

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 29
Issue 4
Dec. 2020

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

December 9, 7:00 p.m.

This meeting will again be via Zoom on-line since pandemic-prevention restrictions continue to keep us from meeting in person. To join the Zoom meeting (ID: 816 1213 3631, Passcode: 212973), link to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81612133631?pwd=eDJGVlc1RnBilzVocnp2UEQxY2QxUT09>

“Ever wonder about dead trees? They are full of life. In fact, about 1/3 of wildlife in forests of Washington are directly dependent on dead wood for some part of their life cycle.

A Dead Tree's Excellent Adventure: The Ecology of Dead Wood

Ken Bevis will present an interesting program entitled, “A Dead Tree's Excellent Adventure: The Ecology of Dead Wood,” on December 9, via Zoom. He will explore how dead trees persist in the environment, how they change with time and some of the fascinating species associated with them, particularly woodpeckers. He might even play a song



Pileated Woodpecker
© Patricia Ediger



Red-naped Sapsucker
© Bob Cashen

Ken Bevis is the Stewardship Biologist for the Washington Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) Small Forest Landowner office. Ken is originally from Virginia, and has lived in Washington since 1986. He has worked for the U. S. Forest Service, the Yakama Indian Nation, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (15 years) and now, DNR. He holds a BS in Forestry and Wildlife from Virginia Tech (1979), and a Masters of Biology from Central Washington University (1994), where he studied woodpeckers and dead trees. He now helps landowners learn how to manage small private forest lands for forests and wildlife. He frequently teaches workshops and classes for Washington State University Extension programs. He sings, is fascinated with dead trees, and works to find humor in everything.



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The Pygmy Owl, the newsletter of the Spokane Audubon Society, is published monthly, September through June.

Spokane Audubon Society
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Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and pg. 8 © Jan Reynolds.



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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status October 20 through November 19, 2020:

Welcome and thanks to our new members:

Individual: Evelyn Florio, Elizabeth Myers, Terrie Preston, Kyle Williams

Family: James & Sheila Harless

Contributing: Sharon Lindsay

Many thanks to our returning members:

Individual: Mary Jean Porter, Chuck Kerkering, Fran Haywood, Karen Santora, Steven Siegfried, Terry Vanhoozer

Family: Theresa Puthoff & Larry Deaver, Jane Beaven & Dan Finn

Supporting: Pam McKenney & Mike Regan, Brent & Vicki Egesdal

Contributing: Michael & Pam Dixson, Therese Nielsen

You can help us reduce our costs and energy use and save paper by switching to our electronic publication. Please send your email address to me, Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com. I will make sure that you get the Pygmy Owl in your email inbox. Another way to get the Pygmy Owl is to go to our website: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/the-pygmy-owl>.



Northern Shrike

© Alan McCoy

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Winter came early this year, with several measurable snowfalls already on the books and counting. Saltwater duck species continued throughout the region. The annual late fall influx of Anna's Hummingbird's is in swing and has been increasing slowly over the past few years. Of note is a major irruption of Blue Jays through the Inland NW, with many dozens of birds at multiple locations. This is arguably the largest irruption of this species in at least 20 years. White-throated Sparrows continued their especially strong fall showing. Redpolls are being seen here and there around the region; look for more at feeders and in mixed flocks with other small finches. Notable bird sightings below:

Long-tailed Duck: Genesee (10/24-CL); Colville River (11/6-TL)

Surf Scoter: Rock Lake (10/19-RB); Mill Canyon (10/21-CM); St. Maries (10/22-CL); Hawk Creek CG (10/23-TL); Hayden (10/24-DW); Rosalia (10/30-RB); Ellisport Bay (11/16-JR and RDC); Sprague (11/17-JI)

White-winged Scoter: Potlatch (10/22-NP and KD); Spokane Premix (11/15-JE)

Red-breasted Merganser: Sprague (11/11-eBird)

Anna's Hummingbird: Hayden (10/24-DW); Spokane Valley (10/16-NT); Spokane Valley; (11/8-MC); Moscow (11/18-NP)

Sandhill Crane: Saltese Wetlands (11/8-MC)

Clark's Grebe: Rock Lake (10/20-RB)

Pacific Loon: Blue Creek Bay (10/19-DW); Sprague (10/26-JI); Silver Lake (11/3-JI)

White-headed Woodpecker: Mill Canyon (10/15-TL)

Blue Jay: Pullman (10/17-JW); St. John (10/20-RB); Spokane Valley (10/21-eBird); Ponderay (10/22-JR); Post Falls (10/26-eBird); Pullman (11/2-MM); Latah (11/2-JE); Pine Bluff (11/2-eBird); Viola (11/4-NM); Bonner's Ferry (11/7-JR); Wilbur (11/15-eBird); University of Idaho (11/14-MS); Silvertown (11/15-eBird); Spokane (11/16-SW); Hole-in-the Ground (11/17-JI)

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch: Mt. Spokane SP (10/20-TO); Harker Canyon (10/23-TL); Moscow (10/23-NP); Moscow (10/24-BB); Potlatch (11/8-NP)

Pine Grosbeak: Salmo Pass (10/-eBird); Spokane SP (11/3-MW); Northrup Canyon (11/6-MY);

White-winged Crossbill: Mt. Spokane SP (10/22-eBird); Northrup Canyon (11/6-MY); Moscow Mountain (11/11-KD); Priest Lake (11/14-TL)

Lesser Goldfinch: Saltese Wetlands (11/8-JI); Feryn Ranch (11/19-TO)

Lapland Longspur: Deer Park (10/22-CM); Troy (10/24-CL); Grand Coulee (10/31-MY)

White-throated Sparrow: Garfield (10/20-eBird); University of Idaho (10/22-BM); Spokane (10/25-MW); Pinehurst (10/25-eBird); Country Homes (10/27-MS); Hayden (10/27-DW); Viola (11/17-NM)

Swamp Sparrow: Reardan (10/23-TL)



White-headed Woodpecker

© Steve Dowlan

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; MaC-Marlene Cashen; SC-Stacy Crist; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; KiD-Kirsten Dahl; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JoE-Johnna Eilers; JE-Jacob Elonen; BF-Bob Flores; FF-Fred Forssell; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-David Kreft; GL-Greg Lambeth; TLa-Terry Lane; TL-Terry Little; CoL-Courtney Litwin; CL-Carl Lundblad; CM-Curtis Mahon; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; TO-Tim O'Brien; PO-Peter Olsoy; JP-Jim Patten; CP-Chris Pease; NP-Neil Paprocki; JR-Jethro Runco; PS-Pall Sieracki; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark; KS-Katie Sorenson; AS-Adam Stepniewski; CS-Charles Swift; DW-Doug Ward; SW-Steven Warren; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; MY-Matt Yawney

Fire in the Shrub Steppe Wildland Urban Interface Webinar Series

Please join us for a Fire in the Shrub Steppe Wildland Urban Interface Webinar Series

The sagebrush steppe is one of the largest ecosystems in North America and one of the most threatened, due to human land use conversions, non-native plant invasions, and wildfire. Fire and community resiliency practitioners and partners have requested opportunities to learn and share knowledge around fire ecology, behavior, management, and community engagement strategies in this unique landscape. In response to this need, and in light of the current global pandemic, this workshop has been adapted to a virtual series, providing a broad overview of working with fire and communities in the shrub steppe by a variety of expert presenters. This webinar series will introduce us to the ecology of this unique ecosystem in Washington State, the past and current role and impact of fire on the landscape, and to many of the brilliant folks working every day to manage and protect critical habitat, wildlife, and communities living with fire in the shrub steppe.

You may register for one, some, or all of the webinars.

For more details and to register, visit: <https://www.fireadaptedwashington.org/learn/>

Contact Information

Questions? Please contact Hilary Lundgren (hilary@washingtonrcd.org, 360-464-7501) or Tessa Vermeul (tessa@washingtonrcd.org, 509-540-0763)

We will be utilizing the Zoom webinar platform. Please contact tessa@washingtonrcd.org if you have audio/video accessibility needs (e.g., interpretation, closed captioning, video support).

Huge decline in abundance of life on Earth

Wildlife populations plunged by 68% between 1970 and 2016, and only 25% of the planet can still be considered 'wilderness'. The [grim numbers come from a report by wildlife charity WWF and the Zoological Society of London \(ZSL\)](#), based on global data on 20,811 populations of 4,392 vertebrate species. Worst hit are Latin America and the Caribbean, where the animal population dropped by an average of 94% during that period. Food production is the biggest driver of nature loss, says the report, with about half of the world's habitable land area already used for agriculture. "We are wrecking our world — the one place we call home — risking our health, security and survival here on Earth," says WWF chief executive, Tanya Steele.

[BBC | 5 min read](#)

Reference: [WWF and ZSL Living Planet Report](#)

Skeletons on the Hill

by Ken Bevis,
DNR Stewardship Wildlife Biologist

She presided over her lands with wide spreading arms, providing grace and shelter for many. Birds loved being near her and often perched in the folds of her luxuriant robes. She fed deer and the soil with all of the things she carefully placed around her solid feet. She deeply held the soil she loved and nourished. Life was good for a long, long time until that fateful day....

When she died...lightning strike perhaps? ...she did stand tall on the hill. Or was it simple ravage of pathogens clogging up her veins? Or did she die from starvation or no water? We don't know, but suddenly, she wilted. Her flesh withered and became dry and brown...scabby even. Pieces fell to the earth, one at a time, after dangling pathetically for long periods, waving in the wind. Miraculously, she did not fall over, but came apart, one slow piece at a time. Her body falling apart bit by bit.

It took only a few short years for her lush exterior tissues to express death, and fall away. All that was left was her vast skeleton and the rough gray/brown skin outside. For a while even this hung on, loose on her surface, spooky night-flying bats resting underneath. Eventually, even that fell away, one sheet at a time.

All that remains is her stark white skeleton standing high on the hill today, fully a century since her untimely death, haunting us with a scary silhouette. Some onlookers feel a chill when they peruse the tall, standing dead tree; the SNAG.....

It reminds us of death and Halloween, with goblins, ghosts, monsters and SKELETONS rattling about. In fact, snags do rattle in the wind sometimes. Don't lean on her. Don't linger too long. She likes to throw big branches down to smash you. And they are stark tree skeletons.

But wait! Isn't that woodpecker tapping on the snag? What is it doing? It's digging for something to eat. He finds an insect and pulls the delicious treat from the dead wood. And are those mushrooms and fungal conks coming out of the stem? Yes, dead wood is a rich substrate for fungal growth of many types, including some of those that produce a deep death-like sleep. Be careful what you eat.

And that woodpecker just went into a dark cavity hole high on the stem, right below the red-tailed hawk perched in the top, right next to the spooky ravens croaking "Nevermore". A squirrel just went into that other cavity, lower on the stem, hoping to survive the evening. Night falls and an owl gives eerie hoots as he emerges from a cavity. Bats come swarming out of cracks and holes, flying out into the night. There are many creatures living in and on the snag corpse, like an eerie mansion! Bwa HA HA HA!!!

Turns out that dead wood is an essential habitat feature of forest ecosystems. And rotting wood feeds the soil, feeds the fungus, and rots away everything, including dead bodies.

I was all spooked out by the snag. Not anymore. It appears to be alive yet! Skeleton indeed, but a living one.

Protect snags whenever you can, especially big ones.

Dead trees are full of life!



Majestic Skeleton
© Ken Bevis



Little King: Ruby-crowned Kinglet

One of North America's smallest songbirds, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, is tinier than a Black-capped Chickadee and only a bit larger than a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Unremarkable at first glance, this diminutive bird is a drab olive-green and gray, with a white eye ring and wing bars. But a closer look reveals that this flitty songbird is anything but boring.

Its genus, *Regulus*, means "little king" in Latin. True to its name, when the male kinglet is excited or agitated, he raises his scarlet "crown." Females lack the red crest but otherwise look identical to males.

Wing-flicking Ways

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet rarely sits still, flitting, hopping, and flying around in short, energetic dashes. As it moves, it constantly flicks its wings — and it's this ceaseless motion that makes identification easy. A few other species, such as the related Golden-crowned Kinglet and the Hutton's Vireo of the western U.S., flick their wings, but none as constantly as the Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Wide-ranging Kinglet

Three subspecies of Ruby-crowned Kinglet are recognized, distributed across northern, western, and some eastern parts of North America. This species can be found in a wide variety of habitats, including

coniferous and deciduous forests, thickets, scrub, and edge. During migration, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet is often sighted in suburban yards as well. In its winter range, this bird favors low woodland habitats.

Most Ruby-crowned Kinglets migrate to the southern U.S. and Mexico each winter, although some western populations are permanent residents. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet lingers later into fall than do other insect-eating birds such as the Blue-winged Warbler and the Wilson's Warbler. The kinglet can linger because in addition to insects, it will also eat berries and suet at feeders.

The Ruby-crowned Kinglet's loud, jumbled song belies its tiny size. This three-part ramble consists of a series of high-pitched notes, two to five low trills, and a repeated three-note "galloping" phrase that can vary by individual. One of its most distinctive calls is a dry "ji-dit," often heard before the tiny bird is spotted.

Help Provide Stronger Safeguards for the Greater Sage-Grouse

Over 90 percent of the Greater Sage-Grouse's historic population is gone today, and declines continue across its range in the western U.S.

The grouse's greatest threat – habitat loss – continues to have an enormous impact on its populations. Just this year, wildfires have affected tens of thousands of acres of sagebrush habitat in eastern Washington, which support the tiny population of Columbia Basin grouse. Meanwhile, oil and gas development is being proposed for vast areas of the inland West that the grouse inhabits.

Despite these persistent threats, the Greater Sage-Grouse remains exempted from protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), a vital safety net that will be essential to its survival if populations continue to decline.

[Please ask Congress to remove the ESA listing moratorium on the Greater Sage-Grouse, making this iconic species eligible for an effective safety net.](#)

How did a bird clearly facing extinction come to be exempt from the Endangered Species Act? In 2014, Congress passed a bill to temporarily prevent the species' protection under the ESA. Six years later, the grouse is still not eligible for these protections.

Congress will soon decide whether or not the moratorium on ESA listing will continue. With significant yearly population declines in various states, the grouse urgently needs the possibility of enhanced protection.

[Act now: Tell lawmakers to oppose attempts to reduce safeguards for the Greater Sage-Grouse.](#)

Conserving sagebrush ecosystems isn't just good for the grouse. More than 350 other species would also benefit from conserving the sagebrush ecosystem – bird species like the Sagebrush Sparrow and Sage Thrasher, as well as animals like the Mule Deer and Pronghorn.

This is a critical moment for the Greater Sage-Grouse. Let Congress know that it needs to act now on behalf of this icon of the American West.

Steve Holmer
Vice President of Policy
American Bird Conservancy

Comments due Dec. 30 for state up-listing of Greater Sage-Grouse

The Spokane Audubon Society board has submitted support for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife proposal to up-list the Greater Sage-grouse from state threatened to state endangered species protective status. But **your individual comments** on this proposal will help, too, and should be sent by Dec. 30 to TandEpubliccom@dfw.wa.gov.

We believe that this up-listing could help recover Sage-grouse by better protecting habitat from land use changes through Department expertise consultations in state regulatory processes.

We have worked with the Department to help recover both Sage-grouse and Columbian Sharp-tailed grouse in eastern Washington. Our volunteers have helped with re-introduction and monitoring efforts at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and other prairie grouse habitat for many years.

Wildfires last year and just this September reduced habitat for both species so significantly that our chapter has so far donated \$10,000 for habitat restoration. We're working with the Department's Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) grant manager to apply another \$8,000-plus left in our grant for grouse monitoring towards habitat restoration. On November 4, several of our members helped plant over 5,000 forbs on a portion of the burned area at Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area, and we are ready to help again next Spring when more plants are available.

We also will continue to lobby for long-term maintenance of private land habitat that depends on Farm Bill programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

We are as invested in protecting shrub-steppe species, including Sage-grouse, as anyone. We just hope it's not too late for Sage-grouse, given the extent of habitat loss with this year's fires. Up-listing this species' protective status to state endangered is the least we can do.

YOU CAN SAVE BIRDS

from flying into windows!



Black and white Warbler by Laura Erickson

Millions of birds die every year, because they can't tell reflections from reality. **Almost half hit home windows.**

Never had a bird hit your window? More likely, you haven't been there when it happened. **But the odds are that sooner or later, your windows will kill a bird.**

Even small windows can be dangerous, as many birds fly into small spaces.

ABC has identified solutions that work. Most birds will avoid patterns on glass with vertical stripes four inches apart or less, or horizontal stripes spaced two inches or less apart. Stripes should be at least 1/8" wide and readily visible. Irregular patterns that follow these guidelines will work too.



This Barn Swallow dove through the small space shown at top flight speed —over 30 miles per hour! Photo by Keith Ringland

For more information contact
Dr. Christine Sheppard,
Director, Glass Collisions Program,
csheppard@abcbirds.org



Solyx Bird Safety film covers the entire glass surface of this building at the Bronx Zoo. Photo: Chris Sheppard



ABC Birdtape, shown here on a window at the Estero Llano Grande State Park, Texas, can be applied in strips or blocks. Photo: Kate Sheppard

Bird Collisions at Home Windows

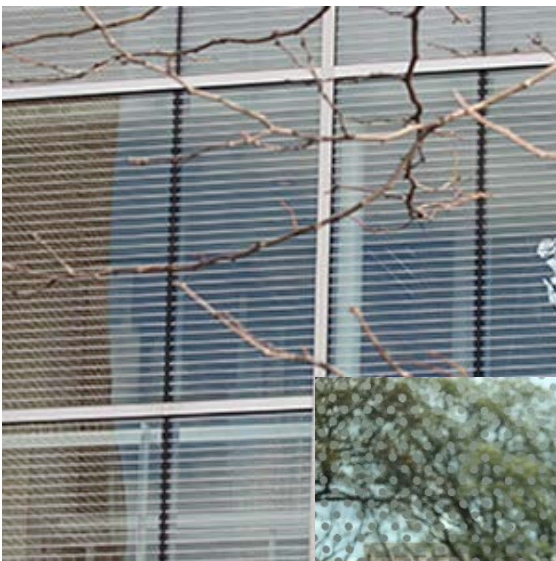
Almost 50 percent of bird collision mortality happens on home windows, and the most likely place for birds hitting windows is near bird feeders.

If you have outside screens on all your windows, you're already on your way to having a bird-friendly home. The patterns made by mullions in colonial windows also reduce the likelihood of collisions.

Window Solutions to Help Birds

Research has identified ways to alert birds to windows. The easiest way to stop birds hitting windows is to apply visible patterns to the outside of windows.

- Most birds will avoid glass with vertical stripes spaced four inches apart or horizontal stripes spaced two inches apart. Stripes should be at least 1/4" wide. Generally, white stripes perform better, as they are visible against more backgrounds.
- Patterns and even artwork done on glass with tempera paint will last a surprisingly long time, can be easily removed or replaced and are non-toxic. Tape and decals are readily available on the internet or at stores for bird lovers.
- Cords or netting can be mounted in front of glass, as can external motorized shades and screens.
- Not all windows are equally hazardous. Check to see which of your windows are most reflective and closest to areas where birds are active, like feeders. Collisions happen more frequently when more birds are present, such as during spring and fall migration and when many young birds are present.



Christmas Bird Count During a Pandemic!?

by Alan McCoy

Birding is keeping a lot of people sane this year. Elections and COVID-19, masks and politics; enough already! Well I think one of the best things to do to de-stress is go outside to watch birds. It is easy to keep a safe distance from others and being outside lowers the risk of spreading infection. So this year especially we are encouraging folks to participate in a Christmas Bird Count (CBC) near you! Get general information about the Christmas Bird Count from the National Audubon Society here.

All Christmas Bird Counts are conducted on a chosen date between December 14th and January 5th each year and within a 15-mile diameter circle. The closest CBC circles in our area are around Spokane and Cheney, but there are also circles near Sandpoint, Coeur d'Alene, Pullman/Moscow, Colville and Chewelah. The Colville and Chewelah counts have been cancelled this year, but all the rest will be conducted. To find out the details for these counts, go here: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/christmas-bird-count>.

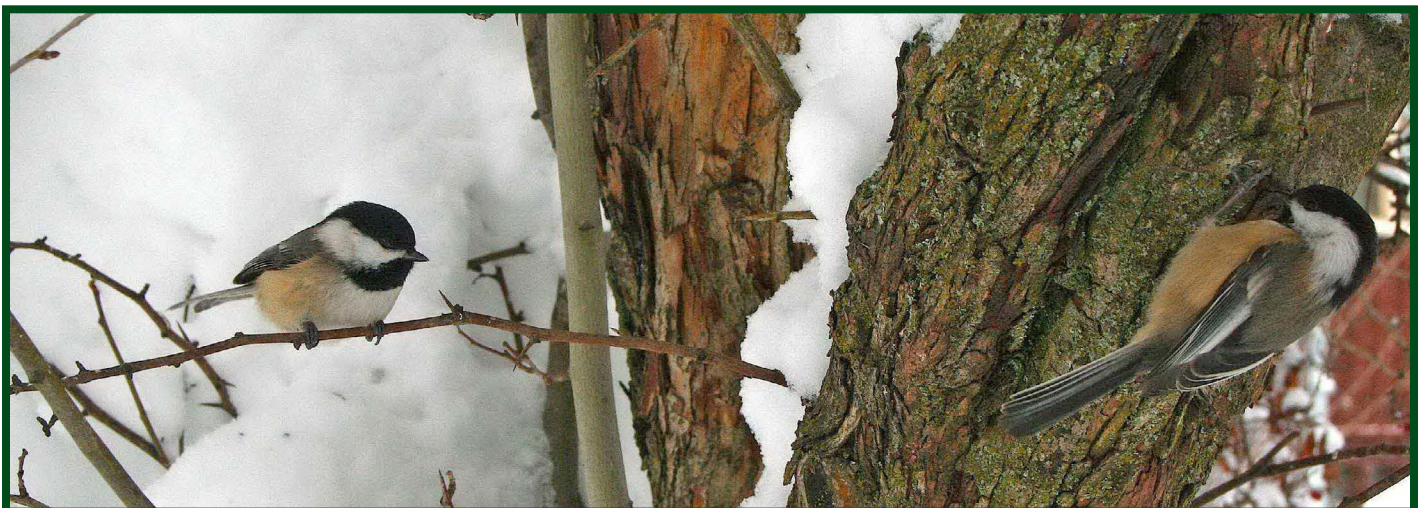
This year will be different though. For those who are on a team out in the field we won't be carpooling with friends as we normally would. Only people in your "pod" should carpool together. And there won't be any post-count gatherings to dine and celebrate.

Many who would usually be in the field and who live inside the count circle will choose to instead stay home and count the birds at their feeders. I think this is a great choice for anyone who lives within one of the CBC circles.

To find out if you live within one of the local circles, please email your name, physical address, email address and phone number to either Sandy Schreven for the Cheney circle, or Alan McCoy for the Spokane circle so they can confirm that your location is within the count area. We have maps of the Spokane and Cheney CBC circles on our website where you may be able to determine if your house is inside the circle. In any case though you will need to contact one of the organizers a week or two before the count date in order to participate.

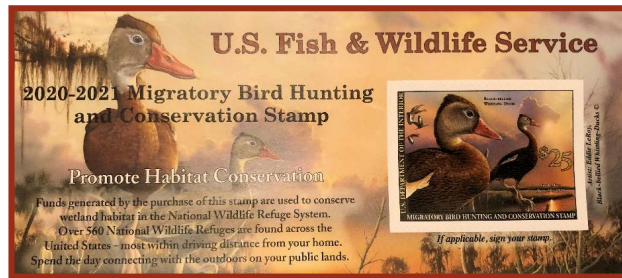
The Cheney CBC will be held on Saturday December 19, 2020. To be involved in the Cheney CBC please contact Sandy Schreven at (509) 624-6801 or sschreven@hotmail.com. The Spokane CBC will take place on Saturday January 2, 2021. Please contact Alan McCoy (509) 999-9512 or ahm2352@gmail.com to join this count.

Black-capped Chickadees



Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps

Good from July 1 to June 30 each year.



Given the current administration’s demonstrated, reckless disregard for wildlife, we believe it is critical to do all we can right now to help preserve habitat.

Duck Stamps are vital tools for wetland conservation. Ninety-eight cents of every dollar generated by the sale of Federal Duck Stamps goes directly to buy or lease wetland habitat for protection in the National Wildlife Refuge System. They also serve as an entrance pass for national wildlife refuges where admission is charged.

Price for each stamp is \$25 plus about \$2 to cover our costs.

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual Membership:

Student (under 21): \$10 per year _____

Individual: \$20 per year _____

Family: \$30 per year _____

Supporting: \$50 per year _____

Contributing: \$100 per year _____

Lifetime: \$500 _____

Other: _____

Annual memberships provide ongoing support for our many conservation and educational activities.

Joining

Renewing

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____



Please make check payable to: Spokane Audubon Society

Send this form and your check to:
Audubon Membership
Attn: Alan McCoy
615 W Paradise Rd
Spokane WA 99224

Join us, or renew your membership, online at our website:

<https://www.audubonspokane.org>.

Click “Support Us” or “Join Us” We accept PayPal, credit/debit cards or Apple Pay.

Receiving duplicate newsletters? Errors or other changes needed on your mailing label? Contact Alan McCoy: ahm2352@gmail.com



The Pygmy Owl
Spokane Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9820
Spokane, WA 99209-9820

December 2020

To:

*The Spokane Audubon Society advocates
for birds and their habitats in the Inland Northwest
and connects people with nature.*

Visit our website: <https://audubonspokane.org>

At this time we are not offering any field trips. Our hope is that by early spring, 2021, we can resume a full schedule of field trips.

We always encourage and enjoy carpooling on birding field trips to save fuel, lower our carbon footprint, and share sighting information more easily.

But with the current need for “social distancing” to help minimize the spread of coronavirus, we need to shift gears. Please consider the following on your next birding field trip:

- Carpool only with people you live with or at least feel comfortable and confident with in the close quarters of a motor vehicle.
- Don't share binoculars, scopes, cameras, or mobile units with birding apps; if you need or want to share, clean equipment with disinfecting wipes between users.

- Maintain the Centers for Disease Control and other public health official “social distancing” guidelines of staying at least six feet away from each other when you reach a birding site where you leave your vehicles.

These steps may seem extreme, but they are simply part of our collective, responsible pre-emptive action to slow the spread and impacts of this virus. We'd all rather be safe than sorry. Happy birding!