

# The Pygmy Owl

Volume 28  
Issue 6  
February 2020

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society



**Spokane Audubon's next meeting will be:  
Wednesday, February 12th at 7:00 p.m.  
Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Bldg  
2117 E. North Crescent Avenue**

## **DISHMAN HILLS CONSERVANCY**

### **Property Addition Update**

**Presented by Jeff Lambert, Executive Director of the Dishman Hills Conservancy  
and Art Zack, Forest Ecologist and DHC Board member**

This presentation is on the 54-year history of the Dishman Hills, with the spotlight on the recent Wilson Conservation Area on Willow Springs Road. The total protected land area is 3,252 acres in the Hills and there are plans to add another 800-acres to connect the existing Conservation Areas. We will talk briefly about funding and negotiations. We will discuss the value of the habitat and the importance of maintaining connectivity with Mica Peak to the east and Turnbull to the west, and the overall biodiversity of the Dishman Hills area.



Jeff Lambert has been a leader in conservation issues since the 1997 campaign for Conservation Futures. He has served in many roles, including on a WA State Recreation and Conservation Office NOVA selection Committee that included rewriting the legislation authorizing the NOVA program. Jeff was President of the Wild Washington Campaign, founder of the Mountaineers Conservation Committee and is currently the President of the Inland NW Trails Coalition and the Spokane Mountaineers Foundation. Inspired by Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold, Jeff believes that protecting ecosystems is of critical importance.



# The Pygmy Owl

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Spokane Audubon Society  
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## Brad Haywood Memorial Service

A memorial service for long-time Spokane Audubon member Brad Haywood, who passed away November 10, will be held April 4 at Contempo Club House, 1205 E. Lyons, Spokane. Brad's wife Fran, also a long-time Audubon member, says that all family and friends are welcome to attend

## Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Nesting through January 20, 2020:

Welcome to our new nesters: Terri Lovins, Brenda Day, April May, Jo McDonald, Richard Eichstaedt, Bill McMillan, John McGarvey, and Lynn Rindal.

Many thanks to our returning nesters: Robin Crain, Conn Wittwer, Megan and John Bastow, Bud and Roxanne McCormack, Ladd Bjerneby, Richard and Sandy Sollie, Norma Trefry, Bill and M' Lou Safranek, Mike and Lynn Noel, Susan Millies, Ron and Pat Dexter, and Doris and Rodney Butler.

You can help us reduce our costs and energy use and save paper by switching to our electronic, full-color publication. Please send your email address to me, Alan McCoy at [ahm2352@gmail.com](mailto:ahm2352@gmail.com) and 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>.

## Clean Transportation Forum Feb. 7 in Spokane

An opportunity to learn about clean fuel and transportation standards is a Washington Audubon co-sponsored forum scheduled for Friday, February 7, 6 – 8 p.m., in the lobby of the Community Building, 35 W. Main Ave., in downtown Spokane.

More global warming pollution comes from transportation than from any other sector, so this is an important way to learn, from the experts and elected officials, how to take steps towards a cleaner transportation system.

March Pygmy Owl  
Deadline February 20th

# Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

You can't have winter without snow and frozen water! Of course, with that, bird activity tends to be a bit on the slow side. That said, there are plenty of raptors about and large amounts of waterfowl and some interesting gulls on the deeper, unfrozen lakes. Winter finch activity has been poor overall, though Pine Grosbeaks and a few Redpolls seem to be here and there around the region, and few are better than none! Keep your eyes and ears alert, though, as you never know what may show up in your yard or on your next birding outing.

Snow Goose: Ball Creek Ranch Preserve (12/24-JE and NP); Spokane (1/20-MW)

Greater White-fronted Goose: Heyburn State Park (1/5-KD and CS)

Long-tailed Duck: Clark Fork Delta (1/9-RDC)

White-winged Scoter: Central Premix Pond (1/8-TO)

Red-breasted Merganser: Mill Canyon (1/1-TL); Liberty Lake (1/1-TO); Lake Pend Oreille (1/1-FF); Coeur D'Alene (1/3-DW); Harrison (1/3-TL); Clark Fork Delta (1/9-RDC)

Anna's Hummingbird: Moscow (12/23-KD); Hayden (12/26-DW); Kendrick (1/13-JH)

Mew Gull: Harrison (12/20-TL); Coeur D'Alene (12/26-DW)

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Harrison (12/20-TL)

Glaucous Gull: Bayview (12/26-BK)

Pacific Loon: Silver Lake (1/1-TO)

Northern Goshawk: Bonner's Ferry (12/24-JE and NP); Heyburn State Park (1/5-JE and NP); Moscow (1/7-MS); Hawk Creek Canyon (1/10-TL); University of Idaho (1/19-CL)

American Three-toed Woodpecker: Dawson Lake (12/25-JE and NP)

Gyr Falcon: Mondovi (12/27-TL); Bonner's Ferry (1/13-JR)

Blue Jay: University of Idaho (12/22-GL); Paradise Prairie (12/26-AM); Sandpoint (1/9-LO)

Pine Grosbeak: Little Spokane River (12/21-JE); Slavin Ranch (12/22-BS); Kootenai NWR (12/24-MR); Horse-shoe Lake (12/24-TL); Dawson Lake (12/25-JE and NP); Liberty Lake (1/1-TO); Tum Tum (1/16-TL)

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch: Worley (12/23-JE and NP); Paradise Ridge (12/29-JE and NP)

Common Redpoll: Coolin (12/28-LP); Steptoe Butte (1/2-DG); Sandpoint (1/3-FF); Moyie Springs (1/9-RD)

White-throated Sparrow: Pullman (1/12-JW)

Rusty Blackbird: Moscow (1/1-BB); Spangle (1/8-MW); Kootenai NWR (1/17-TL)



**3-toed Woodpecker**  
©Roger Grimshaw

Observers: DA-Dan Audet; RB-R.J. Baltierra; BB-Ben Bright; MaC-Marlene Cashen; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; RD-Roger Doucette; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JoE-Johnna Eilers; JE-Jacob Elonen; FF-Fred Forssell; MF-Marian Frobe; DG-Don Goodwin; LH-Lindell Haggin; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; GL-Greg Lambeth; TLa-Terry Lane; TL-Terry Little; CoL-Courtney Litwin; CL-Carl Lundblad; BL-Becky Lyle; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; LO-Larry Owens; TO-Tim O'Brien; PO-Peter Olsoy; LP-Linda Post; NP-Neil Paprocki; MR-Mary Rumble; MS-Mike Scott; SS-Sandy Schreven; BS-Bill Siems; KS-Katie Sorenson; CS-Charles Swift; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; DY-David Yake; MY-Matt Yawney

# Alan McCoy

by Madonna Luers

Our current Spokane Audubon Society chapter president Alan McCoy has been a board member “on and off” for about ten years, but he’s been a chapter member since the early ‘80’s when he moved to Spokane.

“I was on the ‘folding committee’ with some of our chapter founders,” he recalls fondly, back in the day when everyone received a paper edition of the Pygmy Owl newsletter in the postal mail. He’s always participated in the Spokane Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and, since the late 90’s, has served as the chapter’s CBC compiler.

Alan’s love of birds and birdwatching has been truly lifelong. His librarian mother started backyard bird feeding and birding when he was born in 1952 in Greensboro, North Carolina, and he learned about birds “through osmosis.” He attended the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill for a couple of years where he found geography fascinating. He dropped out after two years to try to discover what he wanted to do with his life. He ended up at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City where the author of “Utah Birds,” William H Behle, taught an ornithology class that Alan took twice. He couldn’t stay awake for the class, but loved the field trips.

“There is a large difference between a birder and an ornithologist,” Alan says. “The excruciating detail that ornithologists must explore is nowhere near as fascinating to me as the sounds, colors and behaviors of living birds in the wild.” He bought his first binoculars in the early 70’s and spent lots of time learning the birds of Utah’s Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge and southern Utah.

Eventually Alan completed a degree in geography at Utah where he met his wife, Audrey Burr, who was working on a Masters in social work. In his early 20’s, he knew that he didn’t want a desk job, that he wanted to work with his hands but use his head, too. He read Studs Terkel’s 1974 book, *Working*, about the meaning of work, which included an example of a piano tuner.



Alan in Africa

Despite having no musical background, not even growing up in a home with a piano, he moved to Ohio to attend a piano technician school. “There’s no reason I should be, but I’ve been a piano technician now for the past 40 years,” he says. Perhaps his keen ear for birds works when he tunes pianos.

Alan and Audrey, who is from Helena, Montana, ended up in Spokane when they wanted to move west to a small town big enough for employment opportunities for both. Alan started working for piano dealers, churches, schools and private homes. In

(cont on page 5

2002 he began half-time employment with the music department of Eastern Washington University (EWU) and started contracting piano services for the Spokane Symphony. After 15 years with the symphony, he tired of working on concert weekends and passed that contract to a friend. He plans to retire from EWU on June 30th.

Although he enjoys his own backyard and local birding, Alan has traveled to Ecuador, Costa Rica, Mexico, Florida, the southwest U.S. and Texas to see new birds. During a trip to Panama with Audrey he met an excellent field trip leader, Simon Thompson. Last year he joined Thompson, and a group of birders, just coincidentally from North Carolina, for a trip to South Africa where almost all of the 370 species he saw were “lifers.” That, he says, was outstanding, and rivals his favorite birding experience to Ecuador with his non-birding father.

“Mom couldn’t go on that trip to Ecuador because she was ill,” he recalls. “My one regret is that I never went on a birding field trip with my Mom. We would talk on the phone after Christmas Bird Counts, comparing hers in North Carolina with mine here in Spokane. I remember one year we had the same number of species – 36 – which was terrible for her and good for me!”

Alan doesn’t have a favorite species, but he does love ducks. They’re all beautiful, he says, but the sounds they make are especially endearing, from

whistling wings to quacks or funny little noises like the Northern Shoveler’s “fffttt, fffttt, fffttt.”

Alan’s tip for new birders is to go afield with a good birder who is also a patient teacher. He advises getting good binoculars and learning how to use them. When you see a bird, keep your eyes focused only on the bird while bringing the binoculars up to your eyes to avoid losing it.

The top issue for the future of birds and birding is climate change, he says. Habitat loss, window and wind turbine collisions, domestic cat predation and other important issues pale in comparison to our changing climate. He notes the recent massive wildlife losses in Australia’s climate-change-fueled wildfires. But addressing climate change is challenging with a federal government administration that not only refutes the science, he says, but doesn’t understand that economic health is tied to environmental health.

Alan hopes that he brings the “environmental sensibility” that his mother taught him to the chapter. He wants to help educate and inspire others to protect “our lovely planet.” He also hopes to encourage fellow birders to just “stop and smell the roses” -- leave the “busyness” behind and enjoy our fellow creatures.

## Christmas Bird Count Results

Provided by Alan McCoy

### Spokane CBC:

Sixty-four people joined the Spokane Christmas Bird Count this year. While the number of species seen (76) is only slightly below average, the number of individuals (23,131) was well above average. We set records for the number of Wood Ducks, Mallards and Wild Turkeys. On the other hand, winter finch numbers were way down as were waxwings, robins, kinglets and many other songbirds. One leader hadn’t had this few species for 10 years, while other leaders had above average numbers. Full results of the Spokane CBC can be found here: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/spokane-christmas-bird-count>

### Cheney CBC:

Thirty-six hardy folks ventured out into what turned out to be a morning blizzard on December 15th for the Cheney Christmas Bird Count. Sixty-two species eventually were found, which is down from last year, but respectable given close to zero visibility for several hours in the morning. However, of those species, there were two rarities: a Rusty Blackbird and a Brown-headed Cowbird. Be sure to carefully check those large flocks of black birds! The full results of the Cheney CBC can be found here: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/cheney-christmas-bird-count>

# Photos from the Spokane Christmas Bird Count

All photos courtesy of Lindell Haggin

Bufflehead and Ring-necked Ducks



Yellow-shafted Northern Flicker



Cedar Waxwing



Mountain Chickadee



River Otter

# Winter bird feeding fuels us more

By Madonna Luers

Believe it or not, feeding birds and other wildlife through the winter fuels our own interests more than those of the animals consuming our offerings.

Studies show that birds do not depend solely on feeders in their foraging, many obtaining only up to one-fifth of their nutrition at feeders. Some small pockets of bird populations do benefit from feeders under extreme and persistent weather conditions. But feeding can't replace natural habitat needed for winter cover and spring nesting and rearing. And poorly maintained feeding stations actually can harm birds by spreading disease.

Research also shows that feeding wild ungulates like deer or elk with readily available feed like hay, grain or seeds isn't always helpful in their winter survival. It can take several weeks for these animals to adjust to digesting such feed that is so different from their natural diet. If they don't have enough fat reserves to carry them through that adjustment period, they can starve even with a belly full of undigestible feed.

The main benefit of feeding is that it provides a direct, intimate view of birds and other wildlife for more than 50 million Americans who provide backyard feeding stations of some kind. Experts in Cornell University Lab of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch, which has been collecting winter bird feeder use data from thousands of volunteers across the country for 33 years, say that most bird feeding does neither significant good nor significant harm. It's something we do for ourselves, they say, but it has a lot of educational value.

Up close and personal encounters with wildlife can and do trigger lifelong interest in and compassion for wildlife, the desire to learn more, and ultimately the "bigger picture" understanding of the need to maintain and enhance year-round wildlife habitat.

In fact, the best way to help any wild birds or other animals survive a severe winter is to provide high-quality habitat plantings and water year-round. Wildlife that goes into the winter in good condition is most able to survive deep snow, ice, and cold temperatures. Even in well-functioning natural ecosystems, however, some animals succumb during winter months. The winter season has always been the great

"equalizer," keeping wildlife populations in balance with available habitat.

If you choose to feed birds for that close-up connection, remember to keep feeders clean. Use tube feeders to reduce accumulations of scattered seed on the ground that can become wet and moldy and spread disease if not picked up and discarded regularly. Disinfect feeders at least once a month with a solution of one part bleach to nine parts warm water, and dry thoroughly before refilling.

Locate feeders where there is no immediate cover for cats to wait in ambush, but close enough to cover to allow birds to escape natural predators like hawks. Keep in mind that bird feeding stations will concentrate small birds and in turn attract predators, but studies have shown that natural food sources do the same, and the difference is mostly insignificant. Remember, too, that a bird feeder provides not only for small seed eaters, but also for the birds that feed on them.

Leaving feeders unfilled, or removing them entirely, for several days or weeks can actually be a good thing in terms of disease prevention and predation reduction. Most birds will rely on their ongoing natural food sources and you'll be able to enjoy that winter vacation guilt-free!

**Varied Thrush with  
hopper feeder**  
Jenny Michaels



**Goldfinch on tube feeder**  
©Lindell Haggin




## 2020 Field Trips at a Glance


### March 21 "In Search of Ducks"

Led by Fran Haywood and Alan McCoy  
Details to be determined soon

Details of the field trips will be found on our website  
<https://www.audubonspokane.org/upcoming-events>.

The Great Backyard  
Bird Count   
Art by Charley Hepper

### What do you do?



- Count birds anywhere for at least 15 minutes
- Count longer if you wish!
- Keep track of time
- Best estimate of number of individuals of each species

It all starts with just 3 easy rules:

1. Count birds for at least 15 minutes on Feb 14, 15, 16, and 17, 2020
2. Keep track of how long you counted and how far you walked
3. Start a new count for each new place or day/time

See the [official GBBC FAQ page](#), and the [Participant Toolkit](#) for more explanations and examples. Details in the January Pygmy Owl.

### 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

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**Spokane Audubon Society**  
 P.O. Box 9820  
 Spokane, WA 99209-9820

February 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>

**Directions to the General Meeting**

Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Bldg  
 2117 E. North Crescent Avenue

**From West Spokane & South Hill**

- 1-90 East to Exit 281 toward US-1 E/US-395 N (Newport/Colville)
- Follow US-2 E/US-395 to E. Mission Ave
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**From Spokane Valley**

- I-90 West to Exit 282A
- Follow N. Hamilton St. to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Dr.

**From North Spokane**

- Take US-395 S to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Dr.

**Once you're on E. Upriver Drive (see map below)**

- Follow E. Upriver Drive to N. Crestline Street
- Turn Left on N. Crestline Street
- Turn Right on E. North Crescent Drive
- Proceed to entry on left showing numbers 2015-2145



Limited parking is available by the Village Community Building. Overflow parking is along E. North Crescent Ave.

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