulation diminishes. That is why birds need to replace their feathers periodically through a process called molting.

Quite amazing!

I mentioned earlier about e-bird.com. I would like to encourage you to check it out. There is a ton of information and you can also record bird sightings, keep track of lists, explore dynamic maps and graphs, share sightings and contribute to science and conservation. Have fun with it!

Until next time,

Millie

The Muse of Mews

Sign up for our new Google Group!

We have recently created a new group to serve as an email list server for Rainier Audubon. The intent of this site is to assist in publicizing our activities members and the general public relating to our club activities. Anyone may join or leave the group at any time. You may sign up on our website or at:

<http://groups.google.com/group/ras-activites?hl=en>



Rainier Audubon Society
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Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Kent, WA 98031
Permit No. 441

"If you're not livin' on the edge, you're takin' up too much space."
- Anon.

Rainier Audubon Membership Subscription or Renewal Form

One-year Membership in Rainier Audubon

- ◇ \$20—Individual Membership
- ◇ \$25—Family Membership

To join or renew, mail this application with your payment to:
Rainier Audubon Society - Membership
PO Box 778
Auburn, WA 98071



Or go to <http://www.rainieraudubon.org/> to enroll online.

Name: _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

RAS Chapter membership includes 9 issues of the Heron Herald annually but does not include AUDUBON magazine.