

# The Heron Herald



Rainier Audubon Society

January, 2020

Rainier Audubon Membership Meeting  
7 PM January 20, 2020

## ***“Birds, Beasts, and Flowers of Sabah, Malaysian Borneo”***

By Jerry Broadus and Clarice Clark



Greater Green Leafbird



Scarlet-rumped Trogon

**J**erry Broadus is a past president and board member of Tahoma Audubon, and Clarice Clark is a long-term volunteer for the society. We travel extensively, in the past mostly for scuba diving, but now for birding. In September 1991, we took a two week vacation to Sabah, a state of the country of Malaysia, located on the north tip of the island of Borneo. We chose September because it is the height of the turtle nesting season, since besides looking for tropical Rhododendrons and birds on Mt. Kinabalu, we wanted to go scuba diving for a week on a small island off the coast.

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Rainier Audubon programs are held at:  
Federal Way United Methodist Church  
29645 - 51st Ave. So.  
Auburn, WA 98001

**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.

## Upcoming Programs

- 2/17/2020 Ben Silesky - Survival by Degrees: 389 Species on the Brink”
- 3/16/2020 Marie West-Johnson, Barbara Petersen & Cheryl White, - “Birds of Southern Africa”
- 4/20/2020 Kim Adelson - "The Dinosaurs Amongst Us"
- 5/18/2020 Sally Vogel - “Ethiopia Birds & Mammals”

## Resources

- **Rainier Audubon Facebook Page** [www.facebook.com/rainieraudubonsociety/](http://www.facebook.com/rainieraudubonsociety/)
- **Heron Herald is Available Online** The current issue of the Heron Herald is always available to download from [www.RainierAudubon.org](http://www.RainierAudubon.org). I will try to send an email on our mailing list as soon as it is posted.
- **Rainier Audubon Email List** - You can join our email list by going to [groups.google.com](http://groups.google.com) and searching for “Rainier Audubon”. You can then request to join the group. Alternatively, you can sign up on the [www.RainierAudubon.org](http://www.RainierAudubon.org) website.

### Rainier Audubon Society Directory

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Member at Large	Stephan Feldman	Yes	360-802-5211	<a href="mailto:stephanfeldman@gmail.com">stephanfeldman@gmail.com</a>
Hospitality	Sandra Embrey	No	253-517-3633	<a href="mailto:Sandra.emery@gmail.com">Sandra.emery@gmail.com</a>
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Lifetime Member	Erin Wojewodski-Prinsen	No	425-432-9965	

## **“Birds, Beasts, and Flowers of Sabah, Malaysian Borneo**

*Continued from page 1*

Located just a few degrees north of the equator, Sabah is the epitome of "tropical" with lush rainforest, coral reefs and Mt. Kinabalu, the highest mountain between the Himalayas and New Guinea at 13,455 feet. Borneo, the third largest island in the world, encompasses immense bio-diversity, and (depending on the opinions of different taxonomists regarding splitting, lumping, and races or subspecies) has between 650 and 800 species of birds with 50 to 62 endemics recognized. The bird taxa comprise a subset of birds of the Oriental Region (which includes Sundaland, India, and China) with a few Australasian species visiting during migration.

Our presentation will begin with slides from Mt. Kinabalu and the nearby city of Kota Kinabalu, and then will introduce many of the avian, mammalian, and reptilian inhabitants of the Danum Valley Field Station, which we visited in 2016, as part of a bird banding and research project. The Field Station is located in eastern Sabah, in dense tropical forests of the Danum Valley Conservation Area (DVCA). At 438 km<sup>2</sup>, the lowland Dipterocarp forest that makes up the DVCA is the largest remaining primary rain forest in Malaysia and one of the world's most



Black and Yellow Broadbill

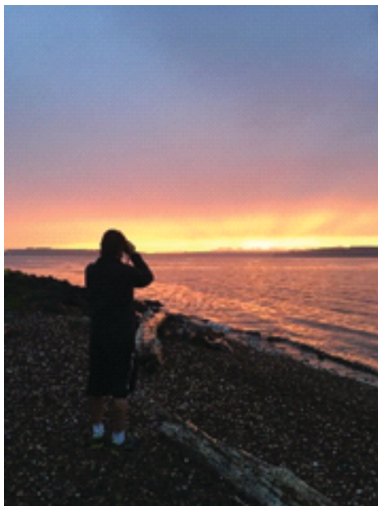
complex ecosystems. It's also the planet's oldest forest, with age estimates ranging from 65M to 120M years old. The forest is every bit as fantastic as any in the world – with one of the densest concentrations of large mammals that you can see outside of the African plains. Birding is of the jungle variety, difficult but with great rewards. It is a truly unique and spectacular area, and we will see many of its birds, both in the hand and in the bush.

Clarice was the nursery manager and propagator for the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, in Federal Way about 25 years ago. She still volunteers at the RSBG and has a greenhouse with (tropical) Vireya Rhododendrons. She and Jerry started a Land Surveying business, are now retired, and spend time volunteering with Fish and Wildlife and the Tahoma Audubon Society.

Jerry is a retired land surveyor and attorney, and is a long term volunteer birder, bander, and wildlife surveyor for Tahoma Audubon and several wildlife refuges. He and his wife, Clarice Clark, have traveled to most of the major birding regions (except, so far, for Africa and Antarctica) in search of birds, as general birders and as community science researchers, often working with endangered species. So far we share a life list of 2541 bird species, which I generally try to photograph and share with friends and organizations.

**“I want you to panic.  
I want you to feel the fear I feel every day.  
And then I want you to act.”  
- Greta Thunberg**

## Seen & Heard by Calen Randall



Imagine a lighthouse point, driftwood strewn along a beach of pebbles, waves lapping the wrack line. On the horizon, past the high forested cliffs of the inlet you can see a rugged chain of mountains, but despite the hilly scenery, the sky still stretches on, like the vaunted "Big Sky Country". Picture flocks of seabirds feeding on the surface. A

Rhinoceros Auklet dives into the cool waters in search of fish. A line of mergansers steam past, leaving a whistle of air and squeaking calls in their wake. Imagine that all sorts of marine mammals can be viewed from the point; Harbor Seals, California Sea Lions, Dall's Porpoise, and if you are extremely lucky, even Orcas. Does this sound like a marine paradise? Would you believe me if I told you this point was Tacoma's Brown's Point Lighthouse Park, right in the heart of urban sprawl?

I have always enjoyed visiting Brown's Point be it on Steve Johnson's annual Fall fieldtrip or on an adventure of my own. Over the past three years volunteering for Seattle Audubon's monthly Puget Sound Seabird Survey (PSSS), I have been able to experience first-hand the wonder of the point as the seasons gradually change. As anyone who frequents a birding hot spot knows, you grow closer with a place the more you return to it and I particularly enjoy how Brown's Point offers a different snapshot on marine life in the Puget Sound every time we go.

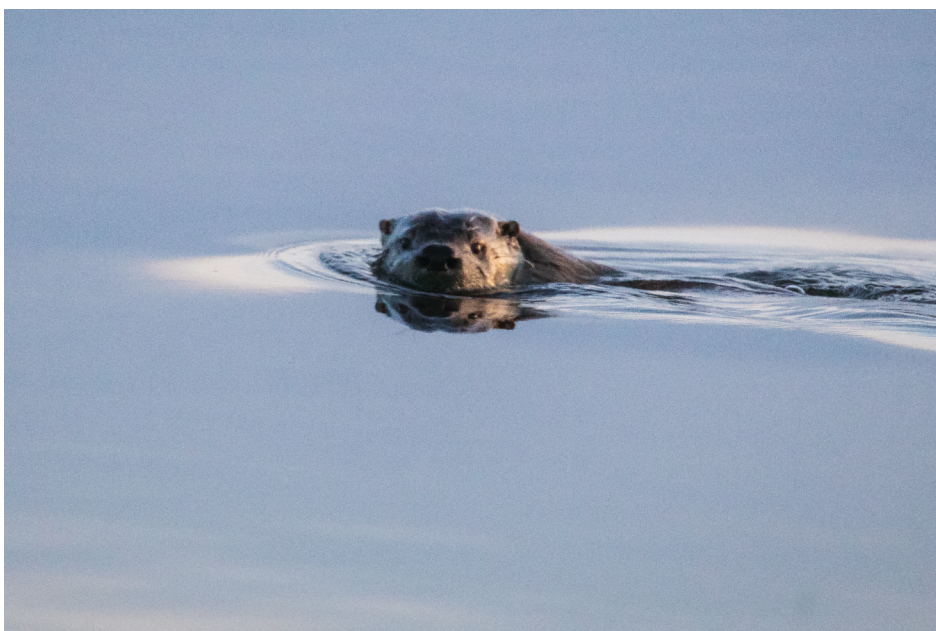
If you are ever looking to practice your seabirds, Brown's Point is a terrific place to get side-by-side comparisons of seabirds, including those in unfamiliar plumages. A good example is Pigeon Guillemots.

Typically we think of these red-footed beauties in their breeding jet-black, white-winged plumage. However, their nonbreeding plumage is easily confused with that of the nonbreeding Marbled Murrelet. Since Brown's Point is home to both, you can go and pick out specific differences between the two. Look for details like head shape (guillemot heads are much more round than the black-capped heads of murrelets), bill size (murrelets have a long thin bill while guillemots' are thicker), and back colouration (murrelets typically feature a solid black back while guillemots' may be less uniform). Murrelets also tend to sit lower in the water than guillemots. While you're out there, keep an eye out for feeding seabirds. We spotted a flock of Mew Gulls a mere hundred



feet from the shore feeding on the surface with Barrow's and Common Goldeneye. The gulls and goldeneyes would dip their bills into the water before tipping their heads back and guzzling down some small organism. I am not sure if they were feeding and if so, what they were feeding on. If anyone has any knowledge of fish or plankton these surface feeders might have been consuming let me know!

Sometimes, when I am out in nature I find myself focused just on the birds and can miss other species of animals and their behavior. Brown's Point offers close views to observe numerous sea mammals. On our last visit to the point, we watched a river otter slink along the beach into the sound. Every minute or so we would glimpse its head pop above the surface. Once it sent a trio of Buffleheads into a tizzy as it nearly surfaced underneath them! We also enjoy watching the sea lions playing along the point and snorting as they surfaced. One sea lion emerged from the depths with a large fish in its mouth. As it voraciously chomped down on the fish, a frenzied flock of gulls quickly accumulated around the



surfacing spot and snatched up the messy remnants of the sea lion's meal. The crown jewel of the marine mammals was sighting a small pod of transient orcas swimming north along the Vashon side of the passage last January. It was hard to focus on seabirds that day!

Amongst all the great birds we see at Brown's Point, the past three months have been marked by the continued absence of one treasured alcid. Where are the Marbled Murrelets? Normally a common sight in the deep water shores of Brown's Point, no one has spotted any at Brown's Point since October. Interestingly, this summer was unusually prolific for summer-time murrelets as there were numerous reports of murrelets at Point Defiance and Brown's Point from June through August. According to eBird, murrelet reports have been consistent through Elliot Bay and Edmonds this September through December. Perhaps the lack of murrelets is due to human coverage in the South Sound rather than a disappearance of birds. However, this is a pattern I would like to keep an eye on. If you go for a winter walk on Puget Sound shores in South King County or Tacoma, take a look out on the open water for any football-shaped seabirds. If you do see any murrelets contact me at [calenbirds@hotmail.com](mailto:calenbirds@hotmail.com)

## Recent Sightings:

In April of 2018 I wrote an article detailing simple traits to identify our nine main gull species in the Puget Sound. Recently, our local gull populations have been supplemented by a variety of off-course vagrant gull species. Here are some of the interesting gull sightings.

### December 1st, 2019

The Ross's Gull is a dapper petite member of the Laridae family. It sports a thin black line from the top of its head to its chin--like a long sideburn and can be characterized by a black "M" pattern on its wings. This gull is not your typical "snowbird". It, unlike its family member the Arctic Tern, makes a short annual migration from the northern reaches of the Arctic in Alaska, the Yukon, and Yakutia (roughly 70 degrees North) to about 60 degrees North in the Bering Strait. Brr! Occasionally these majestic birds are sighted far to the south in random locations such as California, Delaware, and even Spain. When they do, they send birders into a frenzy to find them. One Ross's Gull shocked Seattle when it turned up on Marsh Island, across from University of Washington and next to the Washington Arboretum. Sadly, reports stated that the gull looked in poor condition and birders weren't the only ones flocking to see it. A resident Bald Eagle snatched up the poor Ross's Gull. Eagles seem to have a knack for targeting birds that have been blown of course. Last



Rainier Audubon CBC, Charlie Wright spotted a Bald Eagle pick off a Short-tailed Shearwater.

### November 23rd, 2019

Recently, the mouth of the Cedar River in Renton was a busy place for gulls. In late November, Jeffrey Bryant spotted a gull with an extremely dark mantle and bright yellow feet, an unusual combination for gulls of the Pacific Northwest as our dark-mantled Western Gulls have pink legs and feet, not yellow. Turns out, the gull he sighted was a fittingly named Lesser Black-backed Gull! In addition to its dark mantle, dark wing tips, and bright yellow legs and feet, the Lesser Black-backed Gull (or LBBG in four letter birding code terms) also has a light iris like a Herring Gull. LBBG are typically found in mixed gull flocks on flat beaches or estuaries; the Cedar River Mouth would be a great place to stay. Previously, these types of gulls were mainly native to Europe and Eurasia, but established populations run up and down the American Atlantic Seaboard now.

There was another surprising gull sighting at the Cedar River. Normally hybrid species get less interest because they are not considered a countable species; however, they are nonetheless a fascinating sight, especially in the case of a Glaucous-winged – Glaucous Gull hybrid (would that be Glaucous2 Gull?). The hybrid gull can be found up and down the Pacific Coast. It has pink legs, white wing tips, and a light mantle like the arctic-loving Glaucous Gull, but otherwise looks similar to our usual Glaucous-winged Gulls.

Bio: After 20 years of searching in his backyard, Calen has yet to find his quest bird, Blue-footed Booby. Currently a student in Atmospheric Science at the University of Washington, Calen has spent the last 9 years turning in overdue Seen and Heard articles. Calen loves exploring new regions of the Pacific Northwest, but always looks forward to returning home to familiar hotspots in the South Puget Sound



## BIRDING LAKE FENWICK & WEYERHAEUSER POND

Sat, Feb 1st, 2020, 8:30 - 11:30AM  
Leader Barbara Petersen

Join Barbara Petersen to walk the trails, island and docks at Federal Way/Kent's Lake Fenwick. We'll look for wintering ducks on the lake and raptors perched or flying above. We'll need everyone's eyes and ears to help us spot birds sheltering in the surrounding shrubs and trees. Fenwick is a nice lake to visit any time of the year. Then we'll head south to see who's on the Weyerhaeuser Pond. Hope it won't be frozen over like last time I birded there. The pond edges and fields may also yield bird species, and we'll walk the road that runs from the pond to the Pacific Rim Bonsai Museum. We'll stop birding around 11:30, at which time those who wish can tour the free Bonsai Exhibit, or pay the small fee to walk about in the marvelous Rhododendron Species Garden. Both are lovely even in winter.

Meet at 8:20AM at the Wild Birds Unlimited store parking lot, 15858 1st Ave S, Burien, 98148, OR at 8:55AM in the middle parking lot at Lake Fenwick, 25828 Lake Fenwick Rd, Kent, 98032.

To sign up call Wild Birds Unlimited at 206-241-3201 and ask to be put on the list for the Feb 1st Bird Walk, OR email Barbara at [BPbatfan@aol.com](mailto:BPbatfan@aol.com)

## Weekly Birdwalks at Nisqually

Wednesdays 8 AM to 12 PM

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 visitors' 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](mailto:scrubjay323@aol.com)

## *Ending on a high note*

Christi Norman reflects on her 22 years at Audubon

Who would not want to see their photo in the NAS Magazine article Ending on a high note? What a way to head into retirement! Throughout my 22 years at Audubon Washington it has been an honor to work with all of you incredibly knowledgeable, wise, and generous chapter leaders. It has been a long road from a kid wandering the banks of the Wind River in search of Belted Kingfishers to implementing conservation through state and regional programs such as the Great Washington State Birding Trail maps and phone apps, and the recently completed Sagebrush Songbird Survey. I recall the gasp that went around the table at an Intermountain West Joint Venture meeting as I announced that that Audubon was starting a million-acre bird survey, and now we have done it!

I cut my teeth organizing Puget Sound chapters to pass the first Growth Management Critical Area Wetlands ordinances in the state (remember WETNET and the Bulldozer Guide!) followed by marketing Public Benefit Programs to provide landowners financial rewards for preserving wetlands. My first community science project initiated at Seattle Audubon, the Neighborhood Bird

Project, is still going strong after 25 years. I am pleased to have employed my artistic skills for five Audubon publications, including Important Bird Areas of Washington, the third IBA book published in the US, and presentations at four National Audubon Conventions. Expanding Audubon partnerships is a personal goal, as well as giving back to the community, hence outreach to eight tribes as new partners along the Birding Trail and joint field research and training Northern Colombia Birding Trail guides from South America.

Today, Audubon's trajectory into climate change is the perfect culmination for the Sagebrush Songbird Survey as our data will be both relevant and valuable, and just in time for 100% Clean renewable energy siting on the Columbia Plateau. I have confidence in the terrific team at Audubon Washington to carry on this important and timely conservation work.

Thanks for all the wonderful experiences.

Christi

# Finding a Snipe - Thomas Bancroft

"What's that," someone said, and I whipped around. Just 10 feet off the dike at Wiley Slough sat a plump, melon-sized shorebird, standing on only one foot. It sat sideways, its long bill pointing down the log, its right eye glued on us, a perfect profile. The key field marks -- white buffy eye-stripe, crown stripe, back streaks, buffy chest, and barred sides -- were all visible.

I stuttered for several seconds before "Wilson's Snipe" came out. It was rare to have such a good view, so close. For most of my sightings, this bird had exploded out of a marsh, like a cannonball. It then zig-zagged and disappeared instantly. Their extra-large flight muscles give them that chunky look and also allow them to fly extremely fast, immediately hitting top speeds. People hunt this solitary sandpiper, and successfully shooting one is tough, taking a lot of skill. The word sniper in our lexicon comes from that ability.



Last summer, Wilson's Snipes were displaying around Roger and Tiffany Lakes in the North Cascades. In the mornings and evenings, winnowing drifted through the subalpine landscape. Occasionally, I spotted a bird cruising across the sky, just barely visible in the subdued light. They make that sound with the outer tail feathers. Spreading the rectrices while flying, the resulting airflow vibrates. They modulate the tone by controlling the beating of their wings. That haunting chord is part of their territory defense and an advertisement for females.

They have a sexual call, too, often given on the ground by either sex. Last summer, it had me stymied for the longest time. I kept searching for the source, never finding the bird, but finally realizing it was a snipe responding to the overhead winnowing.

The eyes on these birds are set way back on the sides of their heads. They have binocular vision out the back. Consequently, their sight is excellent while they have their bill stuck down into the mud. Their eye location is a good strategy for detecting a predator while they feed. The tip of that long bill is full of sense organs and flexible, allowing them to capture prey without having to pull it back out of the mud. Females have slightly longer bills than males.

The bird shifted position, giving us a face-on view of its pectoral muscles and the barring on its chest, but it still kept that right eye zoomed right on us. We backed slowly away, trying not to disturb it.

"Now you can tell your friends you went snipe hunting," I said to the ten people in my birding group. No one laughed; they just glared at me.





Rainier Audubon Society  
PO Box 778  
Auburn, WA 98071

Nonprofit Organization  
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Kent, WA 98031  
Permit No. 441

"I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear  
I feel every day. And then I want you to act."

- Greta Thunberg

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

Circle one New / Renewal

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Are you interested in:

- Volunteering?
- Field Trips?
- Classes?

(Please circle)

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