

The Pygmy Owl



Volume 29
Issue 6
Feb. 2021

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society

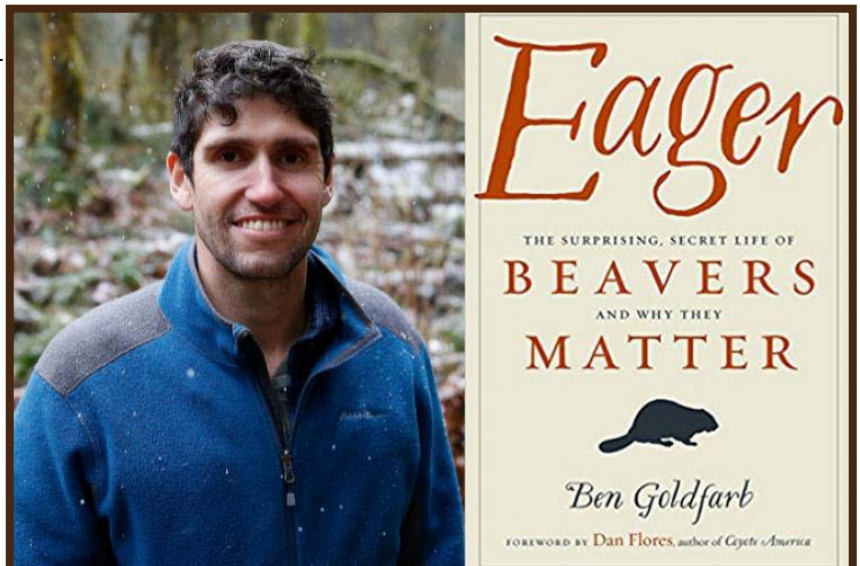
February 10, 7:00 p.m.

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: 820 2599 7746, Passcode: 649793), link to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82025997746?pwd=VHZUZW9Gc3RldDdveW05MjVhVnErQT09>

Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter

by Ben Goldfarb

In *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, environmental journalist Ben Goldfarb reveals that our modern conception of a healthy ecosystem is wrong, distorted by the fur trade that once trapped out millions of beavers from North America's waterways. The consequences of losing beavers were profound: ponds drained, wetlands dried up, and species from salmon to swans lost vital habitat. Today, a growing coalition of "Beaver Believers"—including scientists, ranchers, and passionate citizens—recognizes that ecosystems with beavers are far healthier than those without them. From the Nevada deserts to the Scottish highlands, Believers are hard at work restoring these industrious rodents to their former haunts. In his talk, Ben will discuss the history of this world-changing species; how beavers can help us fight drought, flooding, wildfire, and climate change; and how we can coexist with this important, but challenging, species.



Ben Goldfarb is the author of *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, winner of the 2019 PEN/E.O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award. His work has appeared in publications including the Atlantic, Science, Orion Magazine, and the Washington Post. He lives in Spokane with his wife, Elise, and his dog, Kit — which is, of course, what you call a baby beaver.



Photo courtesy of Half-Earth Project

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Spokane Audubon Society
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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status December 24, 2020 through January 22, 2021:

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

Individual: Jennifer McCain, Laurie Niemeyer, Dori Hettinger, Suzann Barnett, Mary Murphy, Michael Conrad

Family: Robb Repp & Liz Hamer, Theresa Jones, Peggy Davey, George Saylor

Supporting: Jeff Lambert, Lois & Stephen Johnson

Lifetime: Thomas Kasson

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Robin Crain, Darcy Varona, Scott Hall, Connie Fugitt-Smith, Jeff Hedge, Steven Thompson, Nancy Curry

Family: Pearl & Howard Bouchard, Liz Deniro & Paul Swetik, Mike & Lynn Noel

Supporting: Kaye Bartholomew, Richard & Sabrina Wood, April May

Contributing: Joseph Conaty

We have switched the Pygmy Owl to an electronic publication to reduce costs and save both energy and paper. You should receive the Pygmy Owl via email as soon as it is published. Please contact me, Alan McCoy, at ahm2352@gmail.com, if you have delivery issues or want to change your email address. Another way to get the Pygmy Owl is to go to our website:

<https://www.audubonspokane.org/the-pygmy-owl>.



Simple Actions to Help Birds

(excerpts from Cornell's education program birds.cornell.edu)

In 2019, scientists documented North America's staggering loss of nearly 3 billion breeding birds since 1970. Helping birds can be as simple as making changes to everyday habits. Here's our quick list of 7 Simple Actions you can take to help birds.

1. Make Windows Safer, Day and Night

The challenge: Up to 1 billion birds are estimated to die each year after hitting windows in the United States and Canada.

The cause:

By day, birds perceive reflections in glass as habitat they can fly into.

By night, migratory birds, drawn in by city lights, are at high risk of colliding with buildings.

These simple steps save birds: On the outside of the window, install screens or break up reflections—using film, paint, or string spaced no more than two inches high or four inches wide.

2. Keep Cats Indoors

The challenge: Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.6 billion birds annually in the U.S. and Canada. This is the #1 human-caused reason for the loss of birds, aside from habitat loss.

The cause: Cats can make great pets, but more than 110 million feral and pet cats now roam the United States and Canada. These non-native predators instinctively hunt and kill birds, even when well fed. A solution that's good for cats and birds: Save birds and keep cats healthy by keeping cats indoors or creating an outdoor "catio." You can also train your cat to walk on a leash.

3. Reduce Lawn, Plant Natives

The challenge: Birds have fewer places to safely rest during migration and to raise their young: More than 10 million acres of land in the United States were converted to developed land from 1982 to 1997.

The cause: Lawns and pavement don't offer enough food or shelter for many birds and other wildlife. With more than 40 million acres of lawn in the U.S. alone, there's huge potential to support wildlife by replacing lawns with native plantings.

Add native plants, watch birds come in: Native plants add interest and beauty to your yard and neighborhood and provide shelter and nesting areas for birds. The nectar, seeds, berries, and insects will sustain birds and diverse wildlife.

Get started today: Find out which native plants are best for your area

4. Avoid Pesticides

The challenge: More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are applied in the United States each year. The continent's most widely used insecticides, called neonicotinoids or "neonics," are lethal to birds and to the insects that birds consume. Common weed killers used around homes, such as 2, 4-D and glyphosate (used in Roundup), can be toxic to wildlife; and glyphosate has been declared a probable human carcinogen.

The cause: Pesticides that are toxic to birds can harm them directly through contact, or if they eat contaminated seeds or prey. Pesticides also can harm birds indirectly by reducing the number of available insects, which birds need to survive.

A healthy choice for you, your family, and birds: Consider purchasing organic food. Nearly 70% of produce sold in the U.S. contains pesticides. Follow the link to see a list. ([source](#)). Reduce pesticides around your home and garden.

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

January weather has been exceptionally mild. Despite a relatively large snowfall just after Christmas, unseasonably warm temperatures have left the region snowless up to about 3,500 or 4,000 feet. With the abnormally large amount of open water and flooded fields, look for puddle ducks, geese, and swans to “arrive” early (or move from the deeper lakes to the fields they prefer). Our Blue Jay extravaganza continues to impress. Notable sightings are as follows:

Greater White-fronted Goose: Tensed (1/18-KD)

Snow Goose: Colburn (12/21-RDC)

Red-breasted Merganser: Hawkins Point (12/22-JI); Bayview (12/29-DW); Heyburn State Park (1/2-CL and CS)

Anna’s Hummingbird: Hayden (1/8-DW); Spokane Valley (1/17-MC)

Mew Gull: Clark Fork (12/22-JI)

Pacific Loon: Hawkins Point (12/22-JI); Liberty Lake (1/27-TO)

Northern Goshawk: Moscow (12/22-MS); Boundary Creek WMA (12/23-JI); Little Spokane River (12/26-TL); West Plains (1/1-MS); Mill Canyon (1/1-TL); Colburn (1/2-RDC); Potlatch (1/10-eBird)

Ferruginous Hawk: Tokio (12/31-TL)

Blue Jay: Electric City (12/31-MY); Sandpoint (1/4-eBird); Bonner’s Ferry (1/10-JI); Pullman (1/10-eBird); Medical Lake (1/11-MS); Latah (1/16-TO); University of Idaho (1/18-KD); Kettle Falls (1/20-DB)

CALIFORNIA SCRUB-JAY: Spokane Valley (1/16-TO)

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch: Harker Canyon (1/2-LJ)

Pine Grosbeak: Fleming Creek (1/2-JR and SE); (1/15-eBird); Mt. Spokane SP (1/17-JE)

White-winged Crossbill: Colburn (12/28-RDC); Sandpoint (1/6-RDC); Mt. Spokane SP (1/17-JE)

Lesser Goldfinch: Feryn Conservation Area (12/23-TL); Spokane Valley (1/12-TO)



Scrub Jay © Ethan Hobbs

Scrub Jay compared to a Blue Jay



Blue Jay © Bellemare Celine

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; LJ-Louise Johnson; 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; RM-Roy Meyers; RuM-Russ Morgan; 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 Selle; DS-Doug Shoenwald; KS-Katie Sorenson; AS-Adam Stepniewski; CS-Charles Swift; DW-Doug Ward; SW-Steven Warren; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; MY-Matt Yawney

Correction on bird photo from January's last page

We apologize for mistakenly mislabeling a photo of Pine Grosbeaks as White-winged Crossbills in the January Pygmy Owl, but our astute readers picked up on it. The shape of the bills should have been a slam dunk regarding their names!

The photos below of both Pine Grosbeaks and White-winged Crossbills clearly show the difference in their bills, as well as the similarity in their coloring

Pine Grosbeaks

Male - red

Female - yellow

© Christoph Moning



White-winged Crossbills

Male - red

Female - yellow

© Chris Wood

The Great Backyard Bird Count



The count is on the horizon -

February 12-15, 2021.

Participating is easy, fun to do alone, or with others, and can be done anywhere that you find birds.

Choose the easiest way for you to share your birds:

- Identify birds with Merlin Bird ID app and add sightings to your list
- Use the eBird Mobile app
- Enter your bird list on the eBird website (Desktop/laptop)

All you need is a free Cornell Lab account to participate. This account is shared with Merlin, eBird, Project FeederWatch and other projects at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. If you already have an account, please use the same username and password for submitting your bird list for the Great Backyard Bird Count.

It's That Easy!

Submit one or more lists over the four days of counting and you become a contributing citizen scientist (community scientist). All eBird entries and saved Merlin Bird IDs over the four days contribute to the Great Backyard Bird Count.



Member Profile:

Marian and Russell Frobe

by Madonna Luers

Long before she even knew what the Audubon Society was, Marian Pryor had a small bird club with her grade school friends at a one-room schoolhouse on Four Mound Prairie, west of Spokane.

“I always was interested in birds,” she said, “probably through the influences of my mother and grandmother. They knew the names of the birds and flowers and always gave me gifts of bird books and flower books. We almost always lived on farms and I spent hours outside watching birds and learning plants.”

Decades later, stalwarts of the Spokane Audubon Society, Marian and her husband, Russell Frobe, made ornithological and personal history when they banded Washington state’s first recorded golden-winged warbler on their 38th wedding anniversary, August 20, 1998.

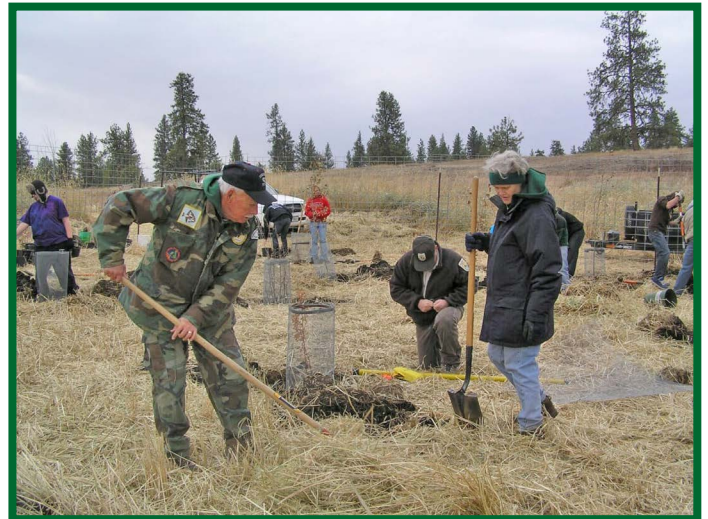


Russell with a Saw-whet Owl at Turnbull
Photo by Sandy Rancourt

Russell recalls it was when they were among other Audubon volunteers helping U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, Mike Rule, conduct Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) surveys at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Each summer for several years they retrieved hundreds of neotropical migrant songbirds from fine-mesh nets set up

to catch them on the fly so they could be weighed, measured, and leg-banded before being released, some caught again in subsequent years. Warblers of many species were commonly handled, but the golden-winged was a rare vagrant, perhaps blown off course from its usual migration from breeding grounds in northcentral states and provinces to wintering areas in Central and South America. “That,” said the man of few words, “was memorable.”

Marian was born in 1937 in Arlington, Washington. Her family moved to Deer Park when she was in the 4th grade, to Spokane for the 5th grade, then to a farm on Four Mound Prairie until she graduated from Reardan High School in 1955. She joined the Women’s Army Corps that summer and served 5 1/2 years, stationed in San Francisco, Japan, Missouri, and in Hawaii, where she met Russell.



Russell and Marian planting at Turnbull
Photo by Sandy Rancourt

Russell was born in 1939 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and lived and went to school there until he joined the U.S. Army in 1956. He was stationed at Fort Belvoir, Virginia; Fort Richardson, Alaska; Fort Meade, Maryland; and Fort Shafter, Hawaii, where he met and married Marian.

The Frobes had their first son in Hawaii before Russell was then sent to Loring Air Force Base in Maine, where their second son was born. Russell left the service after that tour and they came home to Spokane in 1965, where they have lived ever since. Russell worked for the National Guard and Marian got a job with the Social Security Administration. By 1993, they both were retired.

They joined the Spokane Audubon Society (SAS) sometime in the 70's after their kids were mostly raised. Marian knows her life list had a "big hiatus" from the 50's to the 70's anyway, and it was resumed probably due to Audubon membership. They both started going on field trips by 1981, with Russell's interest keying off of Marian's. He really likes recording what she identifies and just getting out to field trip destinations like Turnbull.

Marian's first Christmas Bird Counts were with SAS members Maurice Vial and, later, with Warren Hall. She and Russell started doing point counts at Turnbull and then various other surveys, bird banding, and habitat planting there. They got involved with the Friends of Turnbull group, for which Marian served as president for about six years. For quite a few years, the Frobes ran the small nature store near refuge headquarters. They continued conducting Breeding Bird Surveys at Turnbull up until last year's cancellations due to pandemic restrictions.

From the Turnbull banding work, they connected with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologist Howard Ferguson, and helped with MAPS surveys and banding at the Little Spokane and Mount Spokane sites. They also did some point counts for Howard to help him create baseline data on bird populations in areas slated for development. The Frobes were honored with WDFW's Volunteer of the Year Award in 1999 for their bird banding and surveying contributions to the state.

They have traveled to see birds, mostly after their sons were grown, and always tried to identify birds when traveling on other kinds of tours. They've been to England, Australia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Mexico, Peru and Panama.

"The South American trips were almost always with Legacy Tours, led by a wonderful local guide," Marian

said. "But once I joined a bird banding expedition to Peru with Lindell Haggin and Tina Wynecoop. That was a lot of fun, especially getting to see and handle the small skulking birds, such as antbirds, wrens, manakins and antthrushes, that you may not ever be able to see otherwise. That's probably my favorite birding experience."

Russell recalls that all of their birding trips had great moments. One that comes to mind is a tour they both made to Peru, which included visits to the 15th century Inca citadel, Macchu Picchu. They later stayed at a lodge in the Manu Wildlife Center from which they took several boat trips down the Manu River. One involved walking about a half mile from the river landing to clay licks that attract parrots and macaws. Their guides carried in breakfast and set it up in a partially enclosed viewing structure where they sat and ate while watching the birds come and go.

Russell says that it's hard to pick a favorite bird, but maybe the Pygmy Owl or Northern Flicker. Marian also has more than one favorite – Ruby-crowned Kinglet "for its louder than expected voice," chickadees "for their attitude," and since catching one in the banding project nets last year at Turnbull, perhaps a Saw-whet Owl.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet © Paul Jayck

Seney National Wildlife Refuge

It's good to know that positive things are happening for birds around the country!



Northern Flicker © Matt Davis

The Frobes' advice for new birders is to watch ALL birds. "Become familiar with the common ones, so that when there's a different little brown bird in that flock of house sparrows, you'll realize it's something different," Marian explained. "And go with experts who are happy to help you learn. Don't be intimidated by those who recognize birds by sound. You can't learn the sounds all at once. It takes a lot of field trips and listening."

The Frobes also recommend advocating for strong environmental laws to protect bird habitats from harm. "And we all need to try to do our part to combat global warming," Marian said, "so that we have a world of birds to enjoy in the future."



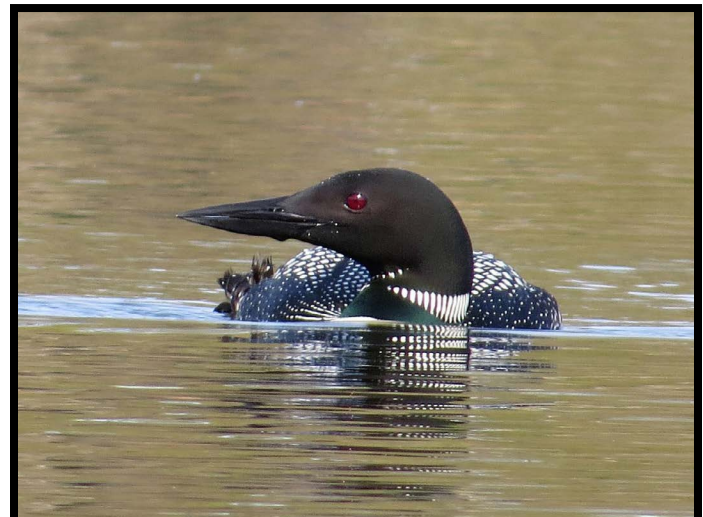
Golden-winged Warbler © Luke Seitz



ABJ shows off his band, his mate, and their tiny chick. (© Laura Wong)

A YEAR IN THE LIFE, SILVER LININGS 2020
Submitted by Bill Maclachlan & Bill Hart

The Seney Natural History Association's activities were shut down on the Seney National Wildlife Refuge (Michigan) due to the virus for the year, but ABJ (adult banded juvenile), the oldest known banded common loon in the world, didn't get the notice! He returned to J-pool for the 24th consecutive season and successfully bred with his long-term mate, Fe, producing a healthy chick, adding to their known total of over 30 hatchlings.



Common Loon "ABJ" © Lorna Wong

Merlin

Bird Terminator



A formidable bird-hunter about the same length as the related American Kestrel, the Merlin is more powerfully built and seems far larger — more like a miniature Peregrine Falcon.

“The Merlin is to an American Kestrel what a Harley-Davidson motorcycle is to a bicycle,” wrote bird authorities Pete Dunne, David Sibley, and Clay Sutton in their seminal book *Hawks in Flight*. “In the air, the difference between a Merlin and an American Kestrel is not a matter of degrees; it is quantum.”

This talented aerialist terrorizes sandpiper, songbird, and pigeon flocks; indeed, its scientific name means “pigeon-like falcon” or “pigeon falcon.” Its common name once was Pigeon Hawk.

A Falcon by Another Name

The shape-shifting wizard of legend might seem an apt inspiration for the Merlin’s name; but instead, it comes from the French word *esmerillon*, meaning falcon. The wizard named Merlin, on the other hand, got his name from the Welsh name *Myrddin*; he was named after a real-life bard who was part of the inspiration for the mystical character perpetuated in King Arthur legends.

Medieval falconers called the Merlin the “Lady’s Hawk,” and royalty prized this small raptor for hunting Eurasian Skylarks and other avian prey. Fans included Mary Queen of Scots and Russia’s Catherine the Great.

In the wild, Merlins mostly hunt other birds. Unlike the Peregrine Falcon, they don’t usually dive or “stoop” on their prey. Instead, they power up in horizontal flight, plowing into murmurations of starlings, clouds of sandpipers, and strong-flying pigeon flocks at speeds topping 30 miles per hour. They also pick off songbirds as small as the Yellow Warbler, be it on breeding grounds, during migration, or where they winter. Merlins also nab bats leaving their roost caves and prey on large insects, including dragonflies.

Northern Falcon

Merlins are not unique to North America. They nest across much of the northern half of the Northern Hemisphere, with most wintering well to the south.

Three distinctive subspecies nest in Canada and the United States. The “Black” Merlin of the Pacific Coast region is mostly dark charcoal in color, solid on the back, wings, and tail. The “Prairie” or “Richardson’s” Merlin is found in the center of the continent and is the lightest in color, with females having a pencil-lead-gray back and the males blue-gray backs. Streaks of brown (in females) and orangish (in males) adorn the birds’ otherwise white underparts. The most widespread subspecies is the “Taiga” Merlin. Its back color is dark gray, as are streaks running down its otherwise buffy underparts. In Eurasia, six other subspecies are found.

In the U.S., Merlins are found year-round along the northern Pacific Coast and in a large patch of the northern Great Plains. Otherwise, they have separate breeding and wintering ranges in North America, nesting from Alaska across most of Canada, and in parts of the northernmost contiguous U.S. states. In winter, they occur along all U.S. coastal regions and from the Pacific states through the western Great Plains. They also winter throughout Mexico, south to northwestern South America. A few reach Ecuador and Peru, the only countries within the Merlin’s world range where they cross the Equator.

Submitted by Alan McCoy

The Ferruginous Hawk

(*Buteo regalis*)

Provide your input about the state's proposal to uplist this beautiful bird from threatened to endangered status

The ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) is a large hawk with broad wings, a large head, and feathered legs. They average 23" long and have a wingspan of 56". Females are noticeably larger. Males and females have similar plumage. Ferruginous hawks can appear in two color phases. The light "morph" (phase) is snowy white below, reddish-brown above, grayish head, whitish tail, and underwing linings. The dark morph is a dark brown head, chest, and belly, and whitish tail and underwing linings. Toes, cere (upper beak membrane), and beak margins are yellow.

Ferruginous hawks are migratory and occur in arid grasslands and shrubsteppe habitats. In Washington, ferruginous hawks' diet consists mostly of small to medium-sized mammals, such as jackrabbits, pocket gophers, mice, and ground squirrels, but often includes birds, reptiles, and insects.

Arriving on their breeding areas from late April through July, ferruginous hawks nest on small rock outcrops on the slope of steep hillsides or canyons or in isolated trees, such as junipers. After nesting, ferruginous hawks typically migrate to the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains to feed on the abundant ground squirrels, followed by a migration to central California.

Washington state is on the northwestern edge of the species' breeding range. Over 200 territories have been documented in Washington, with Franklin and Benton counties together hosting about 60 percent. Grant, Walla Walla, Adams, and Yakima counties have had 13 or more territories each.

Currently the species is undergoing a Periodic Status Review. WDFW is recommending a change from threatened to endangered status for Ferruginous Hawks in Washington.

Learn more about ferruginous hawks at wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/species/buteo-regalis [#wildlifewednesday](https://twitter.com/wildlifewednesday)



Ferruginous Hawk Light Morph © Brian Sullivan



Ferruginous Hawk Dark Morph © Chris Wood



Ferruginous Hawk Juveniles © Tim Barksdale

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.



CDA Field Trip - Feb. 6 2021

CDA Audubon has planned a field trip to the Davenport/Lincoln County area for Feb. 6. We will leave CDA around 8am and should arrive in Reardan around 9:30 depending on weather and roads.

Reardan is probably an easier place for Spokane folks to meet us. Let's rendezvous at Kickin Coffee. We will be following Covid protocols and masking when unable to social distance.

Currently I am planning on checking out the Reardan sloughs, the Davenport Cemetery, and several driving routes we've been on in the past. Any additional suggestions from Spokane folks would be appreciated. If anyone has questions I can be reached at 406-540-2673 / tehesmith@gmail.com. All the best.

Ted Smith
Field Trip Coordinator,
Coeur d'Alene Audubon Society

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:
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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.



The Pygmy Owl
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>

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!