

The Heron Herald



Rainier Audubon Society

November 2014

November 17 2014
RAS Membership Meeting

“Fill of Joy” Constance Sidles Meeting begins at 7:00 PM.

On a cold and dreary Pacific Northwest November morning, do you wonder why you bother to bundle up and go outside to bird? What is it about birding that drives us to get out there, no matter what? For some of us the driving force is love of place. For others, it is adventure, science, love of beauty, or companionship. Come join Connie Sidles in a lively discussion about why we bird and how we find meaning in our passion. Watch a slide show of birds from Montlake Fill and listen to Connie read from her newest book, "Fill of Joy."

Constance Sidles is a master birder, a nature writer and poet who has written seven books and more than 550 feature articles in 67 different publications. She has won two Maggie Awards for best nonfiction writing. She took her degree in Egyptology at the University of Chicago and graduated Phi Beta Kappa. Connie has birded the Fill for nearly 30 years and has seen nearly 200 different bird species there. The Fill is her favorite place on Earth, and Connie manages to bird there nearly every day.

In her newest collection of 32 essays about wild nature, Constance Sidles describes in luminous prose the natural beauty and wonder she finds at Montlake Fill, an island of nature in a sea of urban development. The birds Connie observes here are living gems of color, celestial singers who fill the air with their liquid notes, selfless parents, ruthless predators, clever survivors--and always fascinating.

This is not a book about birds, however. It's a guide that describes how to find joy in ordinary life. By studying the interactions of the wild creatures who share our planet, Connie distills the essence of what it means to be human -- and happy.

Join us at 6:30 PM for conversation and refreshments.



Rainier Audubon programs are held at

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

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

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



Marbled Godwit - Bottle Beach - Dan Streiffert

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
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Board Member	Max Prinsen	425-432-9965
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Board Member	Lisa Mesplay	253-946-3820
Board Member	Ed Stanton	206-870-3107
Publicity	Tom Sernka	253-529-8970

*Also serves as Board Member

Board meetings are held the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6:30 PM at the Federal Way United Methodist Church, and are open to all members.

Brown Bag Auction

Lisa Mesplay has been the Auctioneer for our annual Brown Bag Auction at our November meeting. She is not available for this year, so we need someone to coordinate this event. This is an important fund raiser for the group, so please contact Lisa or another Board member if you can do this for us.

Volunteers Needed!

- Door Greeters for Membership Meetings
- Articles for Heron Herald—send to dan_streiffert@hotmail.com
- Projection & Sound setup person for meetings.

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.

Seen & Heard by Calen Randall

“Look! They’re back! Greater white-fronts, eight of em’!” I exclaimed, as we drove down West Valley Highway. It was September 28th, and we had just spotted our first Greater white-fronted geese of the year. The flock was feasting on the corn residue, next to a flock of Canadas. We turned around to get a better look as the Speckle Bellies (which is what my grampa calls them). Up close, the white splash above their bill looked like someone had used silly-putty to tack the bills onto their heads. At the same time, I loved their stocky orange legs, that could rival Big Bird’s, from Sesame Street. Whenever I see a Greater white-front, I always think of birding with Carol Schulz a few years ago.

Carol was taking me around Kent Valley to show me some of her favorite birding spots. We were ending our day at Boeing Ponds which looked pretty slow, except for a flock of Canadas, which were at the far end of the pond. None of us felt like walking around, scope and all just to look at Canada. Then Carol jokingly said “Even though something may not look like much, it’s often worth checking it out.” Suddenly, someone said “I don’t think all of those are Canadas.” In seconds, Carol adroitly propped up her scope and gloriously exclaimed that we had come upon a flock of Greater white-fronted geese. Seventeen of them! Whenever you discover a bird with Carol, even if it is a crow, Carol has the gift of making each sighting more magical than Disney could ever muster up.

After my sighting on the 28th of September, I could not wait to get home to tell Carol. Carol responded with the sad news that her husband had passed away. I never met her husband, Lynn, but knowing what an amazing person Carol is, I know that he must have been an incredible person too. My heartfelt thoughts go out to Carol.

I will always cherish these wonderful birding outings with Carol and others from our Rainier Audubon group. Not only is it great to discover the birds, it’s wonderful to hear of all of the



as a 1994 article I read by our Audubon founder Thais Bock, who wrote about the first Barred Owls in the Green River Valley) they are a necessity to help conserve and protect the birding habitat in our Rainier Audubon territory. I encourage all of you to pair up this month with a friend, new or old, and get out and



amazing people who have been part of Rainier Audubon. Because of all of these people and their commitment to birding, we have a wonderful record and history of birds in our Rainier area. Not only are these records of bird sightings fun to read about (such

see and hear what you possibly can of the 377 bird species of King County.

Bio: Calen is a 15 year old birder. He enjoys birding around Lake Fenwick, Frager Road, and Boeing Ponds—especially with Charlie Wright. Calen is thrilled to revive Charlie’s ‘Seen and Heard’. When not birding, Calen can be seen flying up and down the ice at Kent Valley Ice Center

Field Trips by Michele Phiffer



Weekly Birdwalks at Nisqually

Wednesdays 8:00 am to Noon
Leader: Phil Kelley

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

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

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

Bring: Good walking shoes or boots, 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

Vashon Winter Water Birds

Wednesday, December 10
8:25 am to mid-afternoon
Limit 12
Leader: Ed Swan

We'll check out birds off the ferry aiming for several alcid species, all three kinds of cormorant and many types of ducks. We'll then head to Tramp and Quartermaster Harbors, the most reliable locations for Eared Grebe in King County and find more waterfowl and hopefully three to four species of loon. Time allowing, we'll go to Fisher Pond to see the freshwater ducks such as Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck and Hooded Merganser.

Meet: On the 8:25 am ferry leaving from Pt Defiance ferry dock.

Directions: From I-5: Take exit 132 (Hwy 16). Proceed west on Hwy 16 approximately 3 miles and exit on the 6th Avenue exit (signed Vashon ferry). Turn left onto 6th Avenue at the stop light. Turn right at the next stop light onto Hwy 163 (Pearl Street). Proceed north, approximately 3.5 miles, to the stop sign at the entrance to Pt. Defiance Park. Stay in the right lane and bear to the right. Do not enter the park. Auto toll plaza one block on right. Ferry terminal located at end of street. Parking to the left of terminal.

Sign-Up: When you sign up, give your phone and email and indicate whether you can drive or not. Then we'll figure out ahead of time who should park and where you should park and who will drive

participants around the Island.

Participants who park should plan to park first, get a ferry ticket second and meet up with the group on the ferry.

Sign up with Ed at:
edswan@centurytel.net

Kittitas County Birding in Winter

Sunday, December 14, 2014
6:30am to evening
Leaders - Roger Orness and Charlie Wright

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

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

Meet: At 6:30am at Auburn Safeway at Auburn Way and Main St.

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

Sign-up: Contact Charlie Wright, cwright770@gmail.com, 253-468-4146. E-mail is preferred.

No field trips for November. So sorry!

Don't forget the link to the Tahoma Audubon
Field trips: fieldtrips@tahomaudubon.org



(c) Dan Streiffert

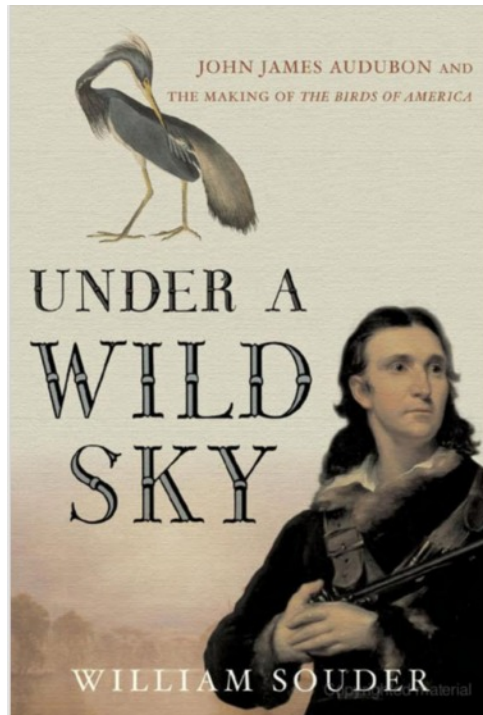
Book Reviews by Laura Lavington



This month I read a biography of John James Audubon: William Souder's 2004 *Under a Wild Sky: John James Audubon and the Making of The Birds of America*. When I first opened it, I was not sure that I was going to go ahead and read the whole book, but I found the writer's style to be engaging, and I was quickly wrapped up in the book. *Under a Wild Sky* begins at a turning point in Audubon's life: he was 38, extremely broke, and traveling from Louisiana to Philadelphia to try to get his drawings of birds published. Ultimately, Audubon was rejected by the scientific community of the east, and in the next few chapters William Souder interweaves information about Audubon's earlier years with a short history of Alexander Wilson's life. I did not know much about Scottish-born Alexander Wilson, other than that he published a book about American birds before Audubon created his famous *The Birds of America*. What I found out was that, although Wilson was already dead when Audubon got to Philadelphia hoping to publish his work, the American scientific community of the 1820s was loyal to Wilson and his *American Ornithology*, and it thus saw Audubon, who was straight from the backwoods, as some sort of imposter. In fact, in the eyes of the American establishment, not only was Audubon treading on Wilson's legacy, but Audubon had also appeared with highly untraditional animal drawings (before Audubon, animals were not depicted in motion or amidst vegetation). In the end, Audubon had to gather what money he could and take his work to England to be published.

Audubon was a businessman for some years, but he was never particularly successful—and instead was often in debt—because, since he was a teenager

first-arrived in America from France, his passion was traveling around the countryside shooting birds to draw them. It is not entirely clear when Audubon first thought of publishing his work: he did not pursue publication until he desperately needed the money. As the reader quickly finds out, it is often difficult to know the truth about Audubon, for he had a



tendency to lie. Often the lies are a little endearing, particularly when one imagines a buckskin-clad Frenchman living on what was then America's western frontier telling tall tales about his time in the woods. Good or bad, Audubon's tendency to not stick to the strict truth must have made his biographer's job a little more difficult. Naturally, Audubon's lies and tall tales also sometimes fueled his detractors.

I saw a surviving copy of *The Birds of America* when I visited the Huntington Library in Los Angeles (it was behind glass, of course). I noticed that the book was quite large, but I did not particularly

think about the size of it until I read

Under a Wild Sky. Souder tells the reader that Audubon *always* drew life-size birds (when advised to scale down his work for publication, he refused). Audubon thus used huge paper—what was referred to as “double elephant.” As one might imagine, *The Birds of America* was quite expensive. Not only was it huge, but each engraved picture had to be hand-colored (not by Audubon himself). William Souder is confident that fewer than two hundred copies of the book were ever created, partially due to its high price. The creation of the book took Audubon fifteen years (the pages were done in installments), and I think the following suggests that the book's true importance was not initially realized: some years after Audubon's death, his long-suffering widow sold the original copper engraving plates as scrap metal (she tried to sell them for what they were and could not). As they were being thrown into the furnace, the teenage son of the metal factory's manager realized what they were and saved a few. Jump forward to today: according to William Souder, the last time (as of 2004) that an original complete *The Birds of America* came up at auction, it sold to someone from Qatar for \$8.8 million.

Audubon came to see his drawings as more than a favorite pastime or a means out of debt. Souder says that, while working on *The Birds of America*, Audubon began to describe it as a kind of divine mission. Souder quotes an Audubon letter: “I know that I am engaged in an arduous undertaking; but if I live to complete it, I will offer to my country a beautiful monument of the varied
(Continued on [page 8](#))

Mewsings from Millie

William John Swainson was an ornithologist, author and self-taught naturalist. He made a name for himself as a zoological illustrator. He was born in England on October 8, 1789 and everyone in his family shared an interest in nature and science. Swainson traveled over a good part of the world learning about the flora and fauna of many different areas. After one trip to Brazil, he returned with 20,000 insects, 1,200 species of plants, 760 bird skins and drawings of 120 species of fish! There are birds all around the globe that are named in his honor such as the Swainson's Toucan and the Swainson's Anteater. Three such birds, a warbler, a thrush and a hawk, are found in North America.

Swainson's Warbler



Swainson's Warbler is one of the most secretive and least observed of all North American birds. A fairly plain little warbler, it is brown above and gray below with a pale eyebrow. It is a skulking warbler found in southern thickets of rhododendron and cane. Most likely it would go largely undetected except for its loud, ringing song. The Swainson's Warbler eats insects and spiders. It builds its nest of dried leaves, sticks and vines in the thick undergrowth. The nest is lined with pine needles, hair, grass, spanish

moss and fern stems. Two to five plain white eggs will be produced. Swainson's Warbler winters in tropical scrub.

Swainson's Thrush



Swainson's Thrush is a medium-sized brown bird with pale underparts, a spotted chest and large, buffy eyerings. Their upward-spiraling flute-like song can be heard throughout the summer in the mornings and evenings. The Swainson's Thrush eats insects and arthropods such as arachnids and crustaceans. It will also eat ants which is unusual for a songbird. The nest is an open cup made of twigs, stems, grass, moss, bark shreds and decayed leaves. It is lined with leaves, rootlets, lichens and moss.

Eggs are blue or greenish-blue speckled with red or brown. The Pacific population of Swainson's Thrush winters in Central America.

Swainson's Hawks are buteos which mean they are large with broad wings and short tails. However, they are slimmer and longer-winged than most other buteos. The Swainson's Hawk is light-bellied with a dark or red/brown chest and brown and gray upperparts.



Most males have gray heads, Females have brown heads. They have distinctive underwings with white wing linings contrasting strongly with black flight feathers. This bird spends its summers in wide-open spaces of the west. It can be spotted over grasslands, sage flats and agricultural fields. Groups of soaring or migrating hawks are called "kettles" and Swainson's Hawks are masters at forming them. They form flocks numbering in the tens of thousands often mixing in with Turkey Vultures, Broadwinged (Continued on [page 8](#))

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.

Fun Facts About Owls

- The adaptive Great Horned Owl can be found virtually anywhere in North America. Its habitat ranges from forest, and field, to tundra and desert and includes highly developed suburban areas as well.
- The feathers of all owls are especially soft and muffle wind noise. Many owls also have special comb-like fringes on the leading edge of their wings to help channel air over the wing, thereby reducing noise. These adaptations for silent flight allow the owl to make a soundless approach towards its prey.
- Great Horned Owls weigh from two to four pounds with birds in the north weighing up to two pounds more than their southern counterparts.
- An old southern legend states that if you hear a Great Horned Owl's call coming from your left side it is forecasting bad luck for you.
- Many owls can turn their heads around over 270° F, allowing them to look almost directly behind themselves. This adaptation has developed to compensate for the fact that their eyes are fixed into a bony socket in the skull and are virtually unable to move.
- Owls' eyes are unique among birds as they are located on the front of the head, instead of on the side. This not only gives them a very human appearance but also enables them to match our level of depth perception that is created by the overlapping vision from each eye.
- Owls can fly and hunt during the daytime as well as at night. However most of them are best adapted for nocturnal hunting.
- Most owls rely as much or more on their hearing as they do their sight to locate, track and capture prey.
- The ears of most owls are located asymmetrically on their head, with the right ear being higher than the left ear. Each ear hears the same sound with a slight difference, thus creating a form of audible "depth perception" which can be used to track the location and movements of their prey.
- When fully spread out, the talons of a Great Horned Owl can span up to eight inches wide.
- Great Horned Owls will prey on both skunks and porcupines.
- After digesting their most recent meal, owls will form a pellet of the undigested remains of their prey and regurgitate it. Made up primarily of fur, feathers and bones, it is egested approximately 13-16 hours after eating.
- The Great Horned Owl nests earlier than any other bird of prey in North America.
- When listening to the calls of Great Horned Owls you can distinguish the male from the female by his lower pitch and slightly slower call.
- Mortality rates for first year Great Horned Owls can range from 30-60% depending on local food conditions.

- The Great Horned Owl is probably the longest-lived owl in North America. Banding records confirm numerous owls living into their twenties, with the record lifespan being more than 27 years.



Trumpeter Swan Mania



- What date will the Trumpeter Swans arrive?
- Where in the Rainier Audubon circle will the Trumpeter's first be sighted?
- How many will be sighted?
- Number of Adults?
- Number of Juveniles?
- Send your reports to Calen (calenbirds@hotmail.com)

Book Reviews (Continued from [page 5](#))

splendour of American nature, and of my devotion to American ornithology." I definitely found John James Audubon to be an interesting figure, but I am otherwise a little uncertain about how I feel about him. Audubon killed a *lot* of birds. Yes, perhaps he was just a product of his times, but I guess it is my inability to understand that aspect of those times that makes me feel a little mixed about Audubon. Souder reports that Audubon "sometimes said a day in which he killed fewer than a hundred birds was a day wasted." Of course, Audubon shot birds so that he could draw them, but he also shot birds simply because he liked shooting them. I had had some exposure to the reality of nineteenth-century America's ability to shoot vast numbers of birds when I read the book about the passenger pigeons, but ultimately, it is still something I can't grasp.

I never found any dryness or boring minutiae in *Under a Wild Sky*, so if you are interested in knowing more about the (second) father of American ornithology, I recommend the book.

Bird Brainz

By Carley R.



Further evidence that a crow never forgets a face.

Millie, The Muse of Mews (Continued from [page 6](#))

Hawks and Mississippi Kites to create a virtual river of migratory birds. During breeding season, Hawks eat rodents, rabbits and reptiles. When not breeding, their diet is almost exclusively insects especially crickets, grasshoppers and dragonflies. They will also eat butterflies, moths and beetles. The nest is a loose bundle of sticks, twigs and debris like rope or wire. It is lined with fresh, leafy

twigs, grass, hay, weed stalks and bark. The nest will be built in the top of a solitary tree or in a small grove of trees along a stream. Eggs are off-white often blotched with red/brown. The Swainson's Hawk winters in Argentina making one of the longest migrations of any American raptor.

*Until next time,
Millie, the Muse of Mews*

Got Birds? Tell FeederWatch!

Don't let what happens at the feeder stay at the feeder.

Ithaca, N.Y.—Chickadees, Bushtits, Northern Cardinals, and other feeder birds carry an important message about the health of bird populations and our environment. In order to decode that message, people just need to count their birds and report what they see to Project FeederWatch. The 28th season of this Cornell Lab of Ornithology citizen-science project is about to begin. The door is open for new participants and more observations.

FeederWatch begins November 8, 2014, and continues through April 3, 2015. New and returning participants are urged to sign up now at www.FeederWatch.org to enjoy the full season. The project is easy to do and makes a great family activity.



More Bushtits are showing up in FeederWatch reports from western states. Photo by Thomas Meinzen. Click image to download a high resolution version. "We learn so much from the information people report to us, and the data become more and more valuable as time goes by," says project leader Emma Greig. "This is how we learned that Bushtits are increasing in the western part of the country and that more Yellow-rumped Warblers are appearing in the East."

A new tool on the FeederWatch website makes it easy for everyone to see the trends, such as the Bushtit and warbler increases, along with many others that decades of data reveal.

"With this new tool, anyone can make discoveries about bird populations using the millions of FeederWatch data points, with just a few clicks of their mouse," says Greig.

Look at reports for one species, compare two species, or compare trends in different parts of the country. The new trend graphs are in the Explore section of the FeederWatch website.

"One trend we'd like to see is more bird reports coming in from cities," Greig explains. "During the past 27 years of FeederWatch, we've only had reports of Monk Parakeets from 136 participants out of more than 50,000. We're very interested in this invasive species which has established breeding populations in cities from a few escaped caged birds. And overall, we need to hear from people with feeders in cities to make sure we're getting a good sample of urban species."

Join the 20,000 FeederWatchers from around the U.S. and Canada who already make this an important part of their year and contribute vital information to science while enjoying their feeder visitors.

To learn more about joining Project FeederWatch in the U.S. and to sign up, visit www.FeederWatch.org or call the Cornell Lab toll-free at (866) 989-2473. In return for the \$18 fee (\$15 for Cornell Lab members), participants receive the FeederWatcher Handbook and Instructions with tips on how to successfully attract birds to your feeders, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds, and a calendar. Participants also receive Winter Bird Highlights, an annual summary of FeederWatch findings, as well as the Cornell Lab's printed

newsletter, All About Birds News. The fee is \$35 in Canada. To sign up visit Bird Studies Canada at www.bsc-eoc.org.

Project FeederWatch is a joint research and education project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.



The greatest danger to our future is apathy.

- Jane Goodall



Rainier Audubon Membership Subscription or Renewal Form

One-year Membership in Rainier Audubon

- \$25—Individual Membership
- \$30—Family Membership

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.