

The Heron Herald



Rainier Audubon Society

February 2016

RAS Membership Meeting
February 15, 2016

Vacation Photography Techniques

Jay Galvin



Fellow Rainier Audubon member Jay Galvin has been busy with his camera in 2015. A photo safari to the Desert Southwest in the Spring, the Washington coast in the Summer, the Skagit Valley in the Fall and Arizona in the Winter, have afforded Mr. Galvin a chance to amass photos of bird and animal species and landscapes in many different habitats.

Jay's presentation will deal with seasonal variations, habitat exploration, best birding sites, effects of climate change, photography challenges and techniques. Mr. Galvin will also discuss some techniques on how to elevate an ordinary photo into a work of art through the use of your computer.

Join us at 6:30 for conversation and snacks.



Rainier Audubon programs are held at 7:00 PM at the
Federal Way United Methodist Church
29645 - 51st Ave. So. 98001 (in unincorporated Auburn)



Taco Time Coupon Books for Sale



Rainier Audubon Society is going to be selling Taco Time coupon books at the welcome table at the membership meeting this month. They will also be for sale at the February and March membership meetings. The books are \$1.00 each, and they contain \$5.00 worth of coupons. The coupons are valid through April 30, 2016. You can buy as many coupon books as you would like, and the entire \$1.00 goes to Rainier Audubon. So, if you buy a book and use just one coupon, Rainier comes out ahead, and you come out even. For more information, visit www.TacoTimeNW.com, or talk to Laura Lavington at the welcome table before or after membership meetings.

Upcoming Programs

- 3/21/2016 Shari Tarantino - Orca Conservancy
- 4/18/2016 Joy & Craig Johnson - Birds and Backyard Wildlife Habitat
- 5/16/2016 Peter Hodum - Plastic Debris in the Environment

RAS Board Elections

Election of Board Officers takes place at our May meeting. If you are interested in this please talk to a Board Member.

Seen & Heard

No reports for this month.

Sign up for our Google email list!

The intent of this site is to assist in publicizing our activities to 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 at:

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

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.

Rainier Audubon Officers

President	Dan Streiffert*	253-796-2203
Vice President	Steve Feldman*	360-802-5211
Treasurer	Laura Lavington*	253-941-7372
Secretary	Heather Gibson*	253-856-9812
Program Chair	Dale Meland	253-946-1637
Field Trip Chair	Barbara Petersen	253-941-4055
Membership Chair	Pat Toth*	206-767-4944
Backyard Habitat Chair	Marie West-Johnson	206-817-8754
Conservation Chair	Dan Streiffert*	253-796-2203
Mailing Chair	Debra Russell	425-271-0682
Hospitality	Sandra Embrey	253-517-3363
Newsletter Editor	Dan Streiffert*	253-796-2203
Webmaster	Treesa Hertzl	253-255-1808
Education Chair	Annette Tabor*	253-927-3208
Christmas Bird Count Coordinator	Alex Juchems	253-529-8996
Board Member	Max Prinsen	425-432-9965
Board Member	Erin Wojewodski-Prinsen	425-432-9965
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 at the Federal Way United Methodist Church, and are open to all members.

Field Trips - Barbara Petersen



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.

Bring: Good walking shoes or boots, rain gear, 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, scrubjay323@aol.com

Raptors of the Auburn/Kent Valley

Sunday, Feb 14, 2016; 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

Leader: Roger Orness

Roger Orness will take us to prime raptor viewing spots in the valley during this very-popular field trip. Past trips have been productive for falcons, accipiters and many red-tails to compare the different color morphs. Eagles could be occupying their nest and there is a chance for an early nesting red-tail, if we are lucky.

Meet: We will meet at the Auburn Super Mall parking lot north of McDonalds on 15th SW off I-167 at 08:00 and start at 08:30. We will carpool and return by 2 PM.

Bring: Bring your lunch, drinks and snacks, dress warmly for the weather and be prepared for a short walk on a level gravel road inside a closed area of the Kent ponds.

Space is limited, so email or call Roger soon to reserve your spot.

Roger Orness, r.orness41@gmail.com,
[253-922-7516](tel:253-922-7516), [253-312-6561](tel:253-312-6561)(cell)

Soos Creek Owl Prowls

Saturday Night, **Feb 27, 2016** -
or Sat. Night, **Mar 26, 2016**;
10:00 PM to 1:00 AM

Leaders: Joe and Liz Miles

Join Friends of Soos Creek Park volunteers Joe and Liz Miles for this late night program and walk exploring the world of owls. We'll start indoors for the first hour learning calls, ID, and info about our local owls, then venture outdoors to prowl for owls.

There is limited space for this program. Reservations are required. Best for adults and children over 13 years. Group size is limited to 15. The owls program is sponsored by Kent City Recreation Dept.

Meet: Meet at the Soos Creek Park Maintenance Shop. Soos Creek Park/Trail 24810 148th Avenue SE, Kent.

Sign-up: Call Kent Commons, Kent City Parks and Recreation, [253-856-5000](tel:253-856-5000). This trip **FILLS EARLY**. Please register in advance.

For further info: E-mail or call Joe Miles, (friendsofsooscreekpark@q.com), (253) 639-0123. Joe can answer your questions but cannot arrange the sign-ups.

Stillaguamish and the Skagit Flats

Sunday, Feb. 7th, 2016 6 AM - 7 PM
Leader Jim Flynn

Join Jim Flynn for a seriously exciting field trip to Stillaguamish and the Skagit Flats.

Meet at 6 AM at the Star Lake Park & Ride in Kent. This is the P&R on the WEST side of I-5, right next to the freeway, at 26th Ave S. and S. 272nd St. There have been issues with people googling P&Rs and going to one on Military Rd., on the east side of I-5 or a different one in a residential neighborhood near Hwy 99.

Return approximately 7 PM. We may split up carpools based on who wants to stay up there later into the day and possibly

have dinner up there before returning south.

Bring binoculars, cameras and spotting scopes, lots of layers for rain and cold, lunch, snacks, drinks and carpool money. Discover passes are helpful.

We will look for swans, snow geese, raptors (including Short-eared Owl) and waterfowl as well as passerines. Should be a well-rounded birding day with lots to see.

Sign up with Jim for this marvelous field trip opportunity by email, text message or phonecall, merlinmania@comcast.net, 206 399 6418.

Beezley Hills/Moses Coulee

Saturday, March 26th, 2016
530 AM

Jim Flynn will lead a field trip to Beezley Hills/Moses Coulee in Eastern WA.

Meet at 5:30 AM at the Kent-Des Moines Rd. Park & Ride. This is the P&R on the EAST side of I-5, on Military Rd., just north of Kent-Des Moines Rd. Return *late*, possibly as late as 10 PM, as we will stay to watch the Sandhill Cranes and geese come into evening roosts in the fields near Crab Creek.

Beezley Hills is a Nature Conservancy Preserve, and along with Moses Coulee is good for wildflowers and birds of the native Sage/Shrub Steppe habitats. We might see anything from Sagebrush Sparrows and Mountain Bluebirds to Prairie Falcons and Western Meadowlarks along with the early wildflowers such as Yellow Bells and Sagebrush Violets. We will also spend some time, especially in the afternoon, driving south towards Othello to look for migrating Sandhill Cranes. Their calls can fill the air as they talk amongst themselves and fly about looking for nighttime roosts. Along with hordes of Canada Geese doing the same, it can make for a very memorable experience.

To sign up for this fabulous all day field trip contact Jim by email, text message or phone call, merlinmania@comcast.net, 206 399 3418.

Bird of the Month: Varied Thrush

Reprint Courtesy of Wild Birds Unlimited, Burien



The Varied Thrush is a beautiful, robin-sized bird. It is stocky with a round head, straight bill and long legs. It boasts richly colored feathers of blue- gray, black and burnt orange which are very distinctive. In summer, it eats insects and in winter, nuts and berries. It is a bird of the Northwest and frequents ravines and thickets especially near streams. It may also be found in yards and along roads.

The Varied Thrush behaves much like the American Robin but is more elusive and shy. Its song is a unique metallic melancholy whistle at different pitches. Males will sing to defend their territory usually at dawn, dusk or after a rain shower.

The nest of the Varied Thrush is made of twigs, moss, leaves and bark pieces and is lined with soft grasses and roots. The female will build the nest in a conifer tree on a branch 5 - 15 feet above the ground. She will lay 3 - 4 eggs. Both parents help feed the young chicks.

The Varied Thrush forages on the ground hopping along moving leaves and debris. It will then fly up to perch and view the area it has just cleared searching for berries, seeds and acorns to eat.

The oldest Varied Thrush known lived to be 4 years and 9 months old.

Backyard 'n Birds - Marie West-Johnson

At our December meeting there was interest generated in Rainier Audubon partnerships with Powellswood Garden and FeatherHaven.

Here are the details: (drumroll)

FEATHERHAVEN – Kelley Ward would like a good list of release sites for rehabilitated birds. Also, during “baby bird season” (May through August) Kelley needs volunteers for bird care, food prep, and cleaning. She has an application process with orientation and training. To reach Kelley at Featherhaven visit her website: <http://www.featherhaven.org> or their Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/featherhavennativesongbirdrehabilitation> or Kelley call at: 253-350-5792.

POWELLSWOOD – 2016 membership rates to Powellswood will be \$30.00 for individual and \$45.00 for family. Kristine is offering ½ off membership rates to Rainier Audubon members, \$15.00 for individual and \$22.50 for family. Benefits of membership are free standard admission during regular open hours April through October. The American Horticultural Society Reciprocal Admission Program of participating gardens

can be found at www.ahs.org. Also there is a bi-annual e-newsletter, 2 one –time guest admission passes. Family membership includes the above membership for two adults and their children under 18. RAS members may mail their membership payments to Powellswood Garden 29607 8th AV S. Federal Way, WA 98003 Attn: Kristine or email her at admin@powellswood.org. for more information.

The Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary and Garden Tour will be Saturday, June 18 this year. I want to thank committee members Cathea Stanley, Barbara Peterson, and Nancy Streiffert for their interest in this event and volunteering to help this year. It should be a fun and successful event. If you have ever thought about hosting your property for June 2016 Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary and Garden Tour, let a committee member know of your interest!

Thanks,

Marie West-Johnson

Backyard Habitat Chairperson

Mewsings from Millie

Reprint Courtesy of Wild Birds Unlimited, Burien

Some of my people really like eggs. Chicken eggs, that is. They scramble them, boil them, make them into omelets and enjoy them in all kinds of intriguing ways.

I've learned that other eggs are interesting, too. Take the ostrich egg for example. Weighing as much as five pounds, it is the largest egg of all. It would take two hours to hard boil one!

Relatively speaking however, the egg of the kiwi is the largest because it takes up 25% of the mother's body! How on earth does she lay it?

Then there's Harriet the hen. In 2010 she laid an egg that was 9.1 inches in diameter, the largest chicken egg ever!

The granddaddy of them all was the egg of the now extinct elephant bird of Madagascar. It was the size of a football or about eleven inches long. Of course, the bird itself was ten feet tall.

I suppose it's safe for me to say that the egg of the bee hummingbird of Cuba, the smallest bird in the world, is the tiniest of bird eggs. It measures about six millimeters in length.

All birds large or small need to sit on their eggs to keep them warm so the eggshells need to be strong enough

to withstand the weight. It would take 26 pounds of pressure to break a swan egg.

Most songbirds lay one egg per day until their clutch is complete. American white pelicans lay two eggs per clutch. The young are able to squawk from inside their eggs if they are too hot or too cold.

A wood duck can lay up to fifteen eggs in one nesting attempt, but a single nest may have as many as forty eggs from more than one female.

Brown-headed cowbirds deposit their eggs in other birds' nests. Their eggs have been found in nests of more than 220 other species.

Eggs can be white, brown, blue, greenish or speckled. Tree swallow eggs, when first laid, are pale pink then within four days they turn white. Some eggshells contain ultra-violet colors that are perceived by the birds but are invisible to human eyes.

The elusive, flightless cassowary of New Guinea and northeast Australia lays green eggs with shells that are a quarter inch thick. I wonder if they taste good with ham?

Male emperor penguins carry a single egg on their feet and don't eat for four months while they look after it.



Eggs come in different shapes. They can be round or pointed. The egg of the common murre is pear-shaped which prevents it from rolling off the narrow cliff edges where the bird nests.

I found myself wondering about the term "egghead". Where did it come from and what does it mean? The term was created in the early 1900's by journalists and used to criticize editorial writers. It became popular in the early 1950's when Adlai Stevenson was a presidential candidate. Some deemed him to be so intelligent that he was out of touch with ordinary people and that is how the term is utilized today.

Well, after learning all of this regarding eggs, they appear to be quite fascinating. I hope you have found them to be eggs-traordinary, too.

Until next time,

Millie, the Muse of Mews

FREE DISCOVER PASSES FOR MEMBERS OF RAINIER AUDUBON SOCIETY

To support our state parks – and to boost membership - the local chapter of the Audubon Society, called the Rainier Audubon Society, is giving away free Discover Passes to any new member who joins Rainier Audubon during 2014.

All you have to do is come to a meeting, join up and get your free Discover Pass. The cost of joining is \$25.00/individual and \$30/family. The cost of a Discover Pass is normally \$35.00 dollars so you've just saved \$10.00 and you have a year's membership in the Audubon Society and a year's free access to all of the state parks in Washington.

Each Discover Pass can be used for any two vehicles you own. Just fill out two license plate numbers on the Pass, hang it from the rear view mirror of whichever car you're taking, and you're good to go for a full year of state park recreation.

The Rainier Audubon Society meets monthly at the United Methodist Church in Federal Way, and presents programs on all aspects of nature, birding, conservation, outdoor photography, and many other topics that adults and children who love the outdoors enjoy. For more information go to www.RainierAudubon.org.

Caribbean Cruise - by Laura Lavington

What do cruising and birding have in common? Well, yes, during both activities one can observe impressive amounts of feeding, but that's not what I was initially thinking of. Cruising and birding can both be addictive! My mom and I had a lot of fun during our Alaska cruise last July, so after that trip, we were only ashore a few moments before we began thinking about the next cruise. This past December, my mom had some vacation, and my sister was tentatively planned to come home to Washington for the holidays (my sister normally lives in Germany). I'm self-employed, so I basically take my vacation when it suits me. December seemed like a great time for a family vacation, and we eventually settled on Holland America's ten-day Panama Canal Sunfarer cruise, round trip out of Fort Lauderdale.



The Panama Canal Sunfarer stops at several islands in the Caribbean and then drops anchor in Central America. Well, Cancun was the only part of the Caribbean that I had ever seen (does Cancun even count?), and I had never been to Central America, so I was quite excited for the cruise. Although our family trips are generally not big birding trips, and even though I knew that since I was going on a cruise, my time ashore would be fairly limited, I was determined to pick up some bird sightings. In fact, I wanted this cruise to be as birdy as it could be (considering it was not a river cruise on the Amazon or something). We were advised by a relatively wise soul that the three of us should not feel like we always had to do the same activities, so during

our planning period, I went about looking at shore excursions in terms of which might yield some bird sightings. My sister, Katie, decided to take the aerial tram excursion in Costa Rica. Her tram traveled high above the rainforest canopy, and I'm sure the views were breathtaking, but I had read that while one sees many plants on the aerial tram, one does not necessarily see much wildlife. So, since I wanted to see at least a few exotic birds, the aerial tram was not for me! I'm getting ahead of myself, however: I'm not to Costa Rica yet. This is where I'm headed: since I was determined to see birds during the shore excursions, I got on Amazon and ordered a stack of books.

You may or may not recall, but on two vacations within the last few years, I have packed my binoculars but forgotten my bird field guides. The first time (the trip to Cancun), I was disappointed, but the second time I did it (on my most recent trip to Europe), I was rather disgusted. For those two trips, I would have taken bird guides that I already owned, but for the Caribbean cruise, I needed new supplies. I think I mentioned in another Heron Herald article that the Girl Scouts implanted in me a desire to "be prepared," and that urge arose again. Our first stop was to be Half Moon Cay, a private island in the Bahamas. For that, I bought *Birds of the West Indies* by Herbert Raffaele, James Wiley, Orlando Garrido, Allan Keith, and Janis Raffaele. I knew from looking at reviews online that that book did not include all of the Caribbean Islands, so for the stops on Aruba and Bonaire (two small desert islands just north of South America), I ordered *Birds of Aruba, Curaçao & Bonaire* by Bart de Boer, Eric Newton, and Robin Restall. Well, the Panama Sunfarer stops at two ports in Central America, and since I didn't see a Central American book that I particularly wanted to use, I bought two books: *The Birds of Panama: A Field Guide* by George R. Angehr and Robert Dean and *The Birds of Costa Rica: A Field Guide* (second edition) by Richard Garrigues and Robert Dean. I typically don't start thinking about my suitcase weight until I absolutely must, so for good measure I ordered *The Mammals of Costa Rica: A Natural History and Field Guide* by Mark Wainwright, too. (I didn't see a book about the mammals of



Panama, or else might have been tempted to order it!) Thus, even when my Heron Herald article is about one of my vacations (instead of being a book review), I don't forget to talk about bird books some. That pile of field guides may suggest that I was set, but in fact I did forget a book. I was so busy getting excited for the cruise, I didn't even think about the fact that after we got off the cruise ship in Fort Lauderdale, we were planning on driving down to the Everglades for a day, and I didn't think to pack my Florida bird book (*Birds of Florida* by Fred J. Alsop III). Oops.



Anyhow, with my suitcase full of books, I set off on the cruise. We sailed out of Fort Lauderdale on a Friday, and the very next day we dropped anchor at Half Moon Cay in the Bahamas. We weren't in port for a super long time: the ship was scheduled to arrive at the little island at 8:00 a.m. and leave at 2:00 p.m. So while my sister decided to sign up for the historic nature walk, my mom and I thought our time would be better spent at the beach. (Plus, the nature walk sounded too strenuous for me, considering the tropical climate.) I didn't see that many birds on the beach, but I did observe a few nice specimens while walking to the buffet and while eating. I was quite excited to

determine that my mockingbird was not a tropical mockingbird (a species that I had seen several times in Mexico), but instead a Bahama mockingbird! While eating, we observed several palm warblers and several bananaquits. Those birds were eating crumbs off of the ground among the picnic tables, just like a house sparrow would in the US. I couldn't help but think "It must be nice for these folks to have little native bananaquits visiting them while they eat outside, instead of our ubiquitous house sparrow." Native is always better. The beach was fun, and our time ashore was over too soon. The guests had to ride on tenders to and from the ship (the ship did not dock at a pier at Half Moon Cay), and on the way back to the ship, I saw several royal terns on some rocks.

Two days later, as the ship was still a ways out from Aruba, my mom spotted sea birds flying along with the cruise ship. I pulled out the most appropriate book and determined that the birds were masked boobies. I think we estimated that there were seven to twelve birds traveling along with us, and I enjoyed watching them. I had never seen a booby, and I had never really seen birds at sea (we saw the birds several hours before we reached Aruba). I think the boobies were catching flying fish. The flying fish were interesting, too, because they're actually smaller than you would expect.

My mom and I had both read that Aruba has some of the best beaches in the Caribbean, so while my sister went horseback-riding, we decided to take the bus to Eagle Beach and nearby Bubali Bird Sanctuary. The beach was pleasant enough, but the books had raved about it so much that I think I was expecting something significant to happen. Like maybe it'd be so beautiful that I would start crying. Didn't happen. I did see some birds at and around the beach, though. The eared dove was OK, but I don't tend to get that excited about pigeons. I always like to watch brown pelicans, so a visit by one was pleasant. The tropical mockingbird, laughing gull, and house sparrow were birds that I had seen before, so I was more excited about the Carib grackle. In Florida and Mexico, I typically see grackles on the beach, but this bird was a *Carib* grackle: something worthy of note! Bubali Bird Sanctuary was within walking distance,



but since the ship had not gotten to port until 1:00 p.m., and since my mom and I had not made it to the beach until after 3:00, the day was much past its lightest hour by the time we got to the so-called sanctuary. I was unable to photograph or identify some of the birds that zoomed past me in the dusk, but I did see some more bananaquits, a Connecticut warbler, and a handsome yellow warbler. I saw some other birds, too, but I don't know what, and at that point we needed to find the bus stop and get back to the ship before darkness settled over everything.

The next day we stopped quite early at nearby Bonaire. I liked Bonaire better than Aruba, but then again, we weren't actually on the island that long. Bonaire is supposed to have some of the best snorkeling in the Caribbean, so the three of us went out on a snorkeling trip. On the walk along the pier to the snorkeling outfit, we saw bananaquits and ruddy turnstones. The snorkeling trip was not that birdy: I just remember seeing magnificent frigatebirds and brown pelicans. We did see some exciting turtles while snorkeling, however: green turtles and hawksbill turtles. I'd seen turtles while snorkeling in Hawaii, and I had the same urge this time:

to stop swimming, be still, and just watch the turtle. I wish I had the ability to just spend a half hour gazing at one, but we were supposed to stay in a group, so after a little bit I had to move on. I had forgotten how impressed I am by turtles.

After leaving Bonaire—and with it the Caribbean—we had a day at sea before reaching our next port of call. The day after that, the ship arrived at the Panama Canal while it was still pitch black out. The Panama Canal Sunfarer only goes partway through the canal (we didn't go clear to the Pacific side). It was pretty

early in the morning when the ship arrived at the Gatún Locks, but as the passengers all crowded on deck to watch the ship's progression through the locks, it was quite humid and quite hot. In fact, I think standing on deck watching the ship move slowly through the locks, I was the hottest I was anytime on the trip. The experience of going through the Gatún Locks in the Panama Canal was



really memorable, and while I watched the locomotives pull the ship, I kept an eye out for birds. The Panama Canal is a vast network of concrete, but it's actually not that far from the rainforest, so birds were about. I saw a group of magnificent frigatebirds perched on some towers and installations quite close to the ship, and I thought the white heads of the immature frigatebirds were interesting. (If I'd ever seen an immature frigatebird before, it must have been from far away.) I also saw a few brown pelicans, a great-tailed grackle, and quite a few swallows. The swallows were perched on some wires, and I think I identified tree swallows and northern rough-winged swallows. After the ship went through the Gatún Locks, it entered Gatún Lake (a giant manmade lake created by the process of building the canal). At that point, those passengers who were going on excursions could board tenders and take off. For the people not going on an excursion that day, they relaxed as the ship waited awhile in Gatún Lake and then went back through the Gatún Locks, ending up docked at Colon, Panama.

So, you're wondering if we went on an excursion or if we stayed on the ship? Well, I wasn't pushing the bird business very hard while we were in the Caribbean (the one day I went to the beach instead of going on the nature walk with Katie), but I figured once we

arrived in Central America, it was bird time! In fact, of my stack of trip bird guides, *The Birds of Panama: A Field Guide* was the thickest one. For that particular day in Gatún Lake, Holland America was only allowing people on official Holland America excursions to get off of the ship: anybody who booked with an outside company was out of luck. Thank goodness we read in a cruising guide book that that was a possibility, and my mom called and inquired before we booked a different excursion. Anyhow, so the list of possible excursions was moderate in length, as it only included official Holland America tours. It is perhaps for that reason that the three of us all wanted to do the same excursion. The closest excursion to being a bird trip was the Monkey Watch & Canal Nature Cruise. Now, the Monkey Watch had some pretty mixed online reviews... but we decided to take our chances.

The Monkey Watch wasn't perfect—mostly because the guide, who had very limited scientific knowledge, adored hearing his own voice drone on, which made me rather grumpy during the ninety-minute bus ride to the boat (and then again during the ninety-minute bus ride back, *in addition* to all the droning while we were on the boat itself). In spite of such nuisances, the Monkey Watch was rewarding. Beforehand, I was a little worried that we wouldn't see anything, as Holland America is careful to give a disclaimer that wildlife observations are not guaranteed. However, we were in luck: we saw monkeys (they are what everyone else on the boat was there to see), and in the process we saw some birds, too. I actually got pretty excited about the monkeys, even though I generally try to maintain an indifferent attitude toward the other primates. Our guide wouldn't feed the monkeys (not because he was ethically opposed to feeding wild animals—instead, he said that once a monkey had attacked a little girl in his boat, so he didn't want any interaction with the monkeys after that). However, other guides do offer the nearby monkeys food, so the monkeys (who are on islands in Gatún Lake) come forth inquisitively when they hear boat motors. Before we left home, I had read quite a bit of *The Mammals of Costa Rica*, so I knew which monkeys might show up (albeit we were in Panama then). On different islands that day, we saw white-faced capuchin monkeys, mantled howler monkeys, and Geoffroy's tamarins. Capuchins are the



organ-grinder monkeys, and howler monkeys are the ones that puff up their throats and bellow. We also saw some Hoffman's two-toed sloths on the boat trip.

Now that you've heard about the mammals (as in, mostly the monkeys), you're probably wondering what birds we saw on the Monkey Watch. The jungle is, of course, seething with birdlife, but we were limited that day by the amount of time we were on the boat. All the same, I did pick up some bird sightings. In the shallow water, we saw common moorhens, sungrebes, great egrets, little blue herons, great-tailed grackles, and wattled jacanas. Flying overhead we saw magnificent frigatebirds, black vultures, and turkey vultures. While we were looking at the monkeys on the jungly islands, I spotted sitting on branches a red lored parrot and a snail kite. Additional birds flew past our boat, but because I don't have much of a visual memory, if I don't either identify the bird at the time or snap a photo, it's hard later to figure out what I saw.

I'm not sure I'd go back to Panama again unless I was on another cruise through the Panama Canal (the poverty in Panama is a little depressing), but I would definitely go back to Costa Rica, which is where the ship traveled to the next day. (Specifically, the ship docked in Puerto Limón.) Katie decided to go on the aerial tram excursion during our day in Costa Rica, for which she had to meet her group at 6:30 a.m. My mom and I both wanted to go on a boat trip through the Tortuguero Canals, so we ended up signing up for the

6 in 1 excursion through an outside company.

Our first stop on the 6 in 1 was at the Del Monte Banana Plantation. I actually found the banana plantation to be more interesting than I expected. Our guide on the 6 in 1 was great, and it was impressive how much he knew about the different places we went in Limón. He educated us about Costa Rica, the banana industry, and Central American plants and animals, and he spoke with an engaging voice (quite the contrast to the Monkey Watch droner the day before who we caught stating scientific falsities). Anyhow, if you ever go to a banana-growing country, I would recommend a tour that visits a banana plantation. A fair amount of work goes into growing bananas, and quite a bit of labor goes into processing them, so I was stumped about how one can buy a banana in the United States as cheaply as one can. Well, while the banana plantation was interesting, I really didn't see that many birds there, even though the guide said that the banana folks attract hummingbirds to pollinate the plants. I saw a great-tailed grackle, bananaquits, turkey vultures, and a tropical kingbird.

The next stop on the 6 in 1 tour in Costa Rica was the hike along La Jungla Trail (also in Limón Province). It's hard to describe what the hike was like for me without first giving you a little information about the other people on the 6 in 1 (and on the cruise in general). First of all, Holland America is known to attract an older crowd, and I'm generally OK with that. However, the percentage of older folks on this cruise was significantly higher than on my Alaska cruise last July, and in fact, young people actually kind of stood out. So basically, I was the only person on the 6 in 1 who was not at or past retirement age. Thus, the hike was rather interesting. Now, these people knew about the hike, so nobody restricted to a walker or wheelchair signed up or anything. Regardless, throughout the whole hike, I was skipping along in front with the guide while other people behind us were sweating buckets and panting with exhaustion. Oh, I didn't mention that the entire hike was downhill! Anyhow, my point is that it was a little amusing to me, as an outsider might at immediate glance think I'm in a lot better shape than I really am. It's all relative I guess.

The La Jungla Trail was somewhere up in the foothills: we drove up to get to it, but I don't think we were actually on a mountain or something, as we didn't go that far from the coast. During the bus ride to the hike, I saw out the window a collared araçari sitting on a branch. That was pretty exciting for me, since a collared araçari is a kind of toucan, which is a pleasantly exotic bird in my estimation. Unfortunately, I didn't see as many birds on the hike as I would have liked. I think some of that was due to the general loudness of the group. We did see some other interesting animals, however. From the parking lot one could see a Hoffman's two-toed sloth on a tree sleeping. While hiking, we saw some white-faced capuchin monkeys moving along in the trees above us, and they even threw some sticks at our group! As far as birds go, the only animals I saw were a double-toothed kite and an unknown woodcreeper (I didn't get a good look at the woodcreeper). I read later that double-toothed kites move along with groups of monkeys (the monkeys stir up prey), and sure enough, that's what the bird did. We did a little better with amphibians and reptiles (although thank God I did not see a snake). We saw many strawberry poison frogs, a green & black poison frog, and a lowland rocket frog. As for lizards, we saw a Central American ameiva (a.k.a. a Central American whiptail), a montane anole (a.k.a. a high anole), and a rather large green iguana. As I was at the front of the pack on the hike (as already mentioned), it was I who spotted the humongous tarantula. At one point when the tarantula moved quite close to my foot (I was gazing at the praying mantis relative and wasn't paying attention), my mom actually screamed! (She doesn't like spiders.) Geez, no wonder we didn't see that many birds (my mom wasn't the only one screaming, yelling, or hooting during the hike: it was like a circus while the monkeys were overhead throwing sticks at us).

After the hike during the 6 in 1 tour, our bus/van headed to the Tortuguero Canals. The Tortuguero Canals are very near the coast in Tortuguero National Park, so the water is brackish. The area is known internationally for its wildlife (including birdlife). The boat trip was excellent for wetland birds. Here are some of the species we saw: tricolored heron, little blue heron, mangrove swallow, yellow-crowned night-heron, common moorhen, great blue heron, snowy egret, least sandpiper, and green heron. I was particularly impressed by

the pair of Amazon kingfishers, which got quite close to the boat. We also saw a pale-vented pigeon, a great kiskadee, magnificent frigatebirds overhead, and great-tailed grackles. Costa Rica has more bats than rodents, so we saw bats several places, including on the Tortuguero Canals. We saw only one crocodile on the boat trip (evidently it is mostly young crocodiles in that waterway). We saw an unusual sight while on the Tortuguero Canals: a brown-throated three-toed sloth hanging over the water going to the bathroom. Sloths only come down to the ground (or water) once a week to go to the bathroom, so it was kind of a special sight, and also we got a lot better view of the sloth than one normally gets. Along the canals, we saw some mantled howler monkeys, and the knowledgeable guide said that if you get too close to howler monkeys and the monkeys think you're bothering them, they throw poo at you! Of course, I asked if that had ever happened to him (how could I not ask that?), and he said that yes it had, and it was quite strong in scent. Finally, in addition to green iguanas, we saw a male and a female green basilisk (which is one of the species known as a "Jesus Christ lizard" because they can walk on water). It was time to get back to the ship after the boat trip, and on the way, I spotted out the bus/van window a crested caracara flying along.

Costa Rica was our last port during the cruise, and after we were there, we spent several days at sea. The trip wasn't quite over for my family once we disembarked, however: since we were flying out the next day, we had planned a short trip to the Everglades. As you may recall, I had just been in the Everglades in August, but I think any opportunity to see alligators and crocodiles is worthwhile. According to the official chart, in August the mosquitos were at "hysterical" level, but in December they were merely "horrible." Our time

was relatively brief (we didn't go on the boat trip like my mom and I had in August), but we did see a few alligators and a crocodile. Some of the birds we saw were the same as before: black and turkey vultures, purple gallinules, fish crows, anhingas, great egrets, white ibises, ospreys, northern mockingbirds... and one eastern phoebe. I think the birds that were the most interesting to me while we were in the Everglades were the ones I spotted in the parking lot trees very near to our parked car: a yellow-throated warbler and a palm warbler.

After the brief sojourn into the Florida Everglades, the trip was done. By then it was December twenty-second, and it was time to get back home and prepare for the holidays. The cruise was a lot of fun, and it gave me a taste of the Caribbean and of Central America. I have a better idea now of where I would go back when I want to dedicate more time to a single region. Hmm, I just thought about what my favorite bird from the trip might be, and I really can't decide! And one can't forget the monkeys and sloths, too.





"There won't be many coming home..."

- Roy Orbison



Rainier Audubon Membership Subscription or Renewal Form

One-year Membership in Rainier Audubon
\$25—Individual Membership / \$30—Family Membership

Circle one New / Renewal

For new members:

How did you hear about Rainier Audubon Society?

To join or renew, mail this application with your payment to:

Rainier Audubon Society - Membership
PO Box 778
Auburn, WA 98071



Name: _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

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