

WILLAPA WHISTLER

A Publication of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society

Volume 45 // Issue 3

Fall 2019



Barred Owl --- Image by Dena Whipple -- seen in a Hemlock on August 4th around 6pm in a garden near Rainier, Oregon

Wings over Willapa Festival coming in September



FRIENDS OF WILLAPA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE'S

WINGS OVER WILLAPA FESTIVAL

The second annual Wings Over Willapa Festival takes place during the last weekend in September (26-29th) to connect people with birds, nature, and art in celebration of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. Located on Washington State's Long Beach Peninsula, they have a weekend full of guided tours, artist workshops, presentations, and fun-filled events. Whether you're an experienced birder or just getting acquainted with the great outdoors, nature lovers of all ages are sure to find plenty to do.

The full schedule is on their website at <https://wingsoverwillapa.org/events-shop/>

Christmas Bird Counts 2019

Save the dates:

This is a fun event for seasoned and new-be birders alike. We will have all the details in the Winter Whistler - published in early December and on our website.

Leadbetter CBC (Pacific County) – tba, 2019

Coordinator: tba

Wahkiakum CBC – December 30, 2019

Coordinator: Andrew Emlen

Cowlitz-Columbia CBC – January 1, 2020

Coordinator: Bob Reistroffer

Letter from Alaska

Sunday, August 18, 2019

By President Steve Puddicombe

Dear Reader,

For nigh on 40 years now I have spent at least a portion of my year in Alaska, mostly at a small village on Unimak Island called False Pass. It was supposed to be just a summer job in the cannery to get me through college; as it is I sit writing, pencil to pad, in my homestead at the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, the cannery across the Pass long gone in a devastating fire, a cell phone on the small cabin table, still an adventure in every step across the tundra and every foray in my skiff or kayak on the mercurial waters of homestead bight.

It's a beautiful high-summer morning: Clear, powder-blue sky above as ground fog wafts over the ridges and lower peaks and dissipates like steam from a kettle; choppy water flashes in the bright sun as if strewn with shards of glass; a rime of lime-green seaweed marks the extent of last night's high tide along the shingled beach. It's brisk, about 50 degrees. The sub-alpine landscape of steep volcanic slopes gashed by tumbling rills, deep-green, gives way occasionally to broad valleys with meandering streams, now ablaze with vast magenta swatches of fireweed, there and on benches high above the sea, in the meadows inhospitable to alder and salmonberry.

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Support our mission, join WHAS today!

Check type of Membership:

- ☐ New Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$20 check for annual membership)
- ☐ Renewal Chapter Membership **WHAS** (\$20 check for annual membership)
- ☐ I would like to support the work of Willapa Hills Audubon Society.

Enclosed is my additional donation of \$ _____

Membership includes 4 issues of our newsletter *WILLAPA WHISTLER* annually.

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

For membership in National Audubon Society visit <http://www.audubon.org/>.

Please make your check payable to:

WILLAPA HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY or WHAS and mail to:

WHAS-Membership, PO Box 399, Longview, WA 98632.

Name _____ Telephone _____

Address _____ Email _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Y14:7XCH rev. 2007

Thank you for supporting your local Audubon chapter -- Willapa Hills Audubon Society!

We will not share your contact information with anyone.

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

✂ ----- -Clip

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Please indicate any **new** information:

I prefer you contact me by:

- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Mail

Other options:

- ☐ I prefer to receive the *WHISTLER* by email
(Add your email address below)
- ☐ Contact me about volunteer opportunities
- ☐ Add me to your announcement email list*

Ridgefield BirdFest and Bluegrass Celebration

The 2019 Event is on October 4 & 5th, 2019. This will be the 20th anniversary fest with activities in town and on the refuge.

More at <https://ridgefieldfriends.org/birdfest-bluegrass/>

Puget Sound Bird Fest 2019

Come to Edmonds, Washington, September 13-15, 2019

Our three-day event includes speakers, guided walks, land and water-based field trips, exhibits, and educational activities for children and adults.

More info and BirdFest registration at www.pugetsoundbirdfest.org/

Long Beach Peninsula Bird Festival 2019

Wings over Willapa - September 26 - 29, 2019. The Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge are hosting a birding, art and nature festival on Long Beach Peninsula celebrating the Wildlife Refuge with a weekend full of classes, workshops, guided tours and more.

More info: <https://wingsoverwillapa.org>

Forty Years and Counting

By Lisa Sudar

June 9th marked the 40th year of the Bunker Hill Route of the Breeding Bird Survey for local board member, Darrell Whipple. The U. S. Geological Society administers these bird counts. Their records show the Bunker Hill route as starting in 1968, but the continuous years started in 1979 when Darrell started. Lisa and Robert Sudar took over the route some years ago.

This is a bird watching route that covers 50 stops, with three minutes of birding at each stop. The Breeding Bird Surveys are run in conjunction with the Canadian Wildlife Service. In Washington there are 89 routes, 11 of which currently aren't being run and need volunteers to step up to do them.

Bunker Hill is our local route. It starts five miles up Abernathy road, goes back down to Ocean Beach Highway and then turns at Oak Point and ends up following the old Cathlamet road up and over the hills to Skamokawa. We had good weather,

not too cold at dawn and warm by the time we reached the end at a boat launch in Skamokawa.

This year's count produced 52 species, with two additional (red-breasted nuthatch and pileated woodpecker) making appearances just after the 3-minute time constraint at two different stops.

Highlights were the numerous nesting purple martins and a pied-billed grebe with chicks out at the Nelson Creek area, and a kingfisher just past the county line at the top of the Cathlamet Highway. And of course, the wonderful weather!

In a time when it is hard to find people to take over and keep the routes covered, it is impressive that Darrell took part as the head counter for so many years. It is a fun, grueling way to spend a Sunday!

For more information, including past results for the Bunker Hill Route, visit the site for Breeding Bird Survey: <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/index.cfm..>

Good and Problematic News about the Skookumchuck Wind Energy Project

By Maria Ruth

For the past two years, the Black Hills (BHAS) and Willapa Hills (WHAS) Audubon Society's Conservation Committee have been tracking the development of the Skookumchuck Wind Energy Project, a 38-turbine project on Weyerhaeuser Company's Vail Tree Farm in Lewis and Thurston Counties near the Skookumchuck Reservoir. Because of the potential negative impact to wildlife—especially the protected Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles, and Marbled Murrelets—the project developer, RES-Americas, was required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Habitat Conservation Plan.

Like National Audubon, BHAS strongly supports properly planned, sited, and operated wind power as a renewable energy source that helps reduce fossil-fuel carbon emissions, thus reducing the threats posed to birds and people by climate change. BHAS and WHAS have worked closely and collaboratively with staff from both RES-Americas and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service during the development of the required documents to help ensure the 38 wind turbines and related infrastructure would be planned, sited, and operated in ways to minimize harm and to mitigate the loss ("take") of eagles and murrelets.

Our chapters strongly support RES-Americas' plans, as far as they go, to minimize harm to murrelets through the curtailment of select turbines during periods of peak murrelet activity during the summer breeding season when these seabirds fly inland to nest. And we support their plans to use state-of-the-art technology (Identiflight) to temporarily stop turbines when eagles are detected flying near the project area.

We appreciate their proposed solutions to mitigate the take of murrelets and eagles. RES-Americas will acquire 620 acres of forested habitat in Pacific County to be conserved and managed in perpetuity for nesting murrelets and will fund the removal of derelict fishing gear in the Salish Sea to reduce fatal bycatch of murrelets. To mitigate the take of eagles, RES-Americas will fund the retrofitting of between 145 and 332 high-risk power poles in Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming to mitigate the fatality of eagles by electrocution.

However, we believe that more could have been done to protect murrelets, throughout their full breeding season (April-September) without significantly reducing total power generated, as we specifically outlined in our recent statement to RES-Americas and US Fish & Wildlife Service.

It is our hope that additional curtailment of turbines will occur as soon as the need is identified. RES-Americas has developed an intensive post-construction monitoring program as part of their adaptive management plan. This will allow them to track eagle and murrelet fatalities at the project site and to modify turbine operations if the take level of these birds is higher than projected. Herein may lie the problem; can such modifications be made quickly and successfully to better protect the birds?

Construction has already begun of the Skookumchuck project and the project will begin operations in 2021. The turbines will generate 137 megawatts of power for distribution through Puget Sound Electric

Learn about WHAS's Partnership with Lower Columbia School Gardens

By Lauren Henricksen

Lower Columbia School Gardens is grateful for the many years of support from the Willapa Hills Audubon Society. Your partnership has allowed us to further our mission of empowering our community by connecting kids and families with real food and hands-on learning. Through dynamic garden and cooking programs, we cultivate health, equity, life-long learning and stewardship of the world around us.

Like Willapa Hills Audubon Society, we are educating and cultivating a new generation of nature stewards. Every day in any one of our 19 school gardens, kids are exploring the natural world, nurturing their curiosity, and enjoying the beauty and shade our 400+ fruit trees provide--all while learning lessons that come to life outside the classroom. Most of all, they are engaging in that critical first step toward becoming conservationists: learning to love nature.

LCSG now stewards over 145,000 square feet of pesticide-free pollinator habitats, transforming school grounds once mostly grass and asphalt into living green spaces that are homes to many hummingbirds, kill deer, sparrows and insects.



Thanks to Willapa Hills Audubon Society, some students have had the chance to construct bird houses, learn about Vaux's swifts and construct a 'chimney' in one of our gardens. Through all these valuable lessons, kids are getting hands-on experiences learning about the connectedness of habitat to species that depend on them, and what they can do to preserve the vast eco-systems of which we are a part.

We are grateful to be a partner in the work of cultivating stewards and preserving and protecting our corner of the natural world.

If you're interested in getting involved with LCSG, there are many ways to participate! Join us at our free volunteer trainings, September 6th or September 7th (Register at our website). Please join us at our Fall Gathering on November 9th (tickets will be out soon). Don't miss this night of live music, wonderful food and celebrating all we've accomplished together. Follow us on facebook by liking 'Steve the Rabbit.' To learn more about these or other opportunities, or to donate, please visit www.lcschoolgardens.org.

Thank you!



Continued from page one: Letter from Alaska

Out my west window Roundtop Volcano looms over the river and alluvial plain of town. By chance a full moon sits at its right shoulder, a cold, gray orb, in comparison with the light-slicked slopes of the mountain, with hints of the day to come.

Savannah and song sparrows flit in the beach grass and light on cow parsnip stalks to sing.

I feel a deep kinship with this landscape. When I first arrived in 1977, flying across Ikatan Bay and up the slot at Whirl Point I said to myself, "This is the place for me." Beginning in the Fall of 1982 I spent nearly 8 months at Mike's Creek in an old trapping cabin I repaired, 15 miles north of town on the Bering Sea at St Catherine's Cove. This was when I got my first bird book and binoculars and kayak,

borrowed from a friend. Each day held new excitement as I began to identify species: snow bunting, common redpoll, rosy finch and out on the water a particular favorite, old squaw, in clumps across the bay with black brant and harlequin ducks.

Onshore my neighbors included fox, a den of river otter, mink, weasel and, in one glance at a protected ridge, I could see both wolves and their family of dens and just below a herd of caribou, resting, nestled in the snow.

I suspect that each of you have such a place or places you know so intimately it is as if they were part of your own form. A loyalty to this kinship develops and then these places inspire and breathe like any organism.

I acquired my homestead land in 2001, an old unused fish company plat first surveyed in 1913, at the tip of the Alaska Peninsula, right across the straits from False Pass. I built my cabins in the style of the trapping cabin at Mike's Creek: low

and spare, the walls pinned with steel rods to the piling foundation to keep from being blown away in the screeching winds. It feels odd to own such a place but I'm confident these few structures will be beaten back into the tundra in due time,



like the planks of the original cabin, now a rotting jumble 100 feet from where I sit.

The weather has been wonderful this summer with few storms, much sunshine and calm winds. My bird list has only 40 species so far with the Autumn migrants yet to show but among them are many I rarely if ever see on the lower Columbia: short tailed shearwater, Leach's storm petrel, the puffins and auklets, black oystercatchers. There are also more familiar denizens: small groups of harlequin ducks float past each morning and mew gulls congregate at the point.

At dawn today I watched two young bull caribou walk south along the beach at low tide mooching at the exposed intertidal greens. Last week two young bears stalked an old bull with an immense rack as he foraged the meadow toward the pond, about half-a-mile north. Bears are all at the creeks now, fattening up on the returning pink salmon, so it's a good time to go blueberry or mushroom picking. Or I can take my ease. Tomorrow I have my work in town.

We all have our beloved haunts and places that have had a profound influence on our lives. Recently at Stonewall, a local landmark of cracked basaltic rock at sea's edge resembling a castle turret, I sat in my kayak and watched pigeon guillemots returning to the nests there, then off to feed again in the swirling, nutrient-rich currents of the straits. Watching them, their tubby sea-going bodies in awkward flight, listening to their distinctive, fluttery singing like a sea hag's laugh, I sensed for a moment the connection between their lives and my own. They are my good neighbors in this place.

I wish you all the best in your special place.

Sincerely, Steve

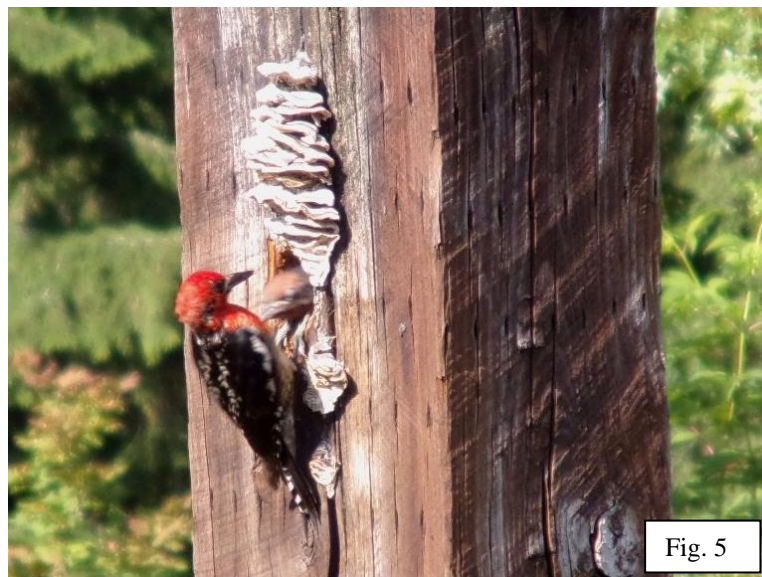
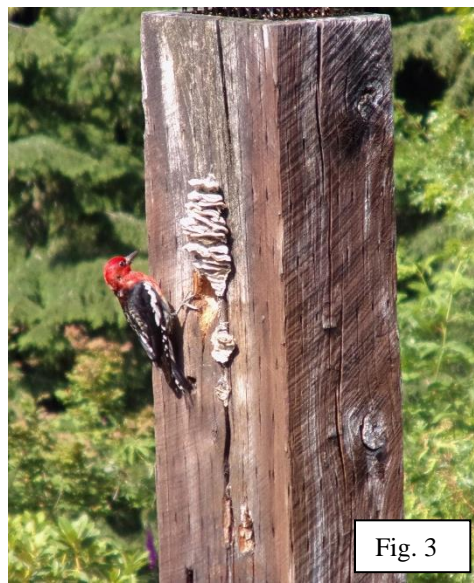


A Strange Nest Site

By Larry Turner

When we moved to Kelso in 2006, we found a country place of almost three acres. The owner before us stuck railroad ties vertically along the lower driveway (see figure 1). We're not sure why (and nobody around us knew), but we think he intended to widen the driveway and use the ties to retain it. We have left them there – we call it “Woodhenge”; everybody new to our place remarks about them. But this year something new happened; it actually started late last year. A hole started appearing in one of the ties; we wondered what was making it.

This year, another hole appeared in a different tie, right below a bracket fungi which may have provided some camouflage/cover, although not much (Figure 2). We do not often look for birds in upright railroad ties (or even



see upright railroad ties), so it took us a while to finally note that it was a Red-breasted sapsucker (Figure 3). We did not think that a used railroad tie would have much sap in it to attract insects, but who am I to know. Or maybe they do not feed where they nest.

Things became much more obvious when the young arrived. The adults started making many more trips with large and probably delicious insects (Figure 4). They would typically land somewhere nearby, food in mouth, and then carefully fly to the hole, or maybe the backside of the tie first. Finally the young appeared (Figure 5). We do not know how many eggs were laid or hatched, or even if the juveniles fledged, although we assume they did.

An interesting experience. Now, will they do it again next year?

We'll be waiting.

WHAS funded Purple Martin Poles-- Project Update

Editor note:

Randy Hill and friends completed the pole replacement for the two purple martin gourd communities at Julia Butler-Hansen and across the road at the Indian Jack slough site. Randy, with some help from volunteers, will also begin banding nestlings. He has taken on lots of martin houses so this project may last long into summer.

The Indian Jack slough site is fully accessible on foot (10-minute walk). JBH requires a volunteer services agreement (from Jackie Farrier) but it can be seen clearly with binoculars. Hope you can get out to see the birds at their new home structure.

Thanks to Randy for locating, constructing, banding and maintaining purple martin gourds in the Cathlamet area. His report is below. If you would like to help contact one of our board members.

I will key in on a request for volunteers to help with the Purple Martin monitoring and banding project, now in its 7th year when I started color-banding in 2013. This year, with financial assistance from Willapa Hills and Vancouver Audubon and the Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards, we were able to replace nearly all of the old home-made pipe and conduit gourd poles at Ridgefield, Steigerwald Lake, and Julia Butler Hansen NWRs with new factory aluminum units that will increase safety and efficiency; all three poles that failed in past years are now peacefully out of circulation for this project.

Efficiency was required because the monitoring and banding area now includes more than 220 potential nests over more than 100 miles of river, three widely separated areas plus outliers requiring a day each from June into August. Last year (with fewer nests to cover) we banded more than 500 nestlings and documented more than 80 banded bird encounters.

More than 80% of this effort was completed by three of us, and this year we are losing Russ Smith to a move. Cindy McCormack and I could use some help; we were both gone for much of May and already are behind in this year's schedule. Other than the 200 yard trek into the Columbia Land Trust poles near Cathlamet, there is vehicle access to most sites and very little walking. A volunteer services agreement will be required for working on refuge lands.

The benefits: working on some areas otherwise off-limits to the general public. Last week I was out monitoring at Ridgefield (saw 20 banded birds) and both days saw a Western Kingbird and heard Yellow-breasted Chats on Bachelor Island.

Last year Russ and I photographed a Black-throated Sparrow at Bachelor Point and Cindy discovered the first Wahkiakum County record of Least Flycatcher at the Columbia Land Trust site.

Part-time or steady support, both are needed, and everything from spotting and/or reading bands to helping with the nest checks, recording data and the banding process.

Please contact me if you have any questions or are ready to jump in and help.

2019 Cowlitz County Bird List

The Cowlitz County Bird List is maintained by Russ Koppendrayner.

In the last two months we have only added three species to our Cowlitz list. Semipalmated and Baird's Sandpipers were both seen in August as is frequently the case. For whatever reason these two species fit with some other shorebird species that migrate north through the middle of the continent in spring, but a few are found going through Washington in the fall. Also found was a Yellow-headed Blackbird which are not seen every year in the county, but seem to pop up at any time of year when they do appear.

For this and other lists please check our website at <https://willapahillsaudubon.org/index.php/bird-lists/cowlitz-county-bird-list>

Our big thrill for the time period was confirming breeding of the Eastern Kingbird pair first found at the Toutle Sediment Retention Dam on June 18. Further monitoring of these birds led us to suspect nesting, but this was confirmed on August 2 when two recently fledged chicks were observed being fed by two adults. This third ever record of Eastern Kingbird in Cowlitz County resulted in the first ever record of breeding here.

ACOW Fall 2019

Host Region: Southwest Chapters (Vancouver, Willapa Bay, Grays Harbor, Tahoma, Black Hills)

When: September 27-29, 2019

Where: Vancouver Water Resources Education Center, 4600 SE Columbia Way, Vancouver, WA 98661

This year's Audubon Council of Washington (ACOW) will focus on big initiatives that could impact 100% of Audubon chapters. Key speakers include the director of Audubon's new Migratory Birds Initiative and the leader of the Campus Chapter Program. There will be time to celebrate recent

achievements, in the legislature (e.g., 100% Clean Energy), and across the landscape (e.g., completion of the Sagebrush Songbird Survey in Eastern Washington.) and honor longtime Audubon leader Helen Engle, who exemplified what it means to be 100% in for the birds.

The tentative schedule:

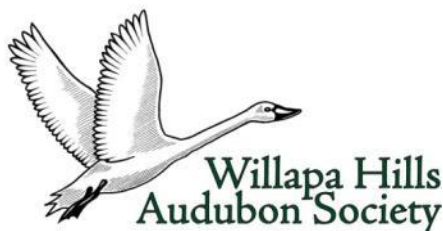
Sep. 27 - WA Conservation Committee and Education Committee meetings;

Sep. 28 - Annual statewide meeting;

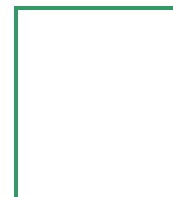
Sep. 29 - Field Trips to Steigerwald Lake Wildlife Refuge.

Watch for more info and signup here:

<http://wa.audubon.org/chapters-centers/chapter-meetings>



PO Box 399
Longview, WA 98632



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 15th 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.

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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.

Field trip to Woodland area lowlands on Sunday Nov 17th.

Field trip leader is Randy Bergman, retired biologist for Juliet Butler Hanson National Wildlife Refuge. Space will be limited. Sign up required by contacting him at trilliumcreamery@gmail.com.

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

Other programs and field trips will appear on our website and will be announced through our email alert system.

The Mission of the Willapa Hills Audubon Society is to support ecologically responsible ways of life, to help maintain biologically diverse habitats, and to promote environmental understanding and enjoyment of nature.

Updates are on our website at www.willapahillsaudubon.org