

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 30
Issue 10
June 2022

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

Enjoy a summer of birding!

The next three months can provide some fun birding experiences incidental to summer camping, hiking, biking, boating and river floating. And the birding could be good if eastern Washington's long-range forecasts hold for a cooler summer than last year's extreme heat and wildfire smoke.

So far we have the following field trips scheduled that are still open to participants:

- June 3, Friday, 6:45am - 11am, Iller Creek (Dishman Hills Natural Area), led by Gary Lee (509-389-5474 or birdfan@aol.com). This will be a slow hike with elevation change, covering up to 4 miles round trip, searching for woodland and riparian species like Ruffed Grouse, Calliope Hummingbird, Red-naped Sapsucker, Dusky and Hammond's Flycatchers, Cassin's and Warbling Vireo, three nuthatch species, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, finches, sparrows, Lazuli Bunting, and migrant warblers.

- June 9, Thursday, Liberty Lake County Park, led by Fran Haywood & Joyce Alonso (509-939-0120). This trip will include checking the lakeshore and marsh for aquatic species and wrens, vireos and warblers, plus an easy trail hike to the campground and beyond looking and listening for flycatchers, waxwings, thrushes, redstarts, hummingbirds, and butterflies.

- June 27, Monday, 8 a.m. start, Little Spokane River Birding Float, led by Jim & Bea Harrison (509-934-7460 or jimharrison2@peoplepc.com). Paddling experience and a Discover Pass are needed for this moving water, daylong trip. Bring your kayak or canoe and other boating gear and meet at the river put-in near St. George's School from where cars will be shuttled to the take-out at Nine Mile Falls Road. During

this float you'll search for Common Yellow-throat, Yellow Warbler, Mallards, Common mergansers, Bullock's Oriole, Gray Catbird, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, moose, and more.

Be sure to check the Spokane Audubon Society website on field trips (<https://www.audubonspokane.org/field-trips>) for more details on these trips and to find new ones added as the summer advances.



Calliope Hummingbird
© Marya Moosman



Marsh Wren
© Tony Varela



Birding by Kayak
© Jeff Laxier



Common Yellowthroat
© Ryan Sanderson

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Spokane Audubon Society
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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status April 21, 2022 through May 21, 2022:

Welcome and thanks to our **new members**:

Individual: Mary Edmonds, Surender Bodhired-dy, Nancy Janzen, Donna Kimball, Carla Hoover, Dick Jensen, Carrie Dugovic, Phil Faris, Brian Tryon

Family: Mark Buening, Michael Henneberry, Chauna Bingham, Sandra Logan, Katrina Martich & Edward Gill, Martha Raske, Jeff & Barb McElhinney, Norma Kingma, Nancy Haygeman, Joe LaTourrette

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If you change your email address, please send your new email address to me, Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com and I will make sure 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>.



Varied Thrush
© Tom Munson

Can switching to electric vehicles help birds?

by Madonna Luers

We bird lovers have heard about the connections between climate change and wildlife of all kinds.

Greater swings in seasons from decreasing winter snowpack to warmer, drier summer conditions, earlier or later springs and autumns, and increasingly frequent and intense natural catastrophes like wildfires, floods, windstorms and hurricanes all impact bird and other wildlife habitat and migration movements. Audubon's own recent "State of the Birds" analysis (<http://www.stateofthebirds.org/>) documents these ties to common bird population declines.

And climatologists from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) have connected climate change to human activities, primarily the emissions from burning fossil fuels that increase the concentration of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere and warm the planet.

Much of that fossil fuel burning is from the motor vehicles we all use, so the question facing us is: Can switching to electric vehicles help birds?

The simple answer appears to be yes. We definitely need to shift away from fossil fuel energy to something without those deadly emissions, like electric energy.

But something to keep in mind about energy use of any kind is that there's really no such thing as a "free lunch" – there are always costs and consequences for any action.

Electric car battery material mining and production, and then battery charging, battery recycling, and battery waste management are not without their own impacts.

Most batteries are made from nickel, which is mostly extracted from hard rock mines. But with fast-growing demand for electric cars, more nickel is needed and it's increasingly coming from strip-mining in



Keysite Technologies

places that have the greatest biodiversity of wildlife on earth -- tropical rainforests. Most electric cars purchased in the U.S. are currently using nickel batteries.

Some electric cars are made with lithium iron phosphate batteries, the materials for which have a more manageable environmental impact. But determining what that electric car you're considering buying runs on can be daunting.

Once you replace that fossil fuel vehicle with an electric one, charging it regularly of course uses electricity that comes from hydropower, natural gas, wind turbines, nuclear, coal, or solar energy – most with some direct impacts to fish, birds, or other wildlife and habitat.

When batteries wear out, recycling them or responsibly managing them in our waste stream can be another challenge that is not without costs to the environment.

Electric vehicles are surely an alternative that can help birds and other wildlife and our own future on the planet, but they are not without environmental costs. Look for more details on this issue in future newsletter editions.

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

An exceedingly cold spring with disturbed weather continues. We've had lightning, wind, hail, and yes, even 2 tornadoes! Passerine migration has been slow at best; shorebird migration, typical but not exceptional. Some highlights/trends: Broad-winged Hawks seem to be nearly annual in spring as well as fall in the region, probably due to people looking at more targeted migration windows rather than a change in actual status. A similar phenomenon occurred in the outer Olympic Peninsula a few years back. This year there have been 3 sightings in the region. Sandhill Cranes continue to be seen more frequently throughout the Idaho Panhandle with plenty of suitable breeding habitat. White-faced Ibises did not show up in as many locations as they did in the past couple of years. A Marbled Godwit was Spokane County's first in 14 years. A Black Swift was Spokane's 4th record. The month's "best bird" was Bonner County's first record of Loggerhead Shrike. Other notable sightings below:

Ross's Goose: Saltese Flats (4/20-TO); Sprague (4/22-JI); Trail of the Coeur D'Alene's (4/23-RyB)

Harlequin Duck: Sandpoint (5/15-RDC)

Black Swift: West Spokane (5/10-JI)

Anna's Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (4/26-MC); Moscow (5/18-NP)

Sandhill Crane: Clark Fork (4/20-RDC); Robinson Marsh (4/23-RyB); Trail of the Coeur D'Alene (4/24-eBird); Bonner's Ferry (4/26-FC)

Black-bellied Plover: Saltese Flats (5/6-NE); Swanson Lakes WMA (5/15-eBird)

Marbled Godwit: Saltese Flats (4/21-JI)

Forster's Tern: Philleo Lake (5/5-JI)

White-faced Ibis: Saltese Flats (4/21-JI); Kendrick (4/28-eBird)

Broad-winged Hawk: Coeur D'Alene (4/24-eBird); Dreary (5/1-NP); West Spokane (5/10-JI)

Burrowing Owl: Lamona (5/10-eBird)



Burrowing Owls
WDFW

Lewis's Woodpecker: Pullman (5/2-JW); Peone (5/8-eBird); Colville (5/10-eBird); Cougar Bay (5/15-RyB)

Black-backed Woodpecker: Sandpoint (5/8-FC)

Peregrine Falcon: Davenport (4/29-WY); Sandpoint (5/17-FF)

Loggerhead Shrike: Clark Fork (5/16-RDC)

Clay-colored Sparrow: Mullan (5/13-BK)

White-throated Sparrow: Pullman (4/28-eBird); Davenport (5/6-MC); Spokane (5/8-eBird); Palouse River (5/8-NP)

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Davenport (5/6-MC); Spokane (5/7-SS); Pullman (5/14-eBird); Rose Creek (5/15-eBird); Barstow 5/16-DB)

Fox Sparrow: Davenport (4/28-eBird)

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; RyB-Ryan Bart; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; Marlene Cashen; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; Jacob Elonen; NE-Norm Engeland; DG-Don Goodwin; CG-Cierra Gove; LH-Lindell Haggin; JH-John Hanna; CH-Cameron Heusser; I-Jon Isacoff; LF-Louie Johnson; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; TL-Terry Little; AM-Alan McCoy; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; AM-Alan McCoy; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; WM-Will Merg;; TO-Tim O'Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; DR-Diana Roberts; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; MS-Mark Selle; KS-Katie Sorenson; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; WY-Will Young

Member Profile:

Lynn and Mike Noel

by Madonna Luers

Lynn and Mike Noel say they've probably spent their lives "backwards" of how many do – traveling and seeing the world of exotic wildlife early on, and now staying put more at their Long Lake home watching nesting wood ducks, bald eagles and osprey.



Lynn and Mike on the Great Wall of China

Born in 1939 in Detroit, Michigan, Mike says he's loved wildlife ever since he could walk, with his family spending summers at rented cabins on Saginaw Bay. Lynn McClements was born in 1945 in Evanston, Illinois, growing up near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she explored the outdoors on surrounding farmlands, and later in Indiana.

They met during their college years when she was earning her degree in biology at Kalamazoo College and he was working on a chemistry degree at University of Detroit and employed at the Detroit Institute of Cancer Research. Lynn spent her junior year in Germany from where she wrote Mike letters and spurred his desire to travel. After graduation, she joined him in Ghana where they worked for the Teachers of West Africa Program and where they married.

When they returned to the U.S. in 1968, they both landed jobs in Houston's huge medical research field. Lynn earned a master's degree in public health, managing an EPA-funded study on air quality and pollution effects on people with allergies. Together they took a class in Environmental Geology that made them more aware of the effects of humans on the planet, joined an outdoor nature club, and did a lot of Texas nature exploration and camping.

Their shared love of traveling and wildlife had them off and running to Kenya with the Peace Corps in 1975, for what turned into three and a half years of service. He taught secondary school chemistry and she taught public health at the University of Nairobi. "And we had the opportunity to see some of the most amazing wildlife in the world," she recalls. "The first time I saw a million flamingoes on Lake Nakuru in Kenya's Rift Valley was incredible. At the time I had some pretty shoddy binoculars so I could only identify the most colorful or biggest birds. For that reason though, I think my favorite bird is still Kenya's three-foot-tall wonder, the Kori Bustard."



Kori Bustard
© Sandra Hughes

Among Mike's most memorable experiences was witnessing the Serengeti migration of two million wildebeests, along with other antelope, zebras, lions and raptors, in the Masai Mara area on Kenya's southern border with Tanzania. He remembers seeing what looked like a forest of trees on the horizon, and then seeing those "trees" moving as wildebeests! Another time in another parkland he recalls seeing a Swallow-tailed Kite -- one of very few sightings in Kenya since it is a species from further north.

Both say lessons learned in their wildlife watching in Kenya shaped their tip today for birding newcomers: get the best pair of binoculars you can afford and learn how to use them!

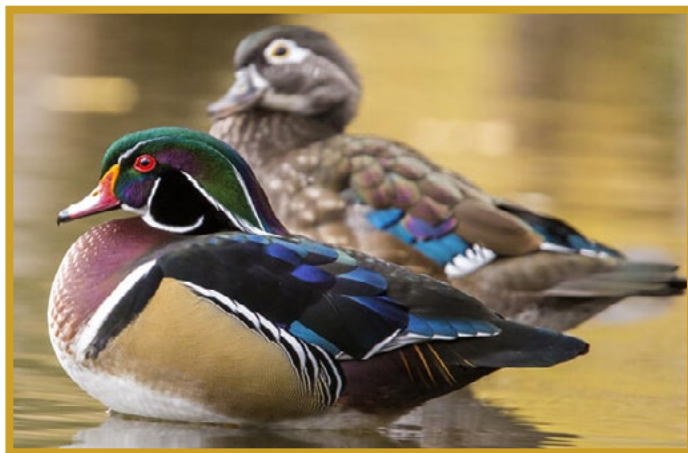
Back in Houston, which became their home base off and on for 37 years, they continued work for a mental health research institute and in public health research, and “doubled down” on learning about local wildlife and ecosystems. But their “itchy feet” found them quitting their jobs and traveling back to Africa again, both for the wildlife and to collect more African arts and crafts for resale in the U.S. That began a traveling business as wholesalers to museum shops across the country, house-sitting for friends along the way. It gave them a chance to see America and realize that they were really “northerners” with a love of four seasons from their childhood roots. On a trip to see a friend in north Idaho they discovered the Spokane area and looked for a place to call their own.

With Mike’s fondness for lakefront property from childhood memories, in 2004 they found their home on a part of Long Lake shoreline where they enjoy wildlife daily. Mike’s favorite bird is probably the Wood Duck, which he enjoys seeing on the home front every spring, at least until the summer power boat traffic on the reservoir. They have seen and reported at least one rare species for the area – a pair of Great Egrets.

The Noels’ volunteer work in local community theater had them working a folk festival at Spokane Falls Community College in 2006 where Spokane Audubon Society staffed an adjacent booth. They immediately joined the chapter to connect with “like minds” and support local conservation efforts.

They have traveled around the world to enjoy wild-life, including trips to the westernmost Aleutian island of Attu where Lynn was awed watching a feeding frenzy of whales and pelagic birds, and to Antarctica, where penguins were unfamiliar with and unafraid of humans. But home is where they love to be now.

The Noels’ stewardship of their Long Lake property has helped them define what they see as the most critical issue for the future of birds and birding – habitat loss and climate change.

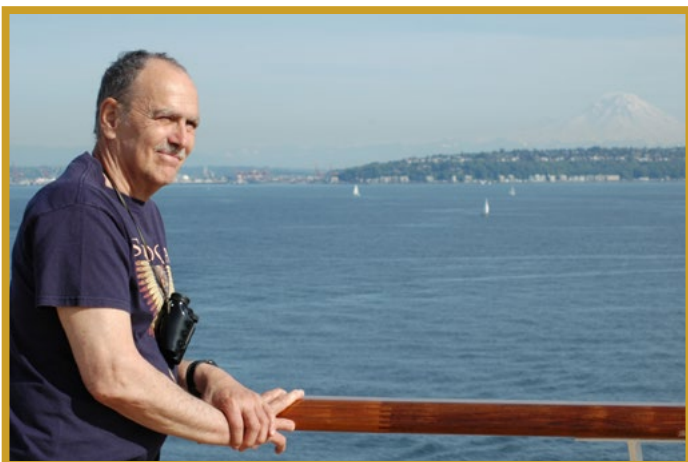


Wood Ducks
© Mircea-Costina

“When we first moved here, we saw hundreds of swallows,” Lynn said, “but now it’s just dozens. Maybe they’ve moved on, but I think there are enough changes around us to suggest not.”

Mike notes that a 27-acre field across from their place that was once farmed now has six houses on it. And migrant birds that are driven by daylight hour changes to move back into their nesting areas are no longer finding the insects to feed their young because of climate change. “If we can’t grasp what we’re doing to the earth and turn it around,” Lynn said, “we’re doomed.”

Since the Noels have no children they plan to donate all their inheritance, including the sale of their Long Lake property, to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) for their conservation projects, in the hope that those will help teach future generations about taking care of the planet.



Mike Noel sailing from Seattle to Alaska

Treasurer Help Needed

Lindell Haggin is stepping down from being our treasurer, a position she has held for the last 30 years, give or take. This position is vital to our small organization, but it does not require a 30-year commitment!

The job does require attention to detail and about 4-6 hours per month. We provide the software (Quicken). Is this something you could do?

Please contact Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com or call (509) 999-9512 for a more detailed description of the job. Thank you for considering this opportunity to serve with us in our mission to conserve and connect.

Quicken
Take control of your finances



Avian flu is highly contagious for some birds

Avian flu is highly contagious for some birds. In March 2022 the World Organization for Animal Health confirmed presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus, H5 variant, in a wild bald eagle found in Vancouver, British Columbia -- the first confirmed report of HPAI virus in the Pacific Flyway since 2015.

Last month the Washington Department of Agriculture confirmed avian flu in several backyard fowl flocks across the state and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) confirmed cases of the disease in wild birds.

Spokane Audubon Society bird rehab assistance team members Bea Harrison and Alice Moravec recently attended a Zoom meeting of the Washington Wildlife Rehabilitators Association with WDFW scientist Katherine Haman, and here's what they reported that they learned:

- This strain of avian flu seems to be very contagious and deadly, particularly for scavengers like eagles, but also Cooper's hawks and Great Horned owls.
- Washington State has had 6 cases confirmed so far in Bald eagles, Snow geese, Canada geese and a Sandhill crane.

- Passerines don't seem to be at high risk.
- Avian flu has jumped to mammals with a few documented cases of skunks and foxes in other places, not in Washington state so far.
- Symptoms in mammals and birds are neurological and respiratory -- the animal is not able to stand or hold its head up, nasal discharge, etc.
- Wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians are being advised to euthanize if they suspect avian flu, due to the highly contagious nature of the disease.
- USDA can force rehab centers and falconers to euthanize all their birds, but so far they have not done so. WDFW is asking centers to use more biosecurity and quarantining, but to euthanize if there is any doubt in raptors, waterfowl, and scavengers.
- There is no in-house testing for rehab centers and vets. They must send birds to be tested in a lab.
- There is a very low risk of transmission to humans, but anyone handling birds or bird feeders should always wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly.

For more information about avian flu, including how to report a sick or dead bird to WDFW, see <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/bird-flu>.

“How to Inspect and Prune Trees for Wildlife”

by Bea Harrison

Who knew that professional arborists are being trained to manage trees to benefit birds and other wildlife? I surely did not, until I attended a local arborist workshop entitled, “How to Inspect and Prune Trees for Wildlife.”

On Wednesday, May 4, 2022, four members of the Spokane Audubon Bird Rescue Team attended the workshop at the John A. Finch Arboretum in Spokane. These included Tina Penny, Alice Moravec, Mary Marsh, and me. We presented two slideshows for the workshop. One was titled “Common Birds of Eastern Washington” (created by Audubon members Joyce Alonso and Alan McCoy and photos provided by Ron Dexter).

The second slideshow, “Wildlife Emergencies and Re-nesting” was about the bird rescue group that Spokane Audubon has been operating for the last few months and included photos of types of nests arborists might encounter. We gave out written instructions on re-nesting songbirds and emergency contact information with e-mails and phone numbers for our rehab group and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The workshop was enlightening and inspirational. The instructors were very aware of the plight of birds in our changing world, and their objective is to not only selectively manage trees for birds and other wildlife, but to enhance trees that are cut in urban and rural settings to create more habitat. They believe that arborists have an opportunity to prevent bird extinctions!

Ryan Gilpin, one of the instructors, is the principal for Nidus Consulting, based in Portland, Oregon. His background is in ecology and conservation. He is very active with Portland Audubon, working with the Rehab Center there as well as leading bird walks in the Portland Area.

Brian French, the second instructor, is a climbing arborist in Portland with a background in traditional arboriculture. He is the principal at Arboriculture International. He designed, and has presented, a workshop for the last five years called “Creating Wildlife Habitat Trees.” Arboriculture International leads workshops all over the Pacific Northwest, teaching the importance of preserving dying trees and snags. They stressed the

importance of helping to create more nesting cavities and other habitat since so many trees are being lost due to urbanization, deforestation, and climate change. They have successfully have written industry standards modified to benefit wildlife. Brian and Ryan are leading an effort in the Portland area to leave more standing snags in neighborhoods and have found many clients who are willing to do this to encourage more birds and wildlife in their backyards. They encourage a long-term perspective on modifying a cut tree with consideration of a plan for what will happen when the snag eventually decays and falls.

The class was attended by about 10 arborists, some of which currently work for the City of Spokane and some for private companies. We learned that City arborists are retaining snags and even some downed wood for wildlife in parks and other City-owned property. This was certainly good news!

Members of the rehab group in attendance were able to make some solid contacts that will benefit our goals. We are hoping that local arborists will be willing to help us re-nest birds in tall trees. Arborists were also glad to get our contact information so we can help them with bird emergencies.

Brian demonstrated techniques for cutting a tree 25 feet up, (height varies) leaving a few branches for perches, instead of cutting the tree down at the ground level. He was on the ground for our example, not attached by ropes 25’ off the ground as would be the case in an actual newly cut “snag”! He created a nesting cavity using a chain saw. He also created a coronet cut to make the top of the snag not only look like an actual tree break but to speed up decomposition. He showed how shallow scallop-shaped cuts could provide habitat for bats.

We (and the arborists) were also taught how to do a pre-work inspection for wildlife, looking for white-wash, nests, and other signs of wildlife. We were taught to be mindful of at least a 50-foot area around a songbird nest and 300 feet for raptors.

The class also presented information on how to adhere to:

- The Eagle Act, which prohibits disturbing Bald and Golden Eagle nests, even if inactive,
- The Endangered Species Act (protects Marbled Murrelet, Common Loon, Spotted Owl, and Ferruginous Hawk in Washington),
- The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (which protects all birds, except for invasive species).

When homeowners and businesses in the Spokane area need the expertise of an arborist, they have the choice of obtaining the services of a Wildlife Certified Arborist. There are several in the area who are looking out for our Feathered Friends! Click on this link for more information on ponderosa pine snags and the birds that use them.

[Cavity-nester-booklet.pdf](#)



Snags, Bark Beetles, and Cavity-Nesting Birds:
Conservation and Management in Ponderosa Pine Forests of the Pacific Northwest

AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY



Alice Moravec, Bea Harrison, Mary Marsh and Tina Penny attended the arborist workshop.

10 Fun Facts about the House Finch

By Lauren Leffer, Audubon magazine

These common and adaptable birds provide a welcome pop of color at feeders from coast to coast. But they weren't always so ubiquitous.



House Finch
© Deborah Ray

House Finches are currently among the most widespread and common birds across the United States—but as we'll see, that wasn't always the case. These days, they can be found brightening backyards and chowing down at seed feeders from the arid Southwest to the humid cities of the Northeast. Familiar as they are, there's plenty about these cosmopolitan birds worthy of closer attention and deeper appreciation.

1.) Once limited to the Western United States and Mexico, House Finches are now found from coast to coast, and as far north as southern Canada. In 1939 a few of the birds, originally captured in Santa Barbara, California, were set free on New York's Long Island by a pet store owner. By the early 1940s wild nests were beginning to show up on Long Island, and from there the spread continued. They've also been introduced and become widespread in Hawaii. In some places, House Finches are considered an invasive species. They act as a vector for disease and compete for food and territory against native birds like Purple Finches—a species they're sometimes confused with since males share reddish plumage.



House Finch
© Michele Black

Purple Finch
© Alan Schmiererk

2.) In their native range, House Finches live in desert, grassland, shrubland, and open woodland environments, as well as near human dwellings and cities. This pre-existing penchant for urban areas likely helped them thrive when they were introduced to new areas. The biggest House Finch flocks in the East are found in cities, and it's much more common to find the eastern birds in habitats developed by people than anywhere else.

3.) House Finches can look very different depending on where they live. The birds come in 11 officially recognized subspecies. Body and bill size, shape, wing length, tail length, and coloring can all vary regionally. For instance, on Guadalupe Island off the coast of Baja California, Mexico, the finches have heftier bills than those found on the mainland. And eastern finches have longer and pointier wings than their western counterparts. That distinct wing shape is better suited to long flights, scientists say—a helpful trait for more northern House Finch populations in the East, some of which migrate south, while western finches tend to stay put year-round.

4.) There are even local House Finch accents. In California, the standard male's song lasts for two seconds and contains between 4 and 26 syllables. In Wisconsin and Colorado, studies have shown that songs last longer and contain more syllables. In New York State, distinct dialects abound, with males' songs noticeably differing within just one square mile.

5.) Although House Finches are well adapted to dry climates, they still need a lot of water. On especially hot days, they can consume more than their own bodyweight in fluids. Luckily, succulent plants abound in their native, arid habitat, offering a hydrating food source. Eating the fruits and flowers of cacti, such as saguaros and ocotillo, allows the finches to get enough liquids without drinking directly. Still, they love water as much as any other species, and a birdbath is likely to draw lots of them to your yard.



House Finch
©Chris Wice

6.) A western House Finch is likely to build its nest within 60 feet of where it was the previous breeding season, while its eastern counterparts have been known to choose sites more than half a mile away from prior nests. Within that home turf, they may choose any variety of settings including coniferous trees, cactuses, planters, streetlights, and windowsills. However, almost all House Finch nest sites have a couple of things in common: a sturdy base and a roof-like overhang to shelter against sun and rain.

7.) The reddish-orange (and sometimes yellow) plumage that mature House Finch males sport on their crown, throat, and chest comes from compounds in their food. These pigments, known as carotenoids, are the same ones found in carrots and tomatoes. Female finches prefer males with bigger and brighter red patches—it's a sign of a well-fed mate!

8.) House Finches are among the strictest avian vegetarians: Seeds, buds, fruit, and foliage comprise 97 percent of their year-round diet. Most seed-eating

birds switch it up in the spring and summer when insects become abundant, but House Finches rarely do. The biggest exception is that parent finches will feed their nestlings soft and squishy fly larvae as an early life protein boost.

9.) The species has been dealing with its own pandemic for decades. House Finch eye disease, a form of conjunctivitis, was first detected in Washington D.C. in the winter of 1994. Since then, the bacterial illness has expanded continent-wide and caused big declines in House Finch numbers. Infected birds often have swollen or reddened eyes and may appear inactive or confused. Over time, it leads to birds becoming blind, disoriented, and vulnerable to predators. Other finch species, such as the American Goldfinch, are also affected. The disease is spread through social contact, so keeping your bird feeders and baths clean is important.

10.) Their plant-based diets might suggest peace-loving passivity, but House Finches can be very aggressive, especially at feeders. In fact, they're so territorial around food and nest sites that they're one of the only birds known to fight off non-native House Sparrows. Where House Finch populations go up, House Sparrow numbers drop.



Yellow House Finch
© Jay McGowan



Orange House Finch
© NPS

Slavin Conservation Area May 8, 2022 Report from the Field

By Alan McCoy

Thirty-four degrees and breezy. In May! But that did not stop Joanie Dezember, Shenandoah Marr and yours truly from getting out early to see what kind of critters we could find. Right away as we crossed the grass, a Savannah Sparrow flew right in front of us, landed no more than 10 feet away and sang its breezy song. A moment later we turned to see a male Northern Harrier hunting low and rocking side to side over the ground as they normally do. Harriers seem to be getting scarce these days so I was happy to watch him for a while. Shortly thereafter, as we were just entering the pines, three beautifully colored Red-naped Sapsuckers entertained us as they probed trees looking for food. I would guess that they were related as I don't recall ever seeing more than one at a time.



Joanie Dezember & Shenandoah Marr

The county has installed some signs along the trail, which I was glad to see, but they stopped at the first overlook for some reason. I hope they will eventually finish the signage along the whole trail system. There weren't all that

many people on this day, nor many with dogs and they were all on a leash but one. For that I was thankful!

The two most notable sightings for me were three Snow Geese flying over. Seems a bit late for them to still be here. The other was a fast-flying falcon. It was much too large to be a Merlin. It was gray above and with the prominent dark mustache, it had to be a Peregrine. That is a first for me at Slavin. Did I mention that it was FAST?

One of the most productive areas at Slavin is what I call "warbler alley." This is across the field from the first overlook where there is a row of birch trees (at

least, I think they are birch). Walking along quietly here, I nearly always find a Yellow Warbler and a Spotted Towhee (which we did find), this time joined by a quiet Downy Woodpecker looking for bugs.

The water supported plenty of waterfowl including abundant coots and Gadwalls. The blue bills of the many Ruddy Ducks were astonishingly saturated with color but too far away to get a decent photo. But this Cinnamon Teal was exploring nearby reeds so I was able to get a decent image just before it disappeared.

In addition to the birdlife, the wild flowers were wonderful. Serviceberry are in full bloom. Arrow-leaf Balsamroot, Camas and wild Hyacinth added so much color to the walk. It may have been cool, but it was dry until a bit of graupel fell as we walked back to the parking lot. For a complete listing of the birds we saw, please check either eBird or our website.



Downy Woodpecker



Serviceberry

Cinnamon Teal



All photos by Alan McCoy

SAS is grateful for legislative leadership to protect Waikiki Springs



Dave Schaub (Inland Northwest Land Conservancy), Lindell Haggin (SAS treasurer), WA State Rep. Marcus Riccelli, and SAS members Tina and Judge Wynecoop toured Waikiki Springs Nature Preserve May 24 to thank Riccelli for his leadership in state support for the area.

Spokane Audubon Society (SAS) members recently met Spokane 3rd legislative district representative Marcus Riccelli at the Waikiki Springs Nature Preserve to thank him for his leadership securing state funds in 2020 to help the Inland Northwest Land Conservancy acquire and manage the property for public use.

The Conservancy's 95 acres along the Little Spokane River in north Spokane that were slated for development are adjacent to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) 116 acres that were slated for state surplus when fish hatchery plans could not be completed. Now the entire 211 acres of riparian, forest, and meadow habitat is managed by the Conservancy in cooperation with WDFW for trail hiking, wildlife watching, and other nature enjoyment.

Riccelli has said the project came together thanks to collaboration with surrounding neighborhood residents and the Spokane Tribe, as well as the Conservancy and WDFW. But SAS treasurer Lindell Haggin says Riccelli's leadership in the state house, and 3rd district senator Andy Billig's in the senate, was key.

Lindell promises to schedule a birding field trip to Waikiki Springs soon. Meanwhile, learn more about this birding gem at <https://inlandnwland.org/waikiki-springs-nature-preserve/>.



Dave Schaub, Tina and Judge Wynecoop, WA State Rep. Marcus Riccelli, and Lindell Haggin walked Waikiki Springs trails



Lindell Haggin points out a bird spotted for Rep. Riccelli and Dave Schaub

Pygmy Owl Contributions

Spokane Audubon Society members who want to contribute to the Pygmy Owl newsletter can submit articles on, and photos of, birds and bird conservation issues to info@spokaneaudubon.org for publishing consideration.

The newsletter deadline is the 20th of the month for the next month's edition.



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

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>

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

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