

# WILLAPA WHISTLER

A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society

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Spring 2021



Chickadee -- Image by Royce Craig

## Time for Renewal, Again

By President Steve Puddicombe

It seems like only a few months ago since a bundle of DNA changed our lives, yet it has been a full revolution of the beautiful Earth around the sun. Just this time last year I wrote about our upcoming annual banquet at the end of March, only to cancel that and all our public gatherings in the teeth of the Covid 19 storm. Since then, Willapa Hills has held its board meetings via zoom. Our three CBCs went on despite distancing restrictions and other logistics issues due to the virus.

But Spring is in our step. This issue marks a year since instituting our once-yearly chapter renewal policy, and a reminder that now is the time to renew your membership. The issue includes a membership renewal envelope; but you can also renew with a credit card or debit card via our secure link at our website [www.willapahillsaudubon.org](http://www.willapahillsaudubon.org) and by clicking "donate/join us" along the bar at the top of the page. This pay site makes it easy to give a gift membership or to support a specific conservation or educational initiative.

Thanks, your continued membership support is important to our mission.

Another initiative we'll be pursuing in the coming months is to enhance your ability to volunteer or contact us with comments, suggestions and concerns. This effort will involve creating a new volunteer link at our website making it easier for you to specify your interests. We also hope to link to a page highlighting specific current volunteer outreach. There are always half a dozen opportunities, from manning our Earth Day booth to lobbying on behalf of conservation issues in the area. And we have several board committees that can always utilize help. WHAS is committed to fulfilling our mission of citizen science, conservation, and enjoyment of the natural world through the feathery prism of birds. Please join us!

For the time being we are still not hosting public events in person. Therefore, there will be **no annual banquet** this year. However, we're pursuing the possibility of an online event, and check out our website for other online activities and links to opportunities in our chapter area and elsewhere.

And, as always.....Happy Birding!

## March is Renewal Month for Your WHAS Membership!

As a volunteer-run organization, the Willapa Hills Audubon Society relies on your support!

Now, it is even easier to join or renew!

Visit our website at

<https://willapahillsaudubon.org/join-us-donate> for a secure transaction using your credit or debit card.

And of course, there is still a membership form in this Whistler on page 2 and on our website if you prefer to pay with a check via mail.

## Final Cowlitz County Bird List for 2020

By Russ Koppendrayer.

2020 has given us the **most species found in Cowlitz County** in one year over the life of this project.

Last month first addition was a **Heermann's Gull** that was actually seen in mid October but didn't get through the eBird review in time for the October report. This was the third ever record for the county for this gull that has a strong attachment to salt water. While we have three records, Wahkiakum county just downstream on the Columbia River has only one record and the next county upstream (Clark) has never witnessed this visitor.

...continued on page four

### In this issue of the Whistler:

- 2 Membership Form
- NW Birding Events
- 3 Wahkiakum CBC Results
- Leadbetter CBC Results
- 4 Leave bird feeders down until April 1 to protect birds from salmonellosis
- 37th Cowlitz-Columbia CBC Results
- 5 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey
- Creating Bird-Friendly Communities - Lights Out

**Support our mission, join WHAS today!**

**Membership renewals are due March 1** of each year. If you prefer to pay by credit or debit card use our online form on our website at <https://willapahillsaudubon.org/join-us-donate>.

Membership includes 4 issues of our newsletter *WILLAPA WHISTLER* annually. Gift Memberships are available online.

**Check type of Membership:**

- Individual Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$25 check for annual membership)
- Family Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$35 check for annual membership)
- Lifetime Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$750 check for lifetime membership)

We are a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation. All dues and donations are tax deductible

Please make your check payable to:  
WILLAPA HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY or WHAS and mail to:  
**WHAS-Membership, PO Box 399, Longview, WA 98632.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Thank you for supporting your local Audubon chapter -- Willapa Hills Audubon Society!**

We will not share your contact information with anyone. For membership in National Audubon Society visit <https://www.audubon.org/> Chapter# Y14

\*) To announce **occasional** reminders and to communicate last minute changes due to weather or other issues for WHAS programs and field trips.

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Please indicate any **new** information:

I prefer you contact me by:

- Phone
- Email
- Mail

**Other options:**(Add your email below)

- I prefer to receive the *WHISTLER* by email
- Contact me about volunteer opportunities
- Add me to your announcement email list\*
- I would like to support the work of Willapa Hills Audubon Society. Enclosed is my additional donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

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Shop at Amazon through <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/91-0951287>. Choose "Willapa Hills Audubon Society" as your charity and we'll receive 0.5% of your purchase total.

**Olympic BirdFest 2021**

Olympic Birdfest 2021 has been canceled. Please check their website for more info at [www.olympicbirdfest.org](http://www.olympicbirdfest.org).

**Othello Sandhill Crane Festival 2021**

Othello Sandhill Crane Festival announced that 2021 is a Virtual Festival. Events include art and photo contests, a webinar and a Facebook live watch Party.  
**Webinar: Saturday March 20, 2021, Time: 10 am until 2 pm**  
 Sign up on their web page, [Othellosandhillcranefestival.org](http://Othellosandhillcranefestival.org)

**Grays Harbor Shorebird and Nature Festival**

April 24-30, 2021 Grays Harbor NWR, Hoquiam WA  
 Each spring, hundreds of thousands of shorebirds stop to rest and feed along the Washington Coast and in the Grays Harbor estuary during their migration northward.  
 Before you go, check their website at <http://www.shorebirdfestival.com/> for any cancelation and for more information.

## Wahkiakum Bird Count Results

By Andrew Emlen

The Wahkiakum Christmas Bird Count circle straddles the Columbia River, including Cathlamet, Puget Island, Elochoman Valley, and parts of the Skamokawa Valleys in Wahkiakum County, Washington; and Westport, Brownsmead, and Knappa in Clatsop County, Oregon. The Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge and most of the Lewis and Clark Refuge are also within the circle.

For the 23rd annual Wahkiakum CBC on December 29, 2020, 19 volunteers counted 60,501 individual birds representing 109 species (there were two additional count week species). This is close to average - pretty good, considering that we had half a dozen fewer participants than usual.

The most abundant species this year was Cackling Goose at 19,750, followed by Greater Scaup (14,531), European Starling (4235), and American Coot (3297). Unusual species include the first White-tailed Kite on the count since 2012.

When I started the Wahkiakum count in 1998 White-tailed Kites had been expanding their range northward and were regular here through the early and mid 2000's, with the population peaking at 11 for the count circle in 2006. Their population in Washington plummeted after the heavy snow of 2008-9, and our numbers for the Wahkiakum count dropped to 4, then 2, then 1 for 2011 and 2012 before they were gone. The present individual can still be found along North Welcome Slough Road, Puget Island, where many birders have gone to view it. Puget Island also had three Turkey Vultures on this

year's count - this is the fourth year in a row Turkey Vultures have wintered on Puget Island, after no previous Wahkiakum CBC records.

New high counts were set this year for eight species (for each I have this year's numbers, followed by the previous high count in parentheses):

- Mourning Dove 66 (64)
- Northern Flicker 67 (64)
- Black Phoebe 12 (11)
- Horned Lark 58 (44)
- White-crowned Sparrow 139 (97)
- White-throated Sparrow 9 (6)
- Western Meadowlark 65 (41)
- Brown-headed Cowbird 22 (13)

Notable among these are the large number of "Streaked" Horned Larks. Since this subspecies was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in October 2013, the Army Corps of Engineers has been managing their dredge spoil islands to maintain habitat for the larks, and it appears to be helping them.

Also notable is the increasing number of Black Phoebes, which have been expanding their range northward and have been breeding successfully in Wahkiakum and Clatsop counties in recent years.

For the full list check our website.

## Leadbetter Bird Count Results

By Robert Sudar

The Leadbetter Point Christmas Bird Count was held on December 19th, 2020. Nationally, it was the 121st Christmas Bird Count. The Leadbetter count has been held each December since at least 1978, except for 2008, when it was cancelled because of heavy snow that made travel to the coast treacherous.

The count "circle" is centered in Willapa Bay and includes areas on both sides of the Bay, plus part of the Long Beach coastline including the Point itself. There are 8-10 "sectors" assigned to different counting teams, depending on how many counters are available and whether all areas are accessible.

For instance, the northern half of Long Island is within the count circle, but no one has counted it for many years because it's harder to reach. This year, COVID-19 created some challenges trying to make sure counters from different family groups weren't mixed, so there were fewer counters overall and each group had to be from the same household.

Some counters also chose not to participate because of health concerns, and some were unable to travel. But organizer Suzy Whitley, who lives on the peninsula, was able to recruit enough counters to get the job done. Counting is done from cars and on foot, depending on the location.

Many homeowners open their yards for counters, while others greet the slow-moving cars with questions, good wishes and the occasional tip as to where birds were recently seen. The weather was dry and adequately calm despite the storms that week until around 1PM, when the rain and wind returned. Still, the temperatures were moderate which made the work more enjoyable.

Overall, almost 18,000 individual birds were seen comprising 88 different species, which is a little lower than normal but still good results considering the challenges of staging the count at all.

The most unusual bird was a Bar-tailed Godwit spotted in the Oysterville area. Pine Siskins were definitely more abundant, often in a flock of over 150 birds. And there were over 80 Anna's Hummingbirds. They were rare at this time of year 40 years ago but are becoming increasingly common on the Leadbetter Count, just as they are in many local areas during the winter. There were also six American Dippers, a bird that likes to forage along fast-moving streams but can be challenging to see.

On the disappointing side of the count, there were no Brants, no Greater White-fronted Geese, no Gray Jays, no Snowy Plovers, no Northern Shovelers, no owls of any species, no Coots, no Bitterns, no Sapsuckers and only Common Loons this year. That doesn't mean there weren't some in the area, but they weren't seen on count day. It's not atypical to have some variation from year to year in what is seen but that doesn't lessen the disappointment for the counters! Brants and Snowy Plovers, for example, are species that have been rebounding a bit in numbers during the winter count in recent years and it would have been good to have recorded them again this year.

It was rewarding for all the counters to be able to spend the day recording birds and helping to maintain the continuity of the data set for the Leadbetter Christmas Bird Count. Hopefully, it will be less of a challenge in 2021!

## 37th Cowlitz-Columbia Christmas Bird Count Results

By Bob Reistroffer

On Friday, January 1, 2021 the 37th Cowlitz-Columbia Christmas Bird Count (3CBC) was conducted. We had 18 field observers and 2 feeder watchers out for the day peering through rain and low clouds. They found 103 species and 18,048 individual birds. The count this year was in the normal range for this count. 2021 brought some changes for counters. Rather than groups covering 6 large areas we had groups covering 12 smaller areas (6 individuals and 6 "Social pods).

We recorded some all-time high individual counts; 4,528 Cackling Goose, 1332 Mallard Ducks, 19 Canvasback, 56 Anna's Hummingbird, 35 Common Raven, 18 Brown Creeper,

24 Bewick's Wren, 2 White-breasted Nuthatch, 33 Cedar Waxwing, and 202 Golden-crowned Sparrow. Also, we had 6 count week birds Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Duck, Northern Harrier, Western Meadowlark, Horned Grebe, and Common Loon.

Thank you to all our field observers and feeder watchers.

This is the final I think after making a few changes due to feedback I got from the first draft. A few miss-placed numbers meant that I had to take away the Band-tailed Pigeon and White-tailed Kite but added a Green Heron.

## Leave bird feeders down until April 1 to protect wild birds from deadly salmonellosis

News Release from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Continued reports of sick or dead birds at backyard feeders across Washington and other northwest states are prompting the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to recommend people continue to leave their wild bird feeders down another month or take extra steps to maintain them.

"You can help to stop the spread of salmonellosis by discontinuing backyard bird feeding until at least April 1, to encourage birds to disperse and forage naturally," said WDFW veterinarian Dr. Kristin Mansfield.

The department first asked residents to remove or clean feeders in February in response to a die-off of finches, such as pine siskins, as well as other songbirds. Salmonellosis, a common and usually fatal bird disease caused by the salmonella bacteria is to blame. When birds flock together in large numbers at feeders, they can transmit the disease through droppings and saliva.

The first signs that a bird may have salmonellosis is often a seemingly tame bird on or near a feeder. Birds infected with salmonella become very lethargic, fluff out their feathers, and are easy to approach. Unfortunately, at this point there is very little people can do to treat them. The best course it to leave these birds alone and report them, and dead birds, to [WDFW's online reporting tool](#).

Discontinuing feeding of wild birds will not leave them without food supplies during the winter and spring months.

"Birds use natural food sources year-round, even while also using backyard bird feeders, so they should be fine without the feeders for another month," Mansfield said.

If people do not choose to remove bird feeders, please clean them daily by first rinsing well with warm soapy water, then dunking in a solution of nine parts water and one part bleach. Finish by rinsing and drying before refilling. Also please reduce the number of feeders to a number you can clean daily, as well as using feeders that accommodate fewer birds (such as tubes rather than platforms) and

spreading out feeder locations. Keep the ground below bird feeders clean by raking or shoveling up feces and seed casings and turn over or cover bird baths so birds cannot access them. It is possible, although uncommon, for salmonella bacteria to transfer from birds to humans through direct contact with infected birds, droppings, or through domestic cats that catch sick birds. When handling birds, bird feeders or bird baths, it is best to wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly afterward. Additional information on salmonellosis, its spread, and frequently asked questions about it, can be found in WDFW's [Frequently asked questions on salmonellosis in wild birds](#) blog. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is the primary state agency tasked with preserving, protecting and perpetuating fish and wildlife and ecosystems, while providing sustainable fishing and hunting opportunities.

### Continued from page one: Cowlitz County Bird List

Heermann's Gull is a handsome mostly gray gull whose favorite foraging technique is to follow Brown Pelicans when they plunge dive on baitfish and take advantage of any fish stirred up or spilled by the pelicans.

The second addition was a White-tailed Kite that appeared for a couple days at Willow Grove. This species has become quite rare anywhere in Washington in the last twelve years. After being well established in the southwest part of the state, their range has regressed southward with the nearest population now in the Tillamook, Oregon area.

As previously stated, there is now a new county highest total for species in a year. These 209 species include the three that were new to the county. We added Gray Flycatcher, Siberian Accentor, and American Redstart to our list in 2020.

We'll see what 2021 has to offer for birding excitement and pleasure, and good birding to all.

Download this and other years pdf here:

<https://willapahillsaudubon.org/bird-lists/cowlitz-county-bird-list>

## Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

By Darrel Whipple

"Well, eagles aren't going to like *this* place!" remarked Mike Tweedy as we turned around in disappointment at the gate of the county shooting range near the mouth of the Toutle.

Indeed. The place was loaded with dozens of vehicles apparently owned by recreational shooters, but also by folks plying their skills -- well, actually their *kids'* skills -- at moto-cross, creating an insufferable din as the bikes bounced and flew around a course over the extensive mound of sand dredged from the Toutle and Cowlitz rivers.

No sooner had we started back toward the Cowlitz River to continue the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, when we saw two bright adult eagles posting watch in the two nearest trees to the moto-cross cacophany! What. were. those. eagles. thinking?

It reminded me of Prof. Mayhew's Second Law of Animal Behavior: An animal will be where you find it. (Mayhew's First Law was: An animal will do what it damn well pleases.) Go figure.

Anyway, it was a great day to run the survey -- Saturday, February 20, 2021 -- and we had a respectable final count of 21 eagles. Seven of them were sub-adults, birds still in their first three years of life, not having attained adult plumage. It's good to see that the population may be replacing itself in our region, after many decades of nesting failure attributed to DDT or PCBs in the food chain. The Silver Lake nests are notably

successful recently, as five of our observed sub-adults today were found there.

Most of our sightings were near nests or territories where I had found them in prior years' surveys, even though we often had to scan distant conifers to find them. Mike was good at spotting that little speck of white on a hillside of green.

Other species that were highlights of this day's outing were American Kestrel, Bufflehead and Tundra Swan.

We were conducting the 43rd Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey sponsored by WHAS, roughly following a vehicle route that was prescribed in 1979, when WDFW and other entities kicked off a ten-year eagle population study in the state. This year's survey yielded 11 adults and 5 sub-adults in the north latitude-longitude block (Coweeman mouth to the I-5 bridge over the Cowlitz) and 3 adults and 2 sub-adults in the south block (Coweeman to Kalama Marina).

Each block is about eight by twelve miles in size, and the route covers approximately 120 miles. The survey hours were 7:45 am to 3:30 pm, with temperatures in the 40s and an occasional shower.

The total of 21 eagles has been par for the course over the last few years. (Last year was a notable exception: we had 74 eagles on February 25, 2020, attracted from all over the region by the late smelt run!)

## Creating Bird-Friendly Communities - Lights Out

From National Audubon

Every year, billions of birds migrate north in the spring and south in the fall, most of them flying at night, navigating with the night sky. However, as they pass over big cities on their way, they can become disoriented by bright artificial lights and skyglow, often causing them to collide with buildings or windows. While lights can throw birds off their migration paths, bird fatalities are more directly caused by the amount of energy the birds waste flying around and calling out in confusion. The exhaustion can then leave them vulnerable to other urban threats.

Dozens of species are affected, including priority species—those we have identified as most in need of and most likely to benefit from our help— such as the Allen's Hummingbird, Wood Thrush, and Golden-winged Warbler. Just one building can cause major problems for birds in the area; within one week in 2017, nearly 400 passerines (warblers, grosbeaks, etc.) were caught in the [floodlights of a 32-story Texas skyscraper](#) and killed via window collisions.

Audubon's Lights Out program is a national effort to reduce this problem. The strategy is simple: by convincing building owners and managers to turn off excess lighting during the months migrating birds are flying overhead, we help to provide them safe passage between their nesting and wintering grounds.

Here are ways to contribute to the Lights Out solution:

- Turn off exterior decorative lighting
- Extinguish pot and flood-lights

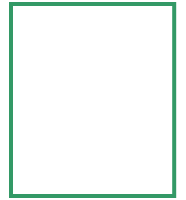
- Substitute strobe lighting wherever possible
- Reduce atrium lighting wherever possible
- Turn off interior lighting especially on higher stories
- Substitute task and area lighting for workers staying late or pull window coverings
- Down-shield exterior lighting to eliminate horizontal glare and all light directed upward
- Install automatic motion sensors and controls wherever possible
- When converting to new lighting assess quality and quantity of light needed, avoiding over-lighting with newer, brighter technology

Turning off bright lights helps birds move on within minutes, as discovered by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and New York City Audubon during the annual 9/11 memorial in New York City. [Hundreds of birds are caught in the memorial's beams](#) every year but turning them off for just 20 to 30 minutes at a time greatly reduces the density of birds in the area.

Taking more steps to decrease the amount of light our buildings emit minimizes unnecessary bird deaths saves money by reducing energy consumption and supports your or your organization's sustainability goals. Moreover, taking these kinds of initiatives to protect birds can even earn you recognition for green, bird-friendly practices.



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The *Willapa Whistler* is the quarterly publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society (WHAS), a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Complimentary copies are available for free on our website.

**TEMP -- RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

**Most WHAS activities and programs are open to the public.**

### **Send in your stories & photos**

Articles, information, wildlife sightings and artwork are most welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, May, August and November. Send your contributions to:

WHAS *Whistler*, PO Box 399, Longview WA 98632  
or email them to [newsletter@willapahillsaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@willapahillsaudubon.org).



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## **WHAS Programs and Field Trips**

WHAS events are free and open to the public (Unless otherwise noted). Check the website for the latest information and updates.

Fieldtrips and in person programs are postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions and will resume once gatherings are allowed again.

### **The Whistler Online**

Did you know that you can subscribe to the Willapa Whistler on our website? All the links are easy to follow. Go to <http://whistler.willapahillsaudubon.org> for this and past issues.

**WHAS made changes to membership by switching to a yearly renewal date.  
All membership renewals are due in March. Check this Whistler for details.**

**Other programs and field trips will appear on our website and will be announced through our email alert system.  
More information about the alert system here: <http://willapahillsaudubon.org/member-services>**