

The

# Heron Herald



Rainier Audubon Society

January, 2012

January General Membership Meeting  
Monday January 16, 2012 7:00 p.m.  
Federal Way United Methodist Church

## Adventures in Bird Photography Gary Luhm

**J**oin outdoor photographer Gary Luhm for a bird photography adventure in our spectacular Northwest. Gary loves finding, observing and photographing birds in their natural habitat. Some habitats are local and easy, like the backyard. Many have more difficult access, like the Washington Coast. All of them have particular challenges. Gary will discuss the why's and how's of each site. We'll visit places like Toileak Point on the Coast for Tufted Puffins, Lac Le Jeune in British Columbia for Common Loon, Bethel Ridge for Williamson's Sapsucker, Eagle Creek in Oregon for American Dipper, Bottle Beach for shorebirds, Chuckanut Bay for Harlequin Duck and the good-old backyard. Please come join, us and enjoy some inspiring photography—and a few tall tales—of NW birds.

Gary Luhm is an outdoor photographer specializing in sea kayaking. Many of his bird photos are shot from a kayak. To learn more visit his website at: [www.garyluhm.net](http://www.garyluhm.net).

Join us at 6:30 for refreshments and conversation.

### 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

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 your left.

# President's Message by ???



## Outdoor ASTRONOMY Lab Saturday, January 14: 6pm-8pm

Join us for a captivating evening with passionate astronomers! Discover the autumn constellations, planets, deep sky objects, and local satellites. We'll also learn about the motion of stars and the importance of reducing light pollution. Adults interested or experienced in Astronomy are encouraged to attend!

\$5/person or \$10/family

## Together Green Day on MLK Day! Monday, January 16: 10am-2pm

Celebrate a National day of service honoring MLK's vision of strengthening community and empowering individuals. Come help create solutions to environmental problems by performing

forest restoration, enhancing the health and function of our watershed.

## Living In Harmony Workshop Saturday, February 18: 10am-12pm

Discover how we can better live in harmony with nature. Apply real life practices to preserving and sustaining nature's innate beauty, while protecting the plants and animals within our local watershed.

\$5/person

Visit our website to register! [www.shadowhabitat.org](http://www.shadowhabitat.org)

## Christmas Bird Count

January 1st has come and gone and the results of the RAS Christmas Bird Count are being tallied and digitized and otherwise manipulated on their way to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. They will become part of the vast database used by amateur and professional birders and environmentalists to determine trends in bird populations continent-wide. Thank you to all who participated either in the field or as feeder watchers. Complete results, including the species of birds seen and volunteers helping will be in the February Heron Herald.

Nancy Streiffert

## Volunteers Needed!

- Please contact a Board Member
- Beginning Birding Instructor for Spring Course
  - Door Greeters for Membership Meetings
  - Nominating Committee Members
  - Articles for Heron Herald—send to dan\_streiffert@hotmail.com

## RAINIER AUDUBON OFFICERS

President	Open	
Vice President	Steve Feldman*	360-802-5211
Treasurer	Jim Tooley*	253-854-3070
Secretary	Heather Gibson*	253-856-9812
Program Chair	Dale Meland*	253-946-1637
Field Trip Chair	Carol Schulz	206-824-7618
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Education Chair	Annette Tabor*	253-927-3208
Christmas Bird Count Coordinator	Nancy Streiffert	253-796-2203
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Board Member	Alex Juchems*	253-529-8996
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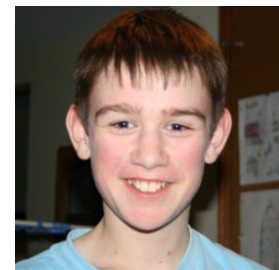
\*Also serves as Board Member.

Board meetings are held the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM in the church conference room and are open to all members.

## Upcoming Events

- Jan. 7, 2012—Environmental Priorities Coalition Legislative Workshop
- Jan. 25, 2012—Lobby Day
- February 20 - Christie Norman "Puget Sound Loop - WA Birding Trails"
- March 19 - Connie Sidle - Book Reading and discussion
- April 16 - Maria Ruth "Marbled Murrelet"

## Seen and Heard by Calen Randall



The holiday season is a time to congregate with our families to celebrate. Some of us journey distant miles to visit family and friends. Each year, my grandparents make the 2000+ mile trip from Manitoba, Canada to Auburn, Washington to spend time with us. They have come so many times that when Christmas nears, we joke that it is time for their yearly migration. The effort they make to come is enormous: driving for four days and facing icy roads and snowstorms. But, their journey is worth it—for all of the games we play, stories we tell, and the happiness we share. One highlight this year was taking my grandpa birding around Lake Fenwick and in the Kent/Auburn Valley on November 26<sup>th</sup>. We stopped at Carpinito Brothers Pumpkin Patch across from Smith Brother Farms on West Valley Highway and sat and watched one of my favorite birds: the Trumpeter Swan. We saw about 40 grazing.



The Trumpeter Swan makes a similar migration as my grandparents do—both looking for better food and warmer temperatures! Only, the Trumpeter Swan travels from Alaska. As I sat beside my grandpa in the car, I thought about how meaningful it was, that these two paths, my grandpa's and the swans', had crossed. Not only because of the length of each of their journeys, but also because of how close to extinction the swans had come. Before my grandpa's time, the trumpeter swan population was in jeopardy. Thanks to the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act and conservationists' hard work throughout the years, the swans were able to make a comeback. Today, there are over 16000 of them, with over 80% of them on the Northwest Pacific Coast.

Trumpeters truly are family birds. They mate for life. Each year, the parents fly south with their young—passing on geographical knowledge and survival skills so that generations to come will feed at the same places. As I watch these families, I wonder what the parents are teaching the young. How do the different ages interact? Do they tell stories? Do they play games together like we do with our family?

These birds are truly amazing. It is a gift that they are still here. I hope that you have a chance to get out and see them this winter.

### The Seen and Heard Challenge

It is time for a New Year's resolution. This year, my resolution is to get better at recognizing bird calls. I know many birds using my eyes, but do not with my ears. Two bird websites that have audio bird calls are Cornell's Lab of Ornithology [www.Allaboutbirds.org](http://www.Allaboutbirds.org) and [www.whatBird.com](http://www.whatBird.com)

My challenge for you this month is to go outside, close your eyes and listen to the different bird calls. Try to focus on one and identify the call. See how many bird calls you can correctly identify. Try to beat your previous number the next time you go out. Good luck!

### Recent Sightings

Thanks to Ralph and Sandra Embrey (SE), Dan Streiffert (DS), Lisa Mesplay (LM), and Annete Tabor (AT) for their reports.

### Common Birds Seen this month

Mourning Doves, Steller's Jays, Dark-eyed Oregon Juncos, Northern Flicker (yellow and red shafted), Pileated Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker (All sent in 11/19/11 by SE), and Trumpeter Swans (12/03/11 by AT).

### Seen & Heard of the Month: A Descent of Woodpeckers

This month's Seen & Heard of the month goes to Sandra Embrey, who spotted five different species of woodpecker in her backyard in one day: a Yellow Shafted Northern Flicker, a Red Shafted Northern Flicker, a Pileated Woodpecker, a Downy Woodpecker, and a wee Hairy Woodpecker! As Sandra said, "It

*(Continued on page 6)*

*Bio: Calen is a 12 year old birder. He enjoys birding around Lake Fenwick 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 Carol Schulz



### 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 estuary 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 estuary boardwalk extension. In winter the estuary boardwalk is 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, raingear, 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).

### Soos Creek Owl Prowls

Saturday Night, Feb 4 -  
or Sat. Night, Mar 10  
10:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.  
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.

**Directions:** Take James Street east from Kent. To reach James St, exit I-167 at Willis, turn east to Central, and North to James. Travel east on James as it becomes SE 240th St. Travel about 4 miles, as 240th dips and turns downhill. Turn right (south) on 148th Ave near the bottom of the hill. The Soos Creek maintenance yard will be down the road about 1/4 mile on the left at a barn and chain-link-fenced parking lot.

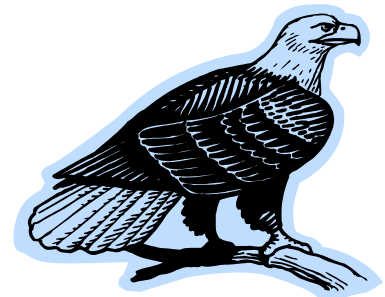
**Sign-up:** Call Kent Commons, Kent City Parks and Recreation, 253-856-5000. This trip FILLS EARLY. Please register in advance.

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

### RAPTORS OF THE AUBURN/KENT VALLEY

Sunday, Feb 12, 2012  
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 car pool and return by 2 PM.

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

**Sign-up:** Space is limited, so email or call Roger soon to reserve your spot. Roger Orness, [r.orness@comcast.net](mailto:r.orness@comcast.net), 253-922-7516, 253-312-6561(cell)

### There are no trips being offered YET during late January.

Watch for a posting of a possible field trip on our website at [www.rainieraudubon.org](http://www.rainieraudubon.org).



## Fun Facts About Towhees

Reprint Courtesy of Wild Birds Unlimited, Burien

- *Towhees are usually shy sculkers and rush for cover at the slightest disturbance.*
- *There are six species of Towhees in North America; Spotted, Eastern, Green-tailed, Canyon, Abert's and California. Only the Eastern Towhee is found east of the Mississippi River.*
- *Towhees are members of the sparrow family.*
- *Towhees are ground feeders and use a hop-and-scratch foraging method. While jumping forward with its head and tail up, it kicks its strong legs backwards to uncover its food in the leaf litter on the forest floor or underneath feeders where the seeds are clearly visible.*
- *In 1586 John White became the first European to discover and draw the Eastern Towhee. He had come to North Carolina as the governor of Sir Walter Raleigh's doomed colony on Roanoke Island.*
- *The name "towhee," a simulation of the bird's call, was coined in 1731 by the naturalist and bird artist, Mark Catesby.*
- *The Eastern Towhee and the Spotted Towhee were both named the Rufus-sided Towhee until 1995 when they were determined to be genetically separate species.*
- *Northern populations of the Eastern Towhee are migratory; southern populations are year-round residents.*
- *The Spotted Towhee seems to be somewhat hardier than the Eastern Towhee, as it withstands lower temperatures.*
- *About 30 percent of the Spotted Towhee's food is insects and the rest is seeds and berries.*
- *Spencer Baird was the first person to describe the Abert's Towhee in 1852. He named it for Lt. James William Abert, a U.S. Army topographical engineer, who obtained the specimen during a survey of New Mexico.*



Photo by Dan Streiffert

- *Abert's Towhees average two successful broods a year despite living in a harsh hot and dry environment, but it may take as many as six nesting attempts to produce the two broods.*
- *California Towhees aggressively defend their territories year-round and often battle their own reflections in windows and other reflective surfaces.*
- *The California Towhee was first named as a separate species in 1839. By 1886, it had been lumped in with the Canyon Towhee and both were renamed the Brown Towhee. In 1989, DNA studies once again separated the two species.*
- *California Towhees are known to use the morning dew on plants as a source of water.*
- *Female Green-tailed Towhees distract predators away from their nest by dropping straight down to the ground and running away in a mouse-like fashion.*

**Seen & Heard** (Continued from page 3)

was a Woodpecker Day.”  
Congratulations Sandra!

**Mystery Bird of the Month**

I chose this bird as it was seen by two reporters, Dan Streiffert (not one but two!) and Lisa Mesplay. Usually at this time of year, this bird is commonly seen snacking on apples at our house; however, we’ve been shut out! The food must be better at the Streiffert and Mesplay households! Here are your clues to this month’s Mystery Bird:

I am shy and like to spend my time  
in coniferous forests  
When I ‘speak’ I am easily heard  
with my powerful voice—some  
say is a *F Minor chord*  
To some I come as a sign of cold  
weather  
I am a masked marvel  
I sport a black breast plate—though  
some prefer to call it a necklace  
A group of me is known as a  
“mutation” or a “hermitage”  
I am from the family *Turdidae*  
My cousin is the American Robin  
Do you know who I am?

Enjoy this month seeing and hearing birds. I hope one of us will be reporting a Snowy Owl sighting with this year’s irruption. Send your sightings/hearings to [calenbirds@hotmail.com](mailto:calenbirds@hotmail.com) I love reading your reports!

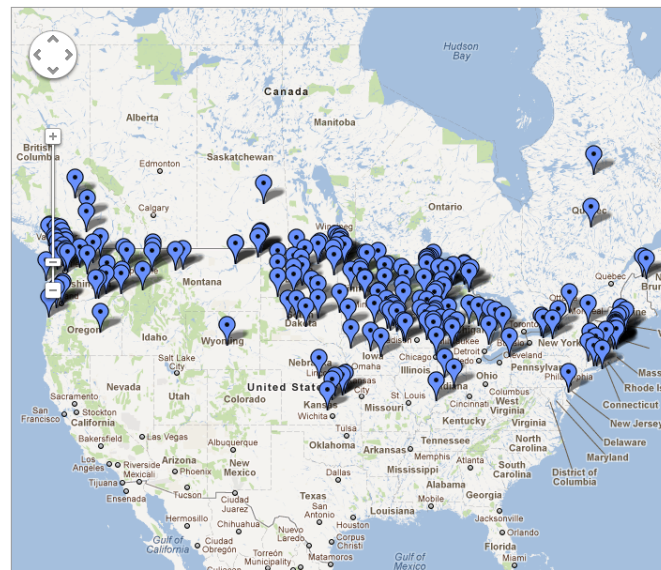
ANSWER: Varied Thrush

**Snowy Owl Video**



<http://danstreiffert.smugmug.com/Other/Videos/i-BfBPzk/1/M/Snowy-Owls-M.jpg>

**Snowy Owls in the Upper US and Canada, 2011-12** <http://g.co/maps/ttk4b>



**Birding Trail’s Puget Loop For Sale \$4.95**

Delight your favorite birders with the newest – the seventh and final – map of the Great Washington State Birding Trail: the Puget Loop. Hot off the press, this signature route features 220 of our 346 annually recorded bird species around Puget Sound from Seattle to Mt. Rainier, plus Lake Washington, Kitsap Peninsula; and Vashon, Bainbridge, Whidbey and San Juan islands. .

**On Sale at our January Membership Meeting and at Wild Birds Unlimited (Burien Store <http://www.southseattle.wbu.com/>).**

All proceeds go to Rainier Audubon.



### Mewsings from Millie

**H**ello and welcome once again to my mysterious musings!

A customer came into the store a short while ago and said that a Snowy Owl had been seen in West Seattle. I thought, "Yeah, right! This guy's watched the Harry Potter movies one too many times!" Then I saw an e-mail from a reputable nature photographer who said there was a Snowy on the Frye's store in Renton! This really got my curiosity up so I went to the West Seattle blog. Sure enough, there was a photo of a Snowy Owl perched on a house up near Schmitz Park! It appears the birds are irrupting southward this year and have been spotted all over western Washington and across the northern United States! If you see one, it should be fairly easy to identify. They are BIG birds, twenty-two inches tall with a fifty inch wingspan. The Snowy has a round head, yellow eyes and is mostly white with varying amounts of mottling.

What would cause this irruption or movement southward? A high level of reproduction resulting in

a subsequent food shortage in the Arctic where they nest and normally spend the winter.

The other exciting news in the store is that the new and final map from the Great Washington State Birding Trail has arrived! It's the Puget Loop map and it is beautiful! The best part is that all proceeds from selling the map go to the Rainier Audubon Society.

It's fairly common to see crows chasing and harassing a hawk or bald eagle. Why do those crazy birds do that? Aren't they afraid they will get hurt? The harassing and chasing is actually an antipredator behavior called "mobbing" and it tends to be present in those species whose young are frequently preyed upon. Birds that nest in colonies such as gulls are known to attack intruders including humans. Birds that most frequently mob predators include mockingbirds, jays, chickadees and blackbirds. Besides driving the predator away, mobbing also draws attention to the predator preventing stealth attacks.

Halcyon is the name of a legendary Greek bird. The phrase "halcyon days" comes from the belief that fourteen days of calm weather were to be expected around the winter solstice. That is when the halcyon calmed the waters of the sea in order to tend to her eggs on a floating nest. The

halcyon was commonly associated with the kingfisher that was also said to nest on the sea and was believed to be able to calm the waters for seven days before and seven days after the winter solstice.

Have you ever wondered what causes the throat feathers or "gorget" of many hummingbirds to sparkle and shine? The iridescent colors are the result of the refraction of light caused by the microscopic structure of the feathers. The refraction works like a prism, splitting the light into rich shimmering colors. At certain angles, the gorget can appear black because little or no light is reflected back to the eye of the viewer.

Speaking of viewing, I think I'm going to plant myself near the front window and keep on the look out for one of those Snowy Owls. That would be something to see!

Until next time,  
Millie  
The Muse of Mews

#### Sign up for our new Google Group!

We have recently created a new group to serve as an email list server for Rainier Audubon. The intent of this site is to assist in publicizing our activities 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 our website or at:

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



Rainier Audubon Society  
PO Box 778  
Auburn, WA 98071

Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Kent, WA 98031  
Permit No. 441

"A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song."--Chinese Proverb

## Rainier Audubon Membership Subscription or Renewal Form

One-year Membership in Rainier Audubon

- ◇ \$20—Individual Membership
- ◇ \$25—Family Membership

To join or renew, mail this application with your payment to:  
Rainier Audubon Society - Membership  
PO Box 778  
Auburn, WA 98071



Or go to <http://www.rainieraudubon.org/> to enroll online.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

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