

# The HERON HERALD



Rainier Audubon Society • December 2005/January 2006

Vol 24 No. 10, Vol 25 No. 1

## December Program – An Evening of Sharing

*Everyone Welcome at our December Program*

Rainier Audubon member Linda Bartlett has created a lush and wildlife-friendly backyard at her home in Kent, using native plants, bird-feeders, brush-piles, and water features. Her yard is alive with a variety of birds throughout the year. Last spring, she discovered a pair of Pacific Slope Flycatchers nesting in her shed. Linda will open our December program by showing pictures she has taken of some of her bird visitors and other wild critters.

Then we will turn the program over to *you*. Anyone who has pictures or slides to share, showing your yard, your plants, birds you've seen, birding trips you've taken, or anything else, is welcome. Each person will have 10 minutes. We will have an old-fashioned slide carousel and our new digital projector on hand, so whether you have slides or a CD, we should be able to accommodate you.



We will also be having our annual Holiday Cookie Exchange, so bring cookies to share! We will provide the coffee, tea, and hot cider.



PACIFIC SLOPE FLYCATCHER  
PARENT FEEDS BABIES  
IN NEST IN LINDA  
BARTLETT'S BACKYARD SHED.  
INSET: 3 BABIES IN NEST  
PHOTOS BY BOB BARTLETT

## Ed Swan: Natural History of Vashon Island and its Birds

*Everyone Welcome at our January Program*

Have you ever wondered how habitat changes affect bird populations? Ed Swan has and will discuss the changes in habitat experienced by the bird populations of Vashon Island since 1850, at our January program. He will describe the original habitat existing before European-American settlement and how the waves of habitat change since that time have brought many new species to the island, eliminated several others and affected many others to varying degrees.

The history of habitat alteration on Vashon is similar to that which occurred throughout the Puget Sound lowlands. Over half the species on the island check-

list have experienced major changes. Old-growth forest once covered the island, only to be completely eliminated in the space of 50 years. Hardwood forest and mixed woods attracted many new species to the island, while simultaneously several species were eliminated by the loss of old-growth coniferous woods. All of these changes have led to interesting developments in the numbers of bird species present and the size of those populations.

Ed has been a birder for about 25 years and went through the first or second class of Seattle Audubon's Master Birder program back in 1990. He subsequently led

*cont'd on pg 7*

This is a combined  
December/January issue of the  
Heron Herald. You will receive your  
next newsletter the first week of  
February.

**DECEMBER & JANUARY  
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

**RAINIER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2005,  
7:00 PM**

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2006,  
7:00 PM**

**FEDERAL WAY SENIOR CENTER**

SEE PAGE 2 FOR DIRECTIONS

**Field Trips on Page 4!**

# Calendar

## THURSDAYS

### **Bird Walks at Nisqually**

See page 4 for details.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2005

### **Rainier Audubon Board Meeting**

6:30 pm, Federal Way Senior Center

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2005

### **Rainier Audubon Membership Program and Cookie Exchange**

See page 1 for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2005

### **Christmas Bird Count Field Trip with Tahoma Audubon**

see page 4 for details

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2005

### **RAS Field Trip: White-tailed Kites**

See page 4 for details

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1, 2006

### **Kent-Auburn Christmas Bird Count**

See page 3 for details

### **Also CBC Field Trip with Rainier Audubon**

See page 4 for details

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2006

### **RAS Field Trip: Federal Way Lakes, Parks, and Trails**

See page 4 for details.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2006

### **Rainier Audubon Membership Program**

7:00 PM, Federal Way Senior Center

See page 1 for details

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2006

### **RAS Field Trip: Vashon Island**

See page 4 for details

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2006

### **RAS Field Trip: Skagit and Samish Flats**

See page 4 for details.

<http://www.rainieraudubon.org/>

### **Directions to the Federal Way Senior Center**

- From Hwy 18 take the WEYERHAEUSER WAY exit.
- Turn south, cross over Hwy 18.
- Take an immediate left turn at S. 344th Way, into a highrise business park.
- Follow S. 344th to MILITARY RD. Turn right (south) on Military Rd.
- Turn right on to S. 352nd St.
- The Federal Way Senior Center will be on your right at 4016 S. 352nd Street, Auburn 98001.

# President's Message

by Nancy Hertzell

Sitting at my kitchen table one recent cold and rainy morning, I watched the chickadees and kinglets flitting around the big birch tree outside. The tree has lost almost all its leaves already. Winter is near and 2005 is drawing to a close. What has our Audubon chapter accomplished this year? With no budget except that which we generate ourselves from such things as garage sales, brown bag raffles, and members' subscriptions to the newsletter, our group showed their commitment to birds and the environment by giving of their time, energy, and skills to accomplish the following:

## **RAS 2005 Accomplishments**

- Organized and managed the 25th Kent-Auburn Christmas Bird Count, with a total of 70 observers.
- Offered and led 32 field trips.
- Participated in monthly birding census-ing at Green River Natural Resources Area.
- Participated in Citizens Lobby Day in Olympia.
- Conducted an Adopt-a-Road litter pick-up in Renton.
- Led a "Duck Pond Walk" for employees of Digital Control Inc, who wanted us to identify some of the ducks they see on the pond every day.
- Gave a slide-show presentation on creating backyard wildlife habitat for Marine Hill Garden Club.
- Manned (and womanned) a booth at the Weyerhaeuser plant sale.
- Gave a presentation on backyard plants and wildlife for Covington Water District.
- Conducted a Backyard Habitat Drawing, with the prize being a one-hour personal habitat consultation with an expert in your own yard.
- Gave three slide-show presentations at local wild bird stores, on creating wildlife habitat in your backyard.
- Spent a day in June teaching Cub Scouts about our local birds.
- Participated in the Tukwila Wildlife Fair.
- Spent three evenings in bird-related

activities with Girl Scouts.

- Became involved in the City of Auburn's proposal to create a 100-acre Environmental Park, to include wetlands and birding towers; attended planning meetings and joined the Technical Advisory Committee; donated \$1,000 to the City for native plants in this park.

- Taught an Introduction to Birding class.

- Worked hard to help save the beautiful Boy Scout Camp Kilworth from becoming a housing development.

- Presented 10 monthly programs for our members, on such topics as falconry, the recolonization of wolves, the Auburn Environmental Park, and the Black Guillemot population in Alaska.

- Published nine newsletters.

- Maintained a phone line for questions from the public, and returned every call. Questions ranged from what to do about too many raccoons, to where one could find owl pellets, the reporting of an albino Steller's Jay, and did we know where a seemingly tame pigeon might have come from.

### **Rainier Audubon Society is the Washington State South King County Chapter of the National Audubon Society.**

*The Heron Herald* is published by Rainier Audubon Society 9 times a year.

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*E-mail material to:*

**autumn207@comcast.net**  
**cc: hhartist@earthlink.net**

*Layout Artist: Rebecca Westby*

# Volunteer Opportunities

## Share Your Love of Books with Others

King County Library System Traveling Library Words on Wheels program needs Outreach Volunteers. You should be at least 18 years old, have reliable transportation, and able to commit to selecting, delivering, and returning library materials to at least one shut-in patron at least once a month for a year. Training is provided. Volunteer sites are available throughout the county. For more information, please contact Susan LaFantasie, TLC Volunteer Coordinator, 1-877-905-2008 (toll free) or 425-369-3456 or slafanta@kcls.org.

## Rainier Audubon Birdathon Coordinator

Coordinate our biggest fund-raising activity of the year! Sign up interested birders and sponsors; put them in touch with each other. Interested? Email Danielle at ddauria@patriotisp.com.

## Salmon Environment Enhancements

In the past few weeks, Friends of the Hylebos Wetlands has been involved in a project on Hylebos Creek in Fife, involving digging out new side channels for salmon. Now comes the fun part!

On Saturday, December 10, from 9 AM-2 PM, we will be planting native trees and shrubs at the site. We will have coffee and bagels for all our volunteers in the morning, and pizza for lunch. Tools will be provided, but you're most welcome to bring your own, just mark it so you know it's yours. It might be a little damp out there, so bring waterproof boots and raingear.

If you can make it, please RSVP to me by phone or email.

HILLARY KLEEB

STREAM TEAM COORDINATOR

FRIENDS OF THE

HYLEBOS WETLANDS

(253) 929-1519



## Rainier Audubon's Christmas Bird Count is January 1, 2006!

BY NANCY STREIFFERT

Thank you in advance to all those who have already signed up to participate. I hope more new people will join us. YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE AN EXPERT. You do not even need to get your feet wet or cold — you can be a feeder watcher! The more eyes and ears, the more birds we'll see and hear. This means more input to the national database used to make long-term conservation and development decisions. Our goal is to enable the protection of the birds we love and the habitats on which they depend. Please contact Nancy Streiffert at (253) 852-8394 or nancy\_streiffert@hotmail.com for information.

A huge thank you to Katie Wright who is providing new, accurate, up-to-date maps for each area, using the latest technology.

After a beautiful and successful day of birding, EVERYONE IS INVITED to join us

at the Kent Top Foods Food Court for dinner. Charlie Wright will tally our sightings and Mark Freeland will compile the data for submission to National Audubon. Feeder watchers can contact me by email or phone the next day to report their sightings. I look forward to meeting and thanking everyone who participates in this worthwhile endeavor!

Directions to Top Foods Food Court at 26015 - 104th SE, Kent: Top Foods is in the same parking lot as the Target store on 104th, across the street from Home Depot. From Central in Kent, go east (up-hill) on SR 516 (Canyon/Smith) to 104th SE. Turn right. Go through one stoplight and turn right into Target parking lot - Top Foods will be on your right. The Food Court includes a Starbucks, Asian deli, regular deli, soups, ready-made and custom sandwiches, chicken, burritos, desserts, etc.!

# Events

## Olympic BirdFest 2006

IN SEQUIM, MARCH 31 - APRIL 2, 2006

Quiet bays and estuaries, sandy beaches, a five-mile-long sand spit, and a protected island bird sanctuary on the Strait of Juan de Fuca; wetlands, tide pools, rainforests, and lush river valleys. Come bird with us and see Marbled Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, Harlequin Ducks, Black Oystercatchers, Peregrine Falcons, and Pygmy Owls sporting their finest spring plumage for this celebration. Enjoy guided birding trips, boat and kayak tours; a traditional salmon bake at the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribal Center, and more. Sequim is just a ferry ride and short drive from Seattle. In two hours, you'll be in the rain shadow of the Olympics. Program information and registration can be found online at: <http://www.olympicbirdfest.org>. To contact us by phone, call (360) 681-4076. Email us at [rivercenter@olympus.net](mailto:rivercenter@olympus.net). Or write to us at:

DUNGENESS RIVER AUDUBON CENTER  
P.O. Box 2450  
SEQUIM, WA 98382

## 2006 Port Susan Snow Goose Festival

Port Susan has long been a winter home to thousands of Snow Geese and Trumpeter Swans. This protected body of water that lies north of Everett next to Camano Island creates wonderful habitat for wintering waterfowl.

The first annual Port Susan Snow Goose Birding Festival will be held on February 25 and 26, 2006, in and around Stanwood and Camano Island, celebrating not only the arrival of the Snow Geese, but also all other wintering birds. The Festival will feature events for both experienced and beginning birders, offering tours, activities, and speakers at several locations. We are pleased to announce that The Nature Conservancy will be opening its unique Port Susan property for tours during the Festival. For more information, visit <http://www.snowgoosefest.org/>

## ***Christmas Bird Count Opportunities***

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2005  
(FOR TAHOMA AUDUBON'S CBC)

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1, 2006  
(FOR RAINIER AUDUBON'S CBC)

The first trip is for Tahoma Audubon, but is in our area. Thais Bock is the coordinator for this one. Contact her at (253) 839-2044 or tbock29@concentric.net.

The second one is for Rainier Audubon. Nancy Streiffert is the contact person. Email her at Nancy\_Streiffert@hotmail.com or call her at (253) 852-8394. (See article in newsletter.) On both of these trips you will learn a LOT about birds, as you travel with an experienced birder. You don't have to know all the birds, but you will be asked to help the leader. This is your opportunity to help a good cause and go on a birding trip too!

## ***Weekly Wintertime Bird Walks at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge***

USUALLY ON THURSDAYS; 8:15 AM TO 12:30 PM

LEADER: PHIL KELLEY

Join Phil on his weekly bird walks as he counts the birds at Nisqually NWR. (The trip usually happens on Thursday, but call or email Phil in case he has to go on another weekday instead, or to find out if the route has been changed.) First, the group walks out to MacAllister Creek and back to the visitor center. Then they take the boardwalk/trail loop out past the Twin Barns to the Ring Dike, coming back along the Nisqually River Trail, a distance of about four miles.

BRING: Good walking shoes or boots, raingear, water, snacks, and \$3 entry fee (or a Golden Eagle or Golden Age Pass, or a Duck Stamp). Scopes are welcome.

MEET: At the parking lot just past the Nisqually NWR visitor center.

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

SIGN-UP: Call or email Phil Kelley to confirm and find out the day he goes. (360) 459-1499, scrubjay323@aol.com.

## ***White-tailed Kites!***

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2005

8:00 AM TO 5:00 PM

LEADER: ROGER ORNESS

White-tailed Kites have expanded their range north to Washington and may be observed at this time of year perching and hovering near roads. Expect to see and learn about other hawks too, on this raptor trip to rural areas near Centralia and Chehalis. This is a special mid-week trip during the holidays.

BRING: Scopes, binoculars, snacks, and lunch.

MEET: Poodle Dog Restaurant in Fife by 7:55 AM and depart promptly at 8:00 AM.

DIRECTIONS: Take I-5 to exit 137 in Fife. Turn right and drive through the intersection to the Poodle Dog Restaurant.

SIGN-UP: Call or email Roger Orness at r.orness@comcast.net, or (253) 922-7516. This trip is limited to seven people and two vehicles. Sign up early.

## ***Federal Way Lakes, Parks, and Trails***

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2006

8:30 AM TO EARLY AFTERNOON

LEADER: CHERYL WHITE

Visit some unfamiliar birding areas in Federal Way, as we explore fields, lakes, and shores. Possible birding sites include Brook Lake, Weyerhaeuser Campus, Lorene Lake, and Lakota Point. Expect to see waterfowl and more. We may walk up to one mile.

BRING: Lunch, snacks, drinks. Scopes welcome.

MEET: Next to Marista's Coffee House in Safeway parking lot on So. 320th St. and Hwy. 99 in Federal Way at 8:30 AM. (Go west on 320th about 1/2 block from Hwy. 99.)

SIGN-UP: Call or email Cheryl White, CMWonthewing@comcast.net, or (253) 931-8342. Speak slowly and distinctly.

## ***Vashon Island with Ed Swan***

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2005

7:00 AM TO MID-AFTERNOON

LEADER: CAROL SCHULZ

On this new field trip, we will meet up with Ed Swan, the Vashon Island birding expert. Ed has written a book about birding on the island. First we will look for sea birds during the ferry ride. Then we hope to see water birds and much more, as we explore birding areas of the wetlands, fields, and beaches of Vashon.

BRING: Money for Point Defiance Ferry. Bring lunch, drinks, and warm clothes. Scopes are welcome.

MEET: 6:50 AM at Mitzel's Restaurant in Fife. We will leave PROMPTLY by 7:00 in order to catch the 7:35 AM ferry from Pt. Defiance. (Or meet us at the ferry dock.)

SIGN-UP: Call or email Carol Schulz, (206) 824-7618, or linusq@att.net. Email preferred.

## ***Skagit and Samish Flats***

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2006

7:00 AM TO LATE AFTERNOON

LEADER AND ASSISTANT LEADER:  
CAROL SCHULZ AND AMY SCHILLINGER

Our target birds are raptors, Snow Geese, swans, and Short-eared Owls. We are hoping for good looks at falcons. Rough-legged Hawks should be hunting and perching in these areas. A WA Fish and Wildlife Vehicle Use Permit (yellow) sticker is required. Limit 10. We will car-pool.

BRING: VERY warm and waterproof clothes. It can be cold and windy on the flats. Bring lunch, drinks (hot?), and waterproof boots or shoes. We will walk up to one mile. Scopes are very welcome.

MEET: Des Moines Park & Ride by 7:00 AM. Leave promptly at 7:05! Take I-5 to exit 149. Turn east about 1 block to Military Rd. Turn north. Park & Ride is on the left.

SIGN-UP: Call or email Carol Schulz, (206) 824-7618, or linusq@att.net. Email is preferred.





*I'm happy to report below more interesting finds from this fall, including everything from banded raptors to returning waterfowl and sparrows, plus a passing Bobolink! As we ap-*

*proach January 1 and the Kent-Auburn Christmas Bird Count, your reports are all the more welcome. Every year we "miss" certain species that we know are present, but just didn't allow themselves to be counted on the big day. This year, give us an idea of what to look for, and where, by sending in your sightings!*

Two **Trumpeter Swans** were flying near Emerald Downs racetrack 11/12 (GH). Fifteen **Snow Geese** were migrating over Bonney Lake

10/21; three separate flocks were heard overhead on the night of 10/23 (CW). A lone Snow Goose was in a very small retention pond in south Auburn 10/23 (RO/CWr). The flock of around a dozen **Greater White-fronted Geese** were noticed for the first time this season 10/22 (TBr). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was at Kent Ponds 10/23 (m.obs) and another was at Boeing Ponds 11/9 (MV). Three **Redheads** were at Kent Ponds 10/23 (m.obs). Ten **Black Scoters** were at Saltwater State Park 10/22

(TBo/CWh). The first few **Barrow's Goldeneyes** were noted 10/28 at Browns Point (Twtrs), while up to 100 were in the

Browns Point/Hylebos area 11/18 (CWr). A **Green Heron** was at Boeing Ponds 10/28 (CS). A **Northern Bobwhite** was seen near Nolte State Park throughout the fall (BC). A late **Osprey** was reported at Cedar River Park on 10/22 (TBr). A color-banded **Cooper's Hawk** observed at the Boeing Ponds 10/23 (RO/AW/CWr) was first captured as an adult-plumaged bird 1/28/2000 a short distance away on Frager Road (JB). Three Cooper's at Kent Ponds 11/2 were likely the local family (CS). A dark "**Harlan's**" **Red-tailed Hawk** was identified at Kent Ponds 10/27 (RO/JB). The banded **Peregrine Falcon** was confirmed to be present at Emerald Downs 11/2 (RO/CWr) for her 7th winter at that site. A **Black-bellied Plover** was fly-



SNOW GOOSE IN FLIGHT



EURASIAN WIGEON ©PETER WEBER

ing over the flooded fields near South Prairie 11/6 (CWr). Two **Spotted Sandpipers** were on the Hylebos 10/28 (Twtrs), where one was seen 11/18 (CWr). A flock of 14 **Long-billed Dowitchers** was in the Riverview Marsh 10/28 (CS). A **Western Gull** was at Gene Coulon Park 11/3 (TBr). Two

**Heermann's Gulls** were resting on the Hylebos logbooms 10/28 (Twtrs). Not often active in daylight, a **Barn Owl** was seen next to the powerline trail at Kent Ponds 10/23 (RO/MK), and one was flying around the meadows 11/9 (MV). Two **Northern Pygmy-Owls** were along Foothills Trail 10/21. A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** along the trail 10/30 was being mobbed by a very angry flock of kinglets (CWr).

A **Northern Shrike** at the Thomas Wetlands 11/2 was the first of the season (RO), and two were hunting the south side of Kent Ponds the same day (CS/CWr). Two **Western Scrub-Jays** visited an Auburn residence 10/7 (JH/HH), and another pair was along the powerline trail at Kent Ponds 11/9 (MV). An albino **Steller's Jay** near the Little Soos Creek Hatchery in October was most interesting (WM). Between 5 and 10 **Townsend's Warblers** were seen daily throughout this period at Bonney Lake (CWr). A **Common Yellowthroat** lingered at Kent Ponds 10/23 (m.obs) and a particularly late one was at Foothills Trail 11/6 (CWr). Three **Violet-green Swallows** at Kent Ponds 10/23 were slightly late (m.obs). A possible "**Red**" **Fox Sparrow** was briefly seen at South Prairie 10/25. Two **Swamp Sparrows** were at Foothills Trail 10/21, with one there 10/25. A **White-throated Sparrow** showed up at Foothills Trail 10/25 and remained at the same spot through November. A female-plumaged **Bobolink** flushed at Kent Ponds 10/23 furnished one of very few records for King County (CWr). Finches remained generally scarce through November.

Observers: JB-Jack Bettsworth; TBo-Thais Bock; TBr-Tim Brennan; BC-Bill Caughey; JH-Jim Hill; HH-Heidi Hill; GH-Gene Hunn; MK-Matt Knox; WM-Will Markey; RO-Roger Orness; CS-Carol Schulz; MV-Mark Vernon; CWh-Cheryl White; CWr-Charlie Wright; AW-Andrea Wuenschel; Twtrs-Tweeters; m.obs.-many observers.

## Going Birding?

Report your sightings to Charlie at (253) 862-0520 or email [c.wright7@comcast.net](mailto:c.wright7@comcast.net).

E-mail is preferred.

# Auburn Environmental Park Update

By Merlin Wiese

**O**n October 20, there was a meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee for the Auburn Environmental Park. Aaron Nix and Mitzi McMahan (from the City of Auburn) gave an update of what was happening on the site. The city now owns the parcel between Clay Street and the Interurban trail across from the marsh, and is looking at this location as a site for storm water detention and water quality improvements. The city is still negotiating to buy the parcel at the north end of the site.

The three subgroups then held break-out meetings to discuss any progress and issues they might have. All three groups reported that they are still exploring possibilities and had no significant progress to report at this point. Aaron said that there probably would not be another meeting of the TAC until after the first of the year, but that the city would like to meet with Rainier Audubon to discuss picking a site for an observation tower sometime within the next few weeks.

After the meeting adjourned, Aaron led a small group on a visit to the site. Aaron pointed out several potential tower locations. It was obvious that Reed Canary Grass is a real problem in the marsh; the city is looking into methods of control or eradication. It was also obvious that because of the height of cottonwood trees which have been planted around the perimeter of the "Thurmod site" (Clay Street Marsh), an extremely high tower would be needed to see into the marsh.

Several days after the meeting, I took an opportunity to explore the site by myself. This was before the rains started. The north end of the site was relatively dry; I found no open water there. The Canary Grass to the south of the pipeline access trail was extremely thick and I noted no signs of wildlife there. There were no paths through the grass and I saw no coyote scat on the trail or other indication that coyotes were present. I did, however, see scat and rabbit fur along the Interurban trail that indicated coyotes were active there. In the brush and trees to the north of the pipeline trail, there were numerous species of resident birds including chickadees, nuthatches, robins, song sparrows, crows,



THE POND AT THE AUBURN ENVIRONMENTAL PARK SITE. PHOTO BY MERLIN WIESE.

starlings etc. A pair of Red-tailed Hawks appeared to be doing a mating ritual and I observed them again later near the Clay Street site where they were checking out some of the taller cottonwoods (possibly looking at nesting sites?). South of the Clay Street area, the ground was much wetter and there was not as much Canary Grass; instead, there were large areas of cattail. Evidently, the groundwater flows to the south and collects against Main Street, where it cuts across the south end of the site.

On November 3, Aaron and Mitzi met with members of Rainier Audubon to discuss picking a site for the observation tower. Representing Rainier were Len Elliot, Debra Russell, Jim Tooley, Carol Schulz and myself. After some discussion, it was decided that it was too early to pick a site without additional information, such as a preliminary plan indicating where open water might be located. Aaron said that water table sampling was planned and that would help define where the best location for open water might be. He also said that he had learned one of the best methods of controlling Reed Canary Grass is to turn the sod over to cover the grass. This will not kill it because it propagates from root stalks, but it could control the grass while allowing trees and shrubs to get started. Once the trees and shrubs get a foothold, they tend to shade out the grass. Several Rainier members asked if it would be possible to get a look inside the

Thurmod site and Aaron said he would be willing to take a few people in.

On November 17, I met Aaron at the Thurmod site on Clay St. Unfortunately, others who had wanted to visit the site were not able to attend that day and I was the only one from Rainier present. Our entry point was fairly easy, but the water level of the pond was high; I was wearing calf-length rubber boots and was in danger of having water run over the tops of them. Cattails were also a big problem, growing all along the margin of the pond and making it difficult to get good views. We tried three different places with about the same results. There were ducks on the pond and I was able to identify Wood Ducks, Buffleheads, Green Wing Teal, Pintails, Ring Necks, and Mallards. I suspect there were other species there, but viewing was difficult. The pond was clear of any plant growth and there were large stretches of open water. The water itself seemed relatively clear.

Aaron and I talked about Rainier being able to access the pond on a regular basis for birding and monitoring purposes. He said the site is still being maintained by the race track so they control it, but agreed to contact them and see if they would allow us access. We also discussed the Auburn Environmental Park project in general and Aaron said he thought they would have a preliminary plan in a month or so and we could revisit the tower site issue at that time.

# Bird News — *Long-Billed Hawk Syndrome*

BY FIONA COHEN

**I**ncreasing numbers of local hawks are developing misshapen beaks, and nobody knows why. Biologist Bud Anderson first saw the phenomenon in 1996, when he found an overgrown beak on a dead Red-tailed Hawk. Since then, he has recorded 86 hawks with misshapen bills, 77 of them Red-tailed Hawks. In each of them, something caused part, or all, of the beak to grow out of control. Sometimes the top half of the beak grew too long and hooked over the hawk's chin. Sometimes both halves grew too long and sagged into a banana shape. Other hawks had beaks that crossed, or beaks where the top half split the bottom in two. The bills are often discolored and flaky. X-rays show that the bone close to the bill has started to dissolve.

The problem appears in young hawks and old hawks, hawks born here and hawks that migrated from thousands of miles to the north. All the recorded instances have been along the West Coast, from Alaska to Los Angeles. No one knows what causes it — whether it is a parasite, an injury, a virus, a poison, an infection or something else.

What Anderson does know is that the condition kills. All hawks with the problem are emaciated and full of lice. With their misshapen bills, they can't preen or clean themselves. If they catch prey, they have trouble skinning it and eating it. A hawk's beak is like a knife, shaped for slicing into the mice and voles that it hunts. If the knife is misshapen, it doesn't work as well. It's like a person trying to butcher an animal with a spatula.

Anderson has no trouble trapping long-

billed hawks. They fly toward the bait, too desperate to be wary.

Sardis Raptor Center in Ferndale has looked after sick or injured birds of prey for the past 16 years. The center first saw long-billed hawks four years ago, said Sharon Wolters, director of the center.

They treated three hawks for the condition early this year and expect to see more when winter comes.

"When we get them in, they're actually starving to death," Wolters said.

Sardis Raptor Center rehabilitators take blood samples,

feed the hawks, dose them with antibiotics, treat them for lice and file their bills back into shape.

Eventually, when rehabilitators are certain a bird no longer has a problem, they release it. They have successfully nursed to health each long-billed bird they rescued, Wolters said. The rehabilitators conducted tests in search of a reason for the problem. They checked for elevated white blood cell counts, a sign of bacterial infection. The hawks had normal counts. They checked for thyroid disorders and "beak and feather disease," two illnesses that cause misshapen beaks in parrots. The results were negative. They sent samples of beaks to the lab. No insights yet.

"We tried to cover all our bases that we think of," Wolters says.

It's hard to know how widespread the problem is.

Many birders like to watch hawks, but they tend to favor the rare species, Anderson said. They find no reason to look for details on Red-tailed Hawks, birds



PHOTO COURTESY OF BUD ANDERSON

## January Program...

*cont'd from pg 1*

field trips for SAS until moving to Vashon Island. He has been active on the board of the Vashon-Maury Island Audubon Society for the last six years and currently serves as the President. Ed is in the final stages of publishing "Birds of Vashon," which will be available in December 2005 and plans to have books available for purchase after the talk.

Please join Rainier Audubon for an interesting look at the natural history of Vashon Island and its birds.

Doors open at 6:30 pm. Join us for refreshments and conversation before the program!

that Anderson called "the Ford or the Chevy of the raptor world." The bulk of known cases are in Skagit County, but Anderson believes that is just because he lives there and he's the one counting. And he believes that even there, many birds suffer unobserved.

Other biologists have reported similar outbreaks in other parts of the country - though not in hawks. Near Anchorage, Alaska, a biologist recorded more than a thousand Black-capped Chickadees with overgrown bills. In Montana, the problem affects Red-winged Blackbirds.

"We need to do some systematic surveys," said Charles J. Henny, a research zoologist with the U.S. Geological Survey. The Corvallis-based biologist studies how pollution affects wildlife. He has been trying for two years to find funding for a study on long-billed hawks.

"What we're seeing is not a natural thing. It's an indication that's something's wrong up there. Something has to be causing that problem," Henny said.

If you spot a bird with a misshapen beak, take note of the bird's species and location and call Bud Anderson at (360) 757-1911.

REPRINTED FROM THE BELLINGHAM HERALD, OCTOBER 25, 2005, WITH PERMISSION.

# The Quizzical Owl

by Thais Bock



1. In what family is the Townsend's Solitaire?
2. What wren might you expect to encounter on talus slopes?
3. The feathered "thumb" of a bird's wing is call an \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The Clark's Nutcracker belongs to this family of birds.
5. What name is given to a group of hawks with similar characteristics?

ANSWERS ARE UPSIDE DOWN BELOW

## Community Rights Threatened by "Property Rights" Initiative

**T**he long-expected "property rights" initiative unveiled Nov. 14 by the Washington Farm Bureau has already galvanized opposition statewide from neighborhood and city leaders, Audubon members, and other conservation advocates who say the initiative violates community rights. The initiative, patterned after Oregon's Measure 37 (recently invalidated by the courts) would require governments to pay landowners to obey land-use regulations — or allow owners to use the property as they wish regardless of what fits the neighborhood or local area.

The initiative is only in its initial draft form at this time; several more drafts will likely be drawn up before it is finalized. Backers need 225,000 signatures to qualify for the ballot next fall. They said they plan to file the initiative with the secretary of state's office in January.

Conservation groups helped defeat a similar measure in Washington about a decade ago by showing that the initiative removes protections for neighbors about what gets built next door. Audubon Washington is working closely with local chapters to develop a statewide strategy to protect community rights.

**Think globally.**



**Act locally.**



*Even on the wide open prairies, I often feel that I am intruding among these delicately balanced forms of wildlife so carefully shaped by Nature's evolving forces through eons of time. I feel I should move slowly and quietly so as not to disturb their complex lives. Strangely enough, I experience a deeply rooted love and kinship for all of this life and strongly resent the fact that man will sooner or later move in to displace it. And still I am a man myself and my own presence is the first step in the displacement that I abhor. At these strange times, I feel that I am an actual part of this marvelous natural complex—not a man at all. And in this role, I love to walk mile-after-mile over the prairie or sit hour-after-hour watching and learning more about the normal daily experiences of these wild creatures.*

WRITTEN BY WALTER J. BRECKENRIDGE, ORNITHOLOGIST, 1903-2003. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION. DR. BRECKENRIDGE WAS A NATIONALLY RENOWNED WILDLIFE AUTHOR AND ARTIST, AND HELPED AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATE NUMEROUS BOOKS ON NATURAL HISTORY.

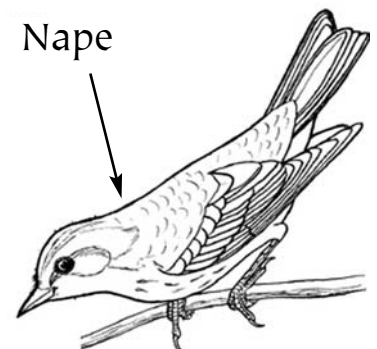
### A Quote to Consider:

*"I heard a bird sing  
in the dark of December  
A magical thing  
and sweet to remember."*

~ Christina Georgina Rossetti

### BIRD ID: December Word-of-the-Month

Nape



Answers to Quizzical Owl: 1. Thrush, 2. Rock Wren, 3. Alula, 4. Crow, 5. Buteo



# Plant of the Month

BY LINDA BARTLETT

**W**ow the bush is ALIVE as I write this! Its small red berries are being devoured mostly by robins, but now and then a Varied Thrush joins them, and the gray squirrels and Cedar Waxwings, and there are towhees underneath picking up bits and pieces. This plant, which is so eye-catching to people and birds alike this month, is the *Pyracantha*, or fire-thorn. It is commonly used by landscapers, and is not a native to this area or even to our country, but is from southern Europe and Asia. If you are a native plant purist, you need read no further. However, if your goal, like mine, is to attract as many birds to your yard as possible, then you must have *Pyracantha*. I have not found this plant to be the least bit invasive. And I credit it for drawing in the special little Hermit Thrush and the Townsend's Solitaire into my yard.



This glossy-leaved shrub, unpruned, can reach 10-15 feet in height and nearly that wide. They are fast growing and bear flowers and fruit on the previous year's growth. I have not pruned my four plants because I have plenty of room for them to grow, and I am enjoying the large dense shrubs they have become in five years. Because I prefer red fruit to orange, I sought out a red-berried variety called *Pyracantha Fortuneana* or 'Cherri Berri'. 'Mohave' and 'Apache' are cultivars that also produce red berries.

*Pyracantha* blooms profuse creamy-white blossoms in spring and produces the most fruit in full sun, although they will do okay in partial shade. Once established, they are very drought tolerant. A great feature of this evergreen shrub is the way it lends itself to espaliering. If you wish to keep it confined to a small space, you can readily find plants for sale that have been trained on a small trellis. They will perform nicely along a sunny wall, and will require pruning from time to time to keep their shape. Because of their thorns, they make excellent barrier hedge plants as well.

They don't like temperatures below 10-20 degrees F, so when we get an occasional very cold winter, they will suffer and lose a lot of leaves. We have not had a winter cold enough in the last 12 years since I have been growing *pyracantha* to actually kill the plant. They are members of the rose family, yet are pest and disease resistant here in our area.

I hope the little Hermit Thrush will remember and come back to dine this winter. It was so much fun to watch him fly up, sometimes hovering, snatch a berry, then quickly disappear within or beneath the *pyracantha*. The robins sit there gobbling and gulping berry after berry. This plant certainly is 'for the birds' and should be planted somewhere near a window so you can sit inside and just enjoy the show!

## Rainier Audubon Society

*Rainier Audubon Society is the Washington State South King County Chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, and to protect birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and biological diversity in South King County and the world we live in.*

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