

# The Pygmy Owl



Volume 29  
Issue 3  
Nov. 2020

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society

**November 11, 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# 846 7313 3127, passcode 754035), link to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84673133127?pwd=VHRWQ0o0RHJtbnN2WGdFL3lUK3hZz09>.

## The Worst Labor Day Ever: Shrub-Steppe, Wildfires, and Wildlife

by Kim Thorburn

Shrub-steppe is a predominant ecosystem of the arid West. It is rich in biodiversity. Fire is a cyclic dynamic of these biologic communities that formerly contributed to their health. For more than a century, human activities and development have altered the shrub-steppe, causing considerable impacts to wildlife. Altered fire behavior is one of the threats.

On September 7, 2020, extreme weather conditions, including drought, high temperatures, and strong winds, contributed to multiple explosive wildfires throughout the shrub-steppe of Washington. Erratic fire behavior challenged containment and large swaths of shrub-steppe incinerated, including public lands managed for wildlife habitat. A history of wildlife management, fire consequences, and plans going forward will be discussed.



**Barn after this summer's wildfire**  
(photo by Kim Thorburn)



**Kim reintroducing grouse**  
(photo by Jason Lowe, BLM)



**Birders near Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area  
barn during a past field trip**  
(photo by Charlotte Byers)

Spokane Audubon member, Kim Thorburn, has volunteered on Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Bureau of Land Management projects related to shrub-steppe wildlife conservation for nearly two decades. Along with Lindell Haggin, she coordinates Spokane Audubon's state grant-funded program that supports prairie grouse recovery volunteer activities. She is a member of the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission.

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

Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and pg. 8 © Jan Reynolds.



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Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area entrance sign in the past  
(photo by Kim Thorburn)



Wildlife area entrance after the fire  
(photo by Kim Thorburn)



Mule deer moving through the burned-over wildlife area  
(photo by Kim Thorburn)



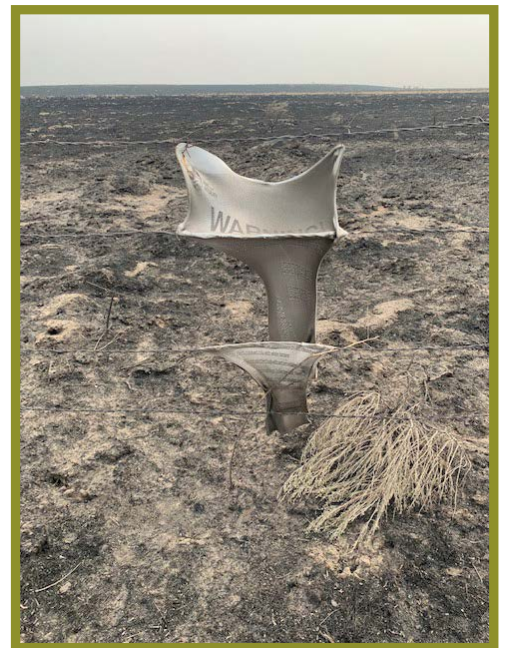
**West Swanson Lake last year**  
(photo by Kim Thorburn)



**West Swanson Lake after wildfire** (photo by Kim Thorburn)



**Spotted Towhee habitat after wildfire**  
(photo by Kim Thorburn)



**Wildfire-melted warning sign for bird hunters about threatened prairie grouse in the area**  
(photo by Juli Anderson, WDFW)

# Donate to restore habitat for threatened prairie grouse lost to wildfire

by Madonna Luers

Spokane Audubon board has committed at least \$10,000 in currently available funds toward restoration of habitat for threatened prairie grouse lost to wildfire on the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area in Lincoln County. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) staff estimate at least \$30,000 in forb restoration on the wildlife area is needed, so your donation now will help us do even more for sharptailed and sage grouse that many of us have worked to help recover for many years. (This month's meeting presentation by our prairie grouse project lead, Kim Thorburn, featured on page one, will provide more details about the status of these species and the wildlife area.)

The board donated \$1,000 to the Inland Northwest Wildlife Council's fund for WDFW grass re-seeding on both public and private lands burned in Lincoln and Douglas county wildfires this summer. Up to \$9,000 were committed to cover some of WDFW costs to plant forbs this fall and next spring, specifically on the wildlife area. An additional \$8,000-plus in the chapter's ongoing state grant for grouse monitoring is also being re-worked so that it can be applied to habitat restoration at Swanson Lakes.

WDFW biologists tell us that forbs are at least as important as grass for these threatened grouse species, so we want to help the birds we've been working to recover in the best way we can.

Forbs are non-woody, broadleaf, flowering plants like asters, blanket flower, buckwheat, camas, daisy, desert parsley, flax, lupine, penstemon, and phlox that grouse and other wildlife either eat directly, or feed on the insects that the plants support. Forb seeds can be sown with grasses in the restoration efforts, but higher-cost plant starts plugged in now and in the spring have greater survival, according to WDFW biologists.

You can donate any amount to this effort, either by a check payable to Spokane Audubon mailed to P.O. Box 9820, Spokane, WA 99209-9820, or on-line by credit card at <https://audubonspokane.org>.



**Bunchgrass trying to sprout after the fire**  
(photo by Mike Finch, WDFW)



**Silky lupine sprouting in burned landscape**  
(photo by Mike Finch, WDFW)



Pre-burn sage brush habitat



Fires turn sage brush habitat in Washington into a scorched 'oblivion'.

© Ashley Ahern

### ***How to get your 2021 calendar***

The SAS limited edition 2021 calendar is available for on-line, credit-card purchase through our website at <https://www.audubonspokane.org/> for \$12, plus \$2 for handling and mailing it to you. Or you can send a check to "Spokane Audubon Society" for \$14 per calendar, with your name and postal mailing address, to Spokane Audubon Society, P.O. Box 9820, Spokane, WA 99209-9820. Please allow 2-4 weeks for delivery for this option

You also can purchase the calendar at Auntie's Bookstore, 402 W. Main Ave., (509-838-0206), for \$12, plus sales tax. Auntie's retains 30 percent (\$3.60) of each calendar sale for providing this service.

You also can make arrangements with SAS president Alan McCoy (ahm2352@gmail.com or call or text 509-999-9512) to purchase a calendar with cash or check and arrange for local (Spokane area) pickup.

Proceeds from calendar sales help fund the work we do to protect bird habitat and secure public access to birding areas.



**2021 Spokane Audubon Society Calendar**  
**Birds of Eastern Washington and the Idaho Panhandle**

## Lindell Haggin honored as Helen Engle Volunteer of the Year

Our 50-year member and long-time board treasurer Lindell Haggin was honored with Audubon Washington's 2020 Helen Engle Volunteer of the Year Award at last month's Audubon Council of Washington meeting.

This award was inspired by longtime Tahoma chapter member Helen Engle who helped create the Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award during the 2013 National Audubon Convention, and who passed away at 93 last year. The award was established to recognize



a volunteer who has contributed outstanding service to the Audubon cause at the chapter, state, regional or flyway level.

Lindell says that she shares this award with her late mother-in-law Margaret Haggin, who, with her husband Morey, was one of the founders of the Spokane chapter. Margaret provided lifelong bird education for the community and inspired Lindell to follow in her footsteps.

Lindell most recently led the Spokane chapter's contributions to the state's 2014 – 2019 Sagebrush Songbird Survey in conjunction with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). She recruited, organized and helped train and equip dozens of other volunteers, contacted private landowners to secure access permission for many of the survey sites, then rounded up and compiled survey results. For this leadership task alone, Lindell was deserving of this year's award.

But she does much more. Lindell has participated in many multi-year volunteer projects, including:

- songbird banding in the Mapping Avian Productivity Surveys (MAPS) program with WDFW and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS);
- waterfowl surveys with Ducks Unlimited, USFWS and WDFW;

- prairie grouse surveys on WDFW wildlife areas and U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands;
- habitat and bird use surveys at BLM North Telford property and WDFW Reardan Wildlife Area;
- surveys at Whitworth University and Edwidge Woldson Park for property species lists;
- annual Christmas Bird Counts as a team leader; and
- chapter field trip leadership.

Lindell often represents the chapter at the annual fall meeting of the Audubon Council of Washington (ACOW) and other state and regional conferences, webinars, and training sessions. She shares these experiences with the rest of the chapter board and membership, most recently helping shift from physical meetings to on-line Zoom meetings during the coronavirus pandemic.

As a retired teacher, Lindell has long served on the chapter's education committee, which means that she responds to many requests annually from schools, youth camps, scouts, and adult clubs for presentations on birds and their habitats.

Lindell is an accomplished photographer and many of her beautiful bird photos have been featured in the chapter's annual calendar. She uses her photography in her education work, too, reviewing photos for better identification than glimpses with binoculars.

Lindell has served as a key spokesperson for Spokane Audubon when news media stories involve birds, other wildlife, and habitat issues. As a board member she encourages more active involvement by members and the general public in issues threatening birds and other wildlife, from insecticide use to habitat loss and overall climate change. She's always looking for more citizen science work with management agencies to help provide the data needed to identify problems and address them.

We congratulate Lindell for this well-deserved and long-overdue honor. We're sure that Helen Engle would be proud to know that Lindell is the recipient of her namesake award.

# Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

Fall birding is here! Leaves are coming down and waterfowl and raptors are moving in. Most of our migrant songbirds are gone. White-throated Sparrows continue their impressive showing around the region. For the second year we are having a major Blue Jay incursion/irruption. It will be interesting to see if this is the “new normal” or if the past two years were just good ones for Blue Jays. At least one bird from the last year or two in the Harrison area has hybridized with a Steller’s Jay, though there are still no confirmed pure breeding records for Idaho. Especially rare sightings are in caps:

Long-tailed Duck: Kettle Falls (10/1-DK);

Surf Scoter: Potlatch (10/13-CL); Newman Lake (10/13-eBird); Rock Lake (10/13-RB); Four Lakes (10/14-JI); Diamond Lake (10/14-TL); Silver Lake (10/15-TL)

White-winged Scoter: Diamond Lake (10/14-TL)

Red-breasted Merganser: Rock Lake (10/13-RB)

Anna’s Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (9/26-NT); Kendrick (10/4-JH); Pine Bluff (10/12-eBird); Spokane Valley (10/13-MC); Moscow (10/16-NP)

Sandhill Crane: Colville Flats (9/29-DK); Mondovi (10/15-TL)

Clark’s Grebe: Rock Lake (10/14-RB)

American Golden-Plover: Saltese Church Pond (9/21-JE)

Sanderling: Reardan (10/15-TL)

Pacific Loon: Haag Cove (10/2-DB); Sullivan Lake (10/8-AS); Four Lakes (10/14-JI); Waitt’s Lake (10/16-DK)

Great Egret: Kettle Falls (10/1-DK)

Western Screech-owl: Sullivan Creek (10/14-MW)

Broad-winged Hawk: University of Idaho (9/26-eBird)

Lewis’s Woodpecker: Rose Creek Preserve (9/27-eBird)

White-headed Woodpecker: McKenzie Conservation Area (9/30-eBird) Mill Canyon (10/15-TL)

Blue Jay: Airway Heights (9/22-eBird); Heyburn SP (9/24-BM); Lost Lake (9/27-CL); Dreary (10/4-CS); Ball Creek (10/5-eBird); Medimont (10/7-DA); Rice (10/8-StS); Pullman (10/8-eBird); Priest River (10/11-PS); Harrison (10/11-eBird); Silverton (10/11-eBird); Ferry Co. (10/12-DB); Spokane (10/14-eBird); Usk (10/14-MW); University of Idaho (10/16-CL); Koppei Farms (10/17-JW); Bonner’s Ferry (10/18-CP)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD: Koppei Farms (10/8-JW)

Gray-crowned Rosy Finch: Mt. Spokane SP (10/14-CM)



**Northern Mockingbird**

© Jay McGowan



**Northern Mockingbird**

© Jeremiah Trimble

(cont on page 7)

Pine Grosbeak: Mill Creek (10/1-TL); Harvey Creek (10/3-TL); Bunchgrass Meadows (10/3-TL); Mt. Spokane SP (10/11-JI); Salmo Pass (10/14-MW)

White-winged Crossbill: Bunchgrass Meadows (10/3-TL); Mt. Spokane SP (10/14-CM)

Lesser Goldfinch: Little Spokane River (10/11-TL)

White-throated Sparrow: University of Idaho (9/22-BM); Deep Creek (9/23-MW); Cusick (9/26-eBird); Bunchgrass Meadows (9/26-eBird); Mt. Spokane Foothills (9/29-TL); Spokane (10/3-CG); Colburn (10/5-FF); Four Lakes (10/14-SS); Calispell Lake (10/14-MW); Paradise Ridge (10/16-KD)

Golden-crowned Sparrow: Deep Creek (9/23-MW); Four Lakes (9/28-SS); Sprague (9/29-MC); Camden (10/4-TL)

Observers: DA-Dan Audet; RB-R.J. Baltierra; DB-Donna Bragg; BB-Ben Bright; WB-Will Brooks; 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; SM-Stuart Muller; TO-Tim O'Brien; PO-Peter Olsoy; JP-Jim Patten; CP-Chris Pease; NP-Neil Paprocki; MR-Mary Rumble; JR-Jethro Runco; PS-Pall Sieracki; SS-Sandy Schreven; StS-Steve Schubert; KS-Katie Sorenson; AS-Adam Stepniewski; CS-Charles Swift; DW-Doug Ward; JW-John Wolff; MW-Michael Woodruff; MY-Matt Yawney



**White-throated Sparrow**  
© Keenan Yakola



**Golden-crowned Sparrow**  
© George Pogos

## Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

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

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

**Individual:** Marion Miethke

**Family:** Ellen Bower, Stanley Williamson

**Supporting:** Terry Gruber

Many thanks to our returning members:

**Individual:** Cindy Bunnell, Peggy Tan

**Family:** Melissa O'Hara

**Contributing:** Jenny Michaels, Margo Wolf & Leonard Shields

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](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>.



# Lighting up can be hard on birds and other wildlife

By Madonna Luers

Seasonally shorter daylight hours and the shift from daylight saving time at the start of November makes our fall evenings darker earlier. That means some of us are now lighting up our outdoor spaces more. Of all the things we humans do that create problems for wildlife, did you ever think that our affinity for lighting the darkness around us would be one of them?

Light pollution has long been recognized as a potential problem for wildlife, particularly migrating birds. During migration, birds are believed to use the stars for navigation. Studies have shown that millions of birds become disoriented by the bright lights of buildings and fly off-course, sometimes crashing into buildings.

Birds migrating at night can be attracted to and even trapped by sources of artificial light, particularly during periods of low cloud cover or inclement weather, when stars are obstructed. When they approach lighthouses, floodlit obstacles, ceilometers (light beams generally used at airports to determine the altitude of cloud cover), communication towers, or lighted tall buildings, birds become vulnerable to collisions with the structures themselves.

But even if collision is avoided, birds are still at risk of death or injury. Once inside a beam of light, birds are reluctant to fly out of the lighted area into the dark, and often continue to flap around in the beam of light until they drop to the ground in exhaustion. Secondary threats from their concentration at lighted structures are increased vulnerability to predation and difficulty finding food, once trapped in an urban environment.

Research shows that light pollution directly affects reproduction and feeding patterns of some birds, bats, and other wildlife. Some scientists are even looking into what role light pollution plays in the recent decline and disappearance of fireflies. Light pollution is largely the result of bad lighting design, which allows artificial light to shine outward and upward into the sky, where it's not wanted, instead of focusing it downward where it is. Ill-designed lighting washes out the darkness of night and radically alters the light levels and rhythms to which many forms of life, including ours, have adapted. Wherever human light spills into the natural world, some aspect of life – migration, reproduction, feeding, resting – is affected.



**Night Migration** © Chanoch Seif

Solutions to this problem are pretty simple: design light fixtures that are shielded so they cast light downward instead of horizontally or upward, and turn off unnecessary lights at night. These measures have the added advantage of reducing energy consumption – which is what our daylight saving time shifts were originally all about. And reduced energy consumption can mean reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change. Some cities have adopted “Lights Out” programs to dim or turn off lights at least twice a year during bird migrations. Some have realized that if lights are unnecessary at those times, they might be unnecessary altogether. Some have even earned the distinction of “Dark Sky Communities” from the world’s recognized non-profit authority on light pollution, the International Dark Sky Association (IDA), which provides technical resources to address the problem.

Like so many problems we humans collectively create for wildlife, solutions can start with our own individual actions. So consider these:

- Turn off unneeded lights around your home;
- Invest in better-designed lighting that is less likely to affect wildlife, such as hooded, directed fixtures or lower, softer light options;
- Keep shades drawn from dusk through dawn to avoid spilling interior light outside;
- Learn more about individual and community-wide options at [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org) and take steps to help Spokane and other Inland Northwest communities go “Lights Out”.

# Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps Good from July 1 to June 30 each year.



After all the wildfires across the west and with the recently reported deaths of migrating song birds falling out of the sky, why wait? Conservation stamps are more important than ever. Now is the time to help.

## Why Do Duck Stamps Matter?

Produced annually since 1934 by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 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.

Besides serving as a waterfowl hunting license and a conservation tool, a current year's Federal Duck Stamp also serves as an entrance pass (for the whole year) for national wildlife refuges where admission is charged.

## Our Pricing:

Each stamp is \$25. The online fee covers our cost of providing them on our website. Normally, the stamps also are available at our meetings; but, of course, our meetings are temporarily on hold due to concerns over Covid-19. To avoid the online fee, it may be possible to purchase a stamp by arrangement. Please contact us at [info@audubonspokane.org](mailto:info@audubonspokane.org).

# Stamps	Online Fee	Total
1	\$2.25	\$27.25
2	\$2.50	\$52.50
3	\$2.75	\$77.75
4	\$3.00	\$103.00
5	\$3.25	\$128.25

## Spokane Christmas Bird Count

The next Spokane CBC is Saturday, January 2, 2021

Compiler: Alan McCoy  
Phone: (509) 448-3123 or (509) 999-9512  
Email: [ahm2352@gmail.com](mailto:ahm2352@gmail.com)

Spokane Count Circle Center:  
(approximately Whitehouse Street and Houston Avenue)

47° 43' 0.4" N (47.716786) Latitude  
117° 25' 0.9" W (-117.416911) Longitude

## Cheney Christmas Bird Count

The next Cheney CBC is Saturday, December 19, 2020.

Compiler: Sandy Schreven  
Phone: 509-624-6801  
Email: Sandy Schreven

Cheney Count Circle Center:  
(Slightly NE of downtown Cheney)

47°29'50.7" N (47.497410) Latitude  
117°33'06.5" W (-117.5518) Longitude

### 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.

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

**November 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>**

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**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!