

The Heron Herald



Rainier Audubon Society

October 2017

Rainier Audubon Membership Meeting

7:00 PM October 16, 2017

Trumpeter Swans

Martha Jordan

Trumpeter swans, the largest waterfowl in the world, have been brought back from the brink of extinction and once again grace our skies and waterways. They trumpet the success of our conservation efforts and continue to call us to action to protect farmland and wetlands. Join Martha Jordan, well-known swan biologist, to learn about the life history and biology of Washington's native Trumpeter and Tundra Swans.

Martha will shed some light on the problems and controversies these birds face on their wintering grounds and what is needed to ensure their future. Get updated on the swan lead poisoning die-off, habitat issues and more. Martha will share some excellent photos that help clarify the difficult identification of these swans and will provide free swan identification pamphlets at the meeting. Discover ways in which you can contribute to our understanding of swans in Washington just by doing what you already do outdoors.

Martha has a degree in Wildlife Science from Oregon State University. Her work with waterfowl began shortly thereafter, although swans were not her focus. She began to look at swans in the late 1970s as an independent citizen and by 1984 had contributed much information to state and federal agencies on the status of Trumpeter Swans in Washington State, including the first swan management plan. She is currently Executive Director of Northwest Swan Conservation Association, a local nonprofit dedicated to swans in Washington State and the northwest.



She is self employed, working as a professional wildlife biologist and as a human and animal **(Continued on [page 8](#))**

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

Audubon Council of Washington

The annual meeting of Audubon chapters in Washington state.

Saturday, October 14, 2017

8:00am - 4:00pm

Sequim, Washington

Jamestown S’Klallam Tribal Center

1033 Old Blyn Hwy, Sequim, 98382

<http://wa.audubon.org/events/audubon-council-washington-0>

New Rainier Audubon Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/rainieraudubonsociety/>

New Rainier Audubon Google Group / email list

We are combining the old Rainier Leaders email list with the ras-activities list into a new RainierAudubon google group.

The [ras-activities] group has been renamed to [RainierAudubon]. So if you were previously a member of this list, then you are still a member of the renamed group. The only difference being that when you send an email to this group, the address is RainierAudubon@googlegroups.com

If you did not get an invitation, you may request to join the group by going to groups.google.com and searching for “Rainier Audubon”. You can then request to join the group.

Alternatively, you can sign up on the RainierAudubon.org website.

Rainier Audubon Society Directory

Position	Name	Board Member	Phone	email
President	Heather Gibson	Yes	206-226-2050	hedder_swedder@yahoo.com
Vice President	Jay Galvin	Yes	253-939-3094	gjgalvin@comcast.net
Secretary	Open			
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Membership Chair	Pat Toth	Yes	206-767-4944	h2opat@msn.com
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Backyard Habitat Chair	Marie West-Johnson	Yes	206-817-8754	crgrie123@yahoo.com
Conservation Chair	Dan Streiffert	No	253-796-2203	dan_streiffert@hotmail.com
Newsletter Editor	Dan Streiffert	No	253-796-2203	dan_streiffert@hotmail.com
Webmaster	Treesa Hertzell	No	253-255-1808	Autumn207@comcast.net
Member at Large	Stephen Feldman	Yes	360-802-5211	stephanfeldman@gmail.com
Hospitality	Sandra Embrey	No	253-517-3633	sandra.embrey@gmail.com
Mailing	Debra Russell	No	425 829 4008	debrarussell@comcast.net
Lifetime Members	Max Prinsen	Yes	425-432-9965	

Field Trips - Barbara Petersen



Weekly Birdwalks at Nisqually

Wednesdays 8 am to 11 am
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

Fall Color and Fall Birds

Leader: Steve Johnson
Sat, October 28th, 2017
8:00 AM to early afternoon

Sign up early for this popular annual trip with Steve. Visit picturesque parks and beaches in King County and Pierce County during a great time of year to look for returning fall birds. We'll travel to local parks and beaches along Puget Sound, searching for many species of sea birds and forest birds. This is a good time of year to encounter scenic views and fall color. Expect to walk short distances from the cars.

People who wish to leave early may do so.

Bring: Lunch, beverages, and warm clothes. A scope is very welcome.

Meet: 8:00AM at the Star Lake Park&Ride north of Federal Way.

Directions: Take I-5 to exit 147 north of Federal Way. Exit onto S. 272nd St. and go west one block to the light. Turn right (north) and go one block, then turn into the P&R on the right.

Sign-Up: Call or email Steve Johnson, (253)941-9852 or johnsonsj5@msn.com

SHADOW Events

October 13th : 9:00pm to 11:30pm

Owl Prowl

Join local birding-enthusiast Joe Miles, to learn about owls, their biology, and how to make an owl call! Then, join SHADOW Lake Nature Preserve staff and birding experts for a night-time tour of the Preserve. Practice your owl calls and see if we can entice an owl to respond!

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/owl-prowl-tickets-36978205809>

October 20th: 10-11am

Guided Nature Walk

Explore the beauty of our trails with a guide to lead you through the diverse ecology represented at SHADOW Lake Nature Preserve. Guided Nature Walks are outdoor explorations that take place rain or shine. Come with weather appropriate clothes and shoes for moderate levels of walking – inclines or uneven ground may be encountered on this walk.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/guided-nature-walk-tickets-37290657360>

October 24th: 6:30-8:30

Volunteer Training Night: Mushroom Madness!

Find your place in the SHADOW Lake Nature Preserve community!

Bring your favorite treat to share and come down to the Nature Preserve for an evening of companionship and fun! Join other environmentally conscious volunteers to discover more about SHADOW's programs, additional volunteer opportunities, and learn something new!

This is a great introduction for new volunteers or an excellent refresher for seasoned volunteers!

This month, join us to learn about the mind-boggling world of mushrooms! Learn mushroom 101 from biology to life history to identification.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/volunteer-training-night-mushroom-madness-tickets-37290701492>

October 28th : 2pm to 4pm

Halloween in the Haunted Peat Bog

Bogs are full of all sorts of tricks and treats! Join us for Halloween crafts, games, treats, and a spooky celebration at SHADOW Lake Nature Preserve. Take haunted tours, play spider games, enjoy crafts and family friendly fun!

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/halloween-in-the-haunted-peat-bog-tickets-37290865984>



Imagine you are a gull, sitting on the shores of a Seattle beach. You're in a large flock of other gulls, like you, yet not one looks remotely like you. That's because you've somehow wound up several thousand miles away from your home and regular range. Little do you know, soon you will be the focal point of hundreds of birders who flock from near and far to see you. Sounds like a pretty improbable scenario doesn't it? Yet inexplicably, that is what happened to one individual gull in early September who ended up on the shores of Puget Sound. No one is certain how this gull, a Swallow-tailed Gull normally found breeding in the Galapagos Islands made its way to Seattle. Perhaps it got blown far off course by a tropical storm. Maybe its internal sense of direction got severely disjointed. Possibly it landed on a cargo ship that brought it to the Puget Sound. Whatever the reason and route it took, the gull was very far away from home.

"What even is a Swallow-tailed Gull?" I wondered as I read about the original sighting by Ryan Merrill at Carkeek Park. A quick online search and I got my answer. Swallow-tailed Gulls are unique amongst gulls as the only nocturnal hunters. They have black heads, and they are quite distinct in that in breeding plumage they have a bright red eye ring. Their long dark bill has white striping at the base and tip of it. Its feet are bright red and when it flew, you could see how its tail was forked. I laughed to myself. It looked prehistoric almost like a bird you would see in the *Flintstones* cartoons. Swallow-tailed Gulls have only ever been sighted twice in the United States, both in California and both over twenty years ago. As a Code Five (rarest) on the ABA scale, the rarity set off a pilgrimage of birders to the Seattle area to find the bird.

Not wanting to battle the I-5 traffic to Seattle, I stuck around at home

Seen & Heard by Calen

and hoped it would be hang around the area. Over the next few days, birders would search the Puget Sound for the gull after it was not seen in Carkeek Park. Each evening someone would find the gull and a few avid bird chasers would shoot over to check the bird out. It was seen in Shoreline and then the Everett Marina. Perhaps it was moving north out of the sound? Finally it was



spotted at Kayu Park in the morning, right on the border of King and Snohomish County so my Mom and I decided to try to catch a glimpse of it.

Chasing the gull was quite different than usual birding, especially because we rarely chase birds further than a half hour away from our house. In fact, the last time my Mom and I had chased a bird (a Brown Booby in Seattle) was five years ago. Still we eagerly headed out. As we drove down into the Shoreline neighborhood where it had been sighted, it soon became clear that we had company. Several dozen cars were parked along the street and at the end we could see a gathering of birders

all peering into scopes, straddling the road. From the top of the ridge I could see a flock of gulls far out on an oil refinery pier. However, the dark head of the Swallow-tail was nowhere to be seen. A fellow birder gave us directions on how to find the bird, a grey smudge even through our scope. For a non-birder--and even for my mom and me--the scene of birders was quite comical. About 40 birders,

some who had come from as far away as Florida and Ohio were crowded onto the side of a road all squinting at a bird that we could barely make out. One birder would emphatically provide play-by-play on the gull's (or grey blur's) miniscule movements. The grey blur shivered. "Preening itself" belted the birder. The grey blur twitched. "Turning its head" hollered the man. "Are we just a little bit crazy" I questioned feeling like this was a scene from the movie *Big Year* as more birders drove up.

After half an hour, a couple of anxious birders decided to try to get closer to the gull. The only problem was that to get to the gull, you had to cross a set of busy train tracks. Every ten minutes a train would come bustling down them. However, as soon as one birder crossed them and the group could see him approach the pier, the pilgrimage kick-started and dozens of birders traversed down the hill and over the tracks to go see the gull up

close. My mom and I both turned to each other and shook our heads; this was a little too dangerous just to see a rare bird. "We are not crossing those tracks," we said in unison and headed back to the van. Hopefully our little grey blur would appear in a more accessible spot the next day.

Fortunately, the next morning, we awoke and heard that the gull was in the same roosting location. The report also said that it was low tide and the gull would be legally accessible by walking up the beach from Richmond Beach, a park that had a bridge that crossed safely above the tracks. This time we made it a full family trip and my dad and my sister

Calen is an 18 year old birder entering his seventh year writing the Seen and Heard. Currently attending the University of Washington, Calen enjoys birding in the South King County and coastal British Columbia region.

came to see the bird. After an hour of beach trekking we came upon the pier where we were told by a young birder and his mom that the gull had flown to the north side of the bay past the beach. Finally, we came to the point where all the gulls were. There, 100 feet in front of us, standing in front of all the other gulls was our red-legged black-headed friend, the Swallow-tailed Gull. The sighting couldn't have been scripted better as a story. All of us got great views and photos of the gull as it stared at its feet, flew to the water with the other gulls as a Peregrine Falcon dive bombed the flock (there were more than a few hearts in mouths for the gull then),

and eyed the handful of birders on the shore.

"It is great for birders," said one woman, "but not so great for the gull being this far away from home." Amidst my excitement at seeing the rarity, I peered at the gull with the red eye ring. It seemed to carry an aura of questions that baffled us all. How had it come here? Many people theorized the answer, however most of all I wondered how the Swallow-tailed Gull would survive this far from home especially as the colder months approached. What was it thinking, so far away from its home with a paparazzi of birders following it at every turn. There were exponentially more

questions than answers. While I was thrilled and thankful for the once in a lifetime opportunity to see such a rare species, I couldn't but hope that as miraculous as its appearance had been for all of us birders, an equally miraculous journey back to the Galapagos Islands would be possible for our extraordinary equatorial gull. That would truly be a phenomenal story to write about.

Christmas Bird Count 2017

The Rainier Audubon Christmas Bird Count for 2017 is in the works. We hope everyone will come out and be part of our chapter's thirty-seven years of citizen science.

As in the past, participants can sign up to go out with a team and count birds in our Audubon circle. Teams will bird by car and by foot from 8 AM to 4 PM.

If you can't go out with a team, but want to count birds in the comfort of your own home, there's always the CBC Backyard Bird Count. Just record what you see in your yard on the CBC date and send your results to:

Calen Randall
6012 S 298th Place
Auburn, WA 98001
Email: calenbirds@hotmail.com

We're looking at possibilities for the traditional meal after the day's events where we hear the day's species tally and share about interesting finds of the day. We might try something different this year, and we'd like to have your input on this.

If you'd rather not be part of the bird count, maybe you would be able to help with the meal. We'd like help planning in advance. Also help with set-up and take down that day.

Please contact Heather Gibson 206-226-2050 hedder_swedder@yahoo.com or Marie West-Johnson 206-817-8754 crgrie123@yahoo.com

Bird of the Month: Owls

Reprint Courtesy of Wild Birds Unlimited, Burien

Owls are fascinating birds. They are mysterious, captivating and unique in many ways.

For instance, the eyes of owls 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.

The ears of most owls are special, too. They are located asymmetrically on their head with the right ear 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.

The feathers of owls are especially soft and muffle wind noise. Many owls also have 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. Many owls can turn their heads over 270 degrees 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.

Let's take a look at some common owls and learn some fun and cool facts about each of them.

Great Horned Owl

This owl can be found virtually anywhere in North America. Its habitat ranges from forest, field, tundra and desert and includes highly developed suburban areas as well.



When fully spread out, the talon of a Great Horned Owl can span up to eight inches wide. When clenched, it requires a force of 28 pounds to open. The owl uses the grip of its talons to sever the spines of large prey.

Large prey for this owl can include ospreys, peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, other owls, skunks and porcupines. They will also eat rodents, frogs and scorpions.

The male Great Horned Owl has a lower pitch and slower call than the female.

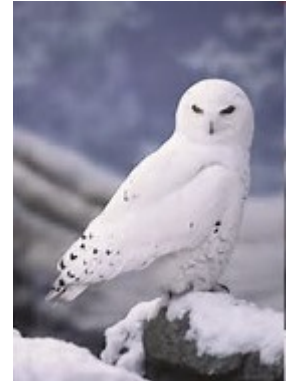
The Great Horned Owl nests earlier than any other bird of prey in North America.

A southern legend says that if you hear a Great Horned Owl call coming from your left side it is forecasting bad luck for you.

The Great Horned Owl is probably the longest-lived owl in North America, the oldest known being 28 years old.

Snowy Owl

Males are barred with dark brown when young then become whiter as they age. Females keep some dark markings throughout their lives. The whitest mature owls are always males.



These owls are diurnal. They will hunt at all hours during the continuous daylight of an Arctic summer.

An adult Snowy Owl may eat more than 1600 lemmings in a single year.

Snowy Owls are the heaviest of all owls weighing in at about 4 pounds due to thick insulating feathers.

The oldest Snowy Owl was 23 years, 10 months old.

Spotted Owl

Flying squirrels and wood rats are high priority prey for these owls. They will also eat bats and other owls.



Spotted Owls will cache prey in moss-covered limbs, under moss-covered rocks, in broken stumps and under logs. After stashing its treasure, the owl will step back and stare at its hiding place as if memorizing its location before walking or flying away.

The oldest Spotted Owl recorded is 21 years old.

Western Screech Owl

The Western Screech Owl doesn't screech. It makes an accelerated series of hollow toots.

This owl can take prey bigger than its own body such as a cottontail rabbit.



The Western Screech Owl will sometimes perch at the entrance to its roost hole during the day but will press its head and body against the tree to blend in.

The oldest Western Screech Owl in the wild is recorded at 13 years. In captivity, 19 years old.

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Barred Owl

Pleistocene fossils, 11,000 years old, of this owl have been found in Florida, Tennessee and Ontario.

Barred Owls do not migrate, in fact, they hardly go anywhere. In a study of 158 Barred Owls, none of them moved beyond a radius of 6 miles over a year's time.

Young Barred Owls can climb trees by using their bills and talons to grasp the bark, flapping their wings and "walking" up the trunk.

The oldest Barred Owl lived to be 24 years, 1 month old.



Barn Owl

Barn Owls swallow their prey whole - skin, bones and all - then twice a day cough up pellets instead of passing all the material through its digestive system.

This owl's ability to locate prey by sound alone is the best of any animal ever tested.

The oldest Barn Owl lived to be 15 years, 5 months old.



Mewsings from Millie

Reprint Courtesy of Wild Birds Unlimited, Burien

olfactory centers in their brains. This debunks the myth that nesting birds will reject a fledgling that has been handled by humans because song birds cannot detect the human scent.

There is, of course, always an exception to the rule. Vultures, kiwis, honeyguides, albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters have much better developed senses of smell. These birds can often smell food from great distances when the odor may not be noticeable to humans.

Birds do have a sense of taste but it is not well refined. Depending on the species, birds may have fewer than 50 or up to around 500 taste buds compared to a human's 9,000 – 10,000 taste buds. Birds can taste sweet, sour and bitter flavors and they learn which of those tastes is the best food source. That explains why most birds will eat safflower seed which is bitter, but squirrels and crows won't. A bird may choose one food over another not because of taste but because it is easier to acquire, there is less competition, their bills are better equipped for eating it or it has better nutrition for their dietary needs.

Birds do not use the sense of touch as much as humans do but it is still vital, particularly for flight. Birds are extremely sensitive to changes in air temperature, pressure and wind speed. Those variations are transferred down the feathers to extensive nerves in the skin.

Some birds have rectal bristles around the bill that may serve a purpose for touch when feeding on insects or drumming into wood. Other birds, particularly shorebirds and wading birds, have sensitive touch receptors in their bills which allows them to feed when probing through mud, water or other materials.

Hearing is a bird's second most important sense. Their ears are funnel-shaped to focus sound. The ears of a bird are covered with soft feathers, called auriculars, for protection.

Birds hear a smaller range of frequencies than humans but they have much more acute sound recognition skills. Birds are especially sensitive to pitch, tone and rhythm changes and use those variations to recognize other individual birds. Birds also use different sounds, songs and calls in different situations. Recognizing the different noises is critical to determine if it a warning, a territorial claim or the finding of food.

Finally, and most importantly, is eyesight. A bird's eyesight is its most critical sense. It relies on sight for flight, evading predators and finding food. The retina of a bird is thicker than a human's and birds' eyes are larger in proportion to their heads. The rods and cones packed on the retina are denser which gives them superior vision in both black-and-white and color. The range of colors that birds see is not much greater than what humans see but research is showing that some birds can see ultraviolet colors.

Birds' eyesight is exceptional in the perception of motion and detail. Birds see two to three times better than humans in that respect. Birds' eyes are generally further apart on the head giving them a wider field of view. Most songbirds' eyes are on the sides of their head allowing them to almost see directly behind themselves which can be very useful if there are predators around.

Birds have an inner eyelid (a nictitating membrane) that helps them protect their eyes and cleans them frequently. During a fight, birds use their wings to protect their eyes and when attacking, birds know instinctively to go for the eyes of the intruder.

So, there you have it! Hope this all made as much "sense" to you as it did to me!

Until next time,

Millie

The Muse of Mews

Welcome back to my musings!

Every day my people and I, and I'm sure you do too, rely on our senses to guide us through our busy days. Our eyes, ears, noses and senses of touch and taste are constantly informing us of our immediate surroundings and exploring new territory.

Of course, I got to wondering about birds and their senses. Are they the same as mine or my people? Or are they very different? Here's what I found out.....

Birds have the same senses as humans (and cats) but they are specialized to help birds survive. In addition, one species of bird may have one sense more specialized than another species.

Smell is the least developed sense in most birds. Most bird species have very small

(Trumpeter Swans - Continued from [page 1](#))

bodywork therapist and Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner.

Martha is impassioned about the role of swans. She believes their beauty and grace instill in people a sense of awe that makes us want to save them and their habitats. "Swans are ambassadors, bringing people together when other aspects of a project would divide them."

"...I think that over the years I began to realize that to each and every person a swan is something special...it's something about their grace and beauty...it's something about that they mate for life...it's something about the grandeur of such a large impressive bird...it's something about how they move that just simply stirs something in each one of us. They're extremely mysterious...I call them 'the knowledge bringers'...You never know what they are going to bring you next."

Martha Jordan
Executive Director
Northwest Swan Conservation Association
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206-713-3684 cell
www.nswswans.org
martha@nswswans.org

Upcoming Programs Dale Meland

- November 2017 - "Birds of Costa Rica" by Sam Merrill
- December 2017 - "Pigeon Guillemots: The Adorable Seabird with Bright Red Feet" by Govinda Rosling
- January 2018 - "The Birds of New Zealand: Past and Present" by Kim Adelson
- February 2018 - "Elwha Dam Removal and Recovery Update" by Jeffrey Duda
- March 2018 - "Wolf Haven International: World of Wolves"
- April 2018 - "Washington Birds and Climate Change" by Trina Bayard and Jen Syrowitz
- May 2018 - "Bees and Wing Nut Honey" by Emmy Scharnberg



(c) Dan Streiffert

Virginia Rail at Bear River NWR

Go birding and make a difference!

Are seabirds in Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca increasing or declining in numbers? Which species are changing their range? Help us find out. You can contribute to vital seabird science by joining the eleventh season of Seattle Audubon's Puget Sound Seabird Survey.

We are now recruiting enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers to help us monitor the status of our local wintering seabirds. Training on survey methodology will be provided at a location near you in September; the first seabird survey will be conducted on October 7, 2017. Volunteers should be able to identify Puget Sound's seabird species and be available on the first Saturday of each month, October through April, to conduct a 30-minute seabird survey. If determining between Lesser and Greater Scaup is a challenge, we'll team you up with more knowledgeable surveyors.

Learn more, including training dates, at www.seabirdsurvey.org and email Toby Ross, Science Manager (toby@seattleaudubon.org) if you would like more information or to take part.



A pair of Barrow's Goldeneye. Photo by [Doug Schurman](#)



Hawk Moth at Antelope Island (Salt Lake, UT)



"We must adjust to changing times and
still hold to unchanging principles."

— Jimmy Carter



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.